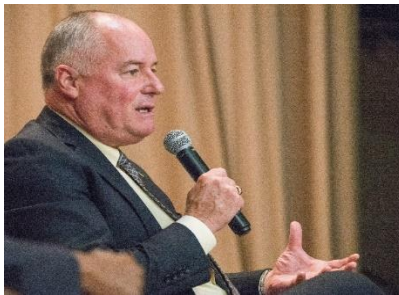


Five questions for CalEPA's new Deputy Val Dolcini

Last week, Governor Gavin Newsom appointed Val Dolcini as deputy secretary for agriculture, a new position within the California Environmental Protection Agency. The role is somewhat of a return to the agency's early years. When CalEPA opened in 1991, an agricultural liaison would ensure that the ag industry's interests were represented in the regulatory processes.

During President Obama's second term, Dolcini served as administrator for the USDA Farm Service Agency and oversaw California programs with the agency during the Clinton administration. Most recently he served as CEO of the Pollinator Partnership, based in Washington, D.C.



Val Dolcini

While visiting San Francisco yesterday, he spoke with *AgriPulse* on the many challenges ahead when it comes to the water, pesticide, air and health issues under CalEPA's mandate, as well as his strategy when it comes to fulfilling this role of Newsom's ag ambassador for the agency.

1. You spent several years at USDA. As state executive director of California FSA under two administrations, what were some of the challenges that came across your desk then?

Well I started much earlier in my career in the final years of the Clinton administration. So just getting up to speed on USDA programs and issues and the challenges of just working with a bureaucracy that was 3,000 miles away and implementing programs on the ground in California was certainly a challenge. But the diversity of California agriculture represented the biggest professional challenge—but also that was a lot of fun, too.

Rather than represent a state that relied solely on commodity crops like wheat, corn or rice, California had nearly 400 different crops. So, I was learning something every day about the diversity, the depth, the breadth and the scope of California agriculture and the farm families that make up California agriculture.

2. How did that experience influence your time as FSA administrator?

It certainly gave me a solid A-to-Z understanding of what the agency could do for farmers and ranchers. I was able to take a lot of the experiences I had gained in the fields of California back to Washington, D.C.

I always felt like I was a better administrator if I got out from behind my desk from time to time and into the fields, working not only with our customers but the 15,000 or so employees who made up the Farm Service Agency and 2,200 offices from Maine to California. All of that time spent on the roads, highways and byways of the Golden State—and I visited all 58 counties when I was the state executive director—really equipped me well for being the national administrator. Customers as well as employees really responded to my interest in being out in the field and they could see that I had a lot of passion for the work of farmers and ranchers, too. It was a great professional experience and a really wonderful personal experience.

3. What made you decide to leave Washington for California?

I grew up in Davis. I'm a fifth generation Californian. My mother is still out in the Sacramento area and I've got siblings, friends and other family members in California, too, not the least of which is my son, who lives in Los Angeles.

My wife and I felt we would always return to California. The question was just under what circumstances and if there would be an opportunity for me to continue my public service career. When this opportunity presented itself, we both thought it was a great way to get back home.

4. Can you describe this new role for CalEPA?

I don't have a ton of detail to share at this point. I'm really going to hit the ground running on May 1, when I start my new job.

More than anything, it really demonstrates the governor's commitment to the future of the Central Valley and to the success of the Central Valley. He's got me at CalEPA. He's got Karen Ross, who's a really experienced and highly regarded secretary, at CDFA. He's got Bill Lyons, who's providing him with insights, input, observation and experience as a family farmer, advising him on water and agricultural issues. The agriculture industry will be really well represented throughout California state government.

It's been clear since his inauguration that Governor Newsom is really interested in making sure that agriculture has a seat at the table and is a full partner in the policies, plans and programs of his administration. I plan to be a really aggressive and proactive ambassador for the Newsom administration at CalEPA.

You're stepping in to CalEPA at an interesting time with a lot of politicized issues under its umbrella, from a ban on chlorpyrifos to a new push by the governor and others on clean water issues and resistance bills in the state legislature pushing back on deregulation from the Trump administration. Does it seem a bit overwhelming?

I'm going to be surrounded by a really great team, not only at CalEPA but some of the folks I mentioned as well. I like a challenge and I'm certainly going to be challenged professionally in this new role. You cited some of the issues. I think that is the tip of the iceberg really when it comes to regulatory, legal and legislative issues that impact one of the leading industries in California's economy.

I'm going to start having informal phone conversations with folks over the next few weeks. By the first of May, when I report to the CalEPA building for duty, I'm sure my plate will be full. These are important issues that deserve thoughtful consideration and that's been a hallmark of my approach as a professional over the years, as really trying to collaborate with all the parties that are impacted by a given decision and make sure that their point of view is taken into consideration. I won't always be able to provide the sort of relief that folks are looking for. But more often than not it will be a process that's inclusive and transparent and one that I really hope is supportive of the great work that farmers and ranchers do every day, mostly in an unheralded way.

We take for granted in this country and certainly in this state the work that farmers and ranchers do. Right now, I'm looking over a city that doesn't have an immediate connection to the farm fields of California. But we're in a food shed a hundred miles from here that accounts for some of the highest value crops and the most nutritious crops that are produced in the world. I just want to make sure that I'm an able, effective, hard-working and an energetic advocate on behalf of California farmers and ranchers.

5. Anything else you would like to add?

What I would really like to do in the first few months is travel around the state and meet with groups—not just in Sacramento but up and down the Central Valley and corners of the state that don't get a lot of attention or visibility from Sacramento. That will be part of my recipe for what will hopefully be a successful tenure in this position here.

It's a new position at CalEPA and one that I'm really glad I was considered for and ultimately chosen for this role. It's going to be both challenging and very exhilarating, and hopefully a lot of fun at the end of the day.

The Colorado River drought plan opens a new era of water trading

After years of negotiations, the seven states along the Colorado River agreed to voluntarily cutbacks in water allocations last month. The goal is to replenish two key storage reservoirs that have been severely depleted as a 16-year drought has deepened throughout the Colorado River basins.

The Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) finally came together when an urban water district in California overruled the objections of the lone holdout, a highly productive agricultural region and the river's largest water user. For California farmers, sources say this may be a lesson in what to expect from further water negotiations over the coming decades.

According to Nevada representatives and other parties in the agreement, the Imperial Irrigation District (IIP) held the agreement hostage over a comparatively insignificant amount of money to clean up a neglected and irrelevant lake.

“The only real connection that exists between the DCP and the Salton Sea is in IID's demand for money,” said John Entsminger, head of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, in his testimony before Congress.

Fueling the contention is a century of water deals between cities and agriculture, interwoven with regional, state and federal agencies and some of the largest water infrastructure projects in history.

The Imperial Valley vegetable growers at the center of the controversy, meanwhile, are facing uncertainty over the next regulatory benchmarks to come, as changes in climate inspire deeper responses from federal and state agencies.

“We want to participate but we don’t want to be abused,” said Kay Pricola, executive director for the Imperial Valley Vegetable Growers Association.



Rep. Tom McClintock at a committee hearing on the DCP.

Minutes earlier, Pricola sat in a Congressional hearing for the DCP in which Rep. Tom McClintock called the Sultan Sea an “accident that occurred in 1905” and asked: “Why are we still obsessing on it? In the grand scheme of things, I still don’t understand its importance.”

Pricola said she was offended by this dismissal of the years of hard work farmers had put into conserving water for both the Sultan Sea and for neighboring water districts.

“We have been good citizens to the river,” she said, referring to the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) of 1988.

IID had signed onto the QSA under conditions similar to those of the DCP today. California was overusing its share of Colorado River water when other states were not using their full allocations. As those states began taking their shares, the federal government stepped in and required California to cut back. This led to an unprecedented union between two powerful water rights holders: Los Angeles represented the urban system and the Imperial Valley represented an integrated irrigation system across several counties. These farmers had the most senior rights across the entire river.

Since the agreement went into effect in 2003, IID has conserved about 5 million acre-feet of water. Ramping up to full implementation in 2026 will lead to nearly 500,000 acre-feet saved per year, or about 15 percent of the district’s entitlement from the Colorado River. On top of that, IID initially offered to conserve an extra 250,000 acre-feet per year for the Drought Contingency Plan. By comparison, the DCP aims to conserve less than 2 million acre-feet in total by 2026.

Farmers have already adapted by growing vegetables that use comparatively less water than other crops. But to restore soil nutrients they typically rotate with alfalfa, a high water-use crop.

The water efficiencies inspired by the QSA, however, led to the Salton Sea starting to dry up, since it was fed by the valley’s agricultural runoff. IID then incorporated San Diego into the QSA along with a fallowing program. This delivered more water to both the coastal city and to the Sultan Sea, buying time for the state to come up with a fix. That part of the agreement finished in 2017, when the sea again began drying up. Now the fish have been dying, nearly no

birds stopped over during the recent winter migration and asthma rates are rising in the local community due to the toxic dust.

The State Water Resources Control Board, locked into high-profile battles to the north, did commit a portion of funding for the cleanup. The federal government added more and last year's Proposition 3 water bond would have supplied \$200 million—if it had actually gained the vote. **“When we entered into the QSA, we were told this would be peace on the river for 75 years,” said Kay. “Twelve years later, we’re being asked to give again.”**

The long drought throughout the Colorado River basins, meanwhile, pulled the states together to come up with a strategy that would determine a more flexible management system. That also included an international agreement guaranteeing water for Mexico. While California has senior rights in the lower Colorado River basin, a more stringent plan was needed to ensure Lake Mead did not drop to “deadpool” level, below the intake turbines that deliver water to California and the other stakeholders downstream.

The uncertain future of water trading in the West

It took the states six years to put the DCP in front of a Congressional committee for hearings last week. That plan, however, only lasts to 2026. According to climate models, the southwest will continue to dry up, with precipitation patterns growing more erratic. A wet winter this year made the decision a little easier for the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California to volunteer to cover IID's share of water conservation and move the DCP forward.

Among all the stakeholders, uncertainty remains to how the farmers of the Imperial Valley would afford more cuts to water supplies. **Now that the DCP is in place, these farmers, the most senior water rights holders, will certainly be holding their ground as new fronts in the water war opens up among urban water districts and now seven western states.**

This time the concerns of the Imperial Valley water rights holders will play a much larger role in the trading, according to Ellen Hanak, director of the Water Policy Center at the Public Policy Institute of California.

“Negotiating about ramp-downs,” she said, “involves a lot of interest on the part of the urbans.”



How long will Trump keep US steel and aluminum tariffs in place?

If American almond, citrus, pork, apple and dairy farmers want any chance of regaining their markets in China, Mexico and Canada, U.S. steel and aluminum tariffs will likely have to be lifted. The problem, however, is the threat of cheap foreign metal flooding the U.S. market is now as high as ever.

It's not a fact lost on President Donald Trump, who early on made it a priority to bring domestic prices up for the metals and protect the industry. Prices have risen, breathing new life into U.S. producers, according to the American Iron and Steel Institute (AISI), but the global threat remains.

“Steel tariffs are working,” AISI said in a statement provided to *Agri-Pulse*. “Momentum in the steel industry as result of the Section 232 remedy, the administration’s policy actions and favorable economy are allowing companies to reopen idled mills, invest in new facilities and create jobs.”



President Donald Trump

The Trump administration, arguing that Chinese overproduction of metals was a threat to national security, hit the country and other nations around the globe about a year ago with a 25 percent tariff on steel and a 10 percent tariff on aluminum. China ships very little steel and aluminum directly to the U.S., but the metals also make their way here by transshipment through third countries. China hit back with tariffs on \$3 billion worth of U.S. farm goods, like oranges, walnuts, dairy and broccoli.

“The U.S. apple industry worked very hard over years, and in 2015 finally achieved full access to the Chinese market, just as China has access to our market,” U.S. Apple Association President Jim Bair said in response to China’s retaliation. **“China’s retaliatory response to U.S. tariffs (is) just the latest chapter in a long and sad story where U.S. apple growers get hurt in a fight we didn’t start and in which we have no interest.”**

The U.S. at first held off on levying the 232 tariffs on Canada and Mexico because talks were underway to rewrite the North American Free Trade Agreement, but the import taxes went into place May 31 when negotiations stalled. Mexico was the first to retaliate, hitting U.S. pork, cheese, apples and potatoes with tariffs, and Canada followed suit by taxing value-added products like ketchup, strawberry jam, yogurt, maple syrup and whiskey.

Trump's position that the import taxes are lawful under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 was recently upheld by the U.S. Court of International Trade.

Global steel and aluminum production remains high, however, despite Trump’s 232 tariffs, making the import taxes as crucial as ever to protect U.S. producers from international competition. That helps explain Trump’s unwillingness to abandon the tariffs — even on neighboring allies like Canada and Mexico — but it’s also creating an increasingly difficult situation for American farmers and ranchers who are suffering from retaliation.

The AISI argues that the “Section 232 trade remedy remains necessary as there is still more work to be done and progress to be made. Despite recent momentum, global steel overcapacity remains over 600 million net tons, and China produced more than one billion net tons of cheap, government-subsidized steel in 2018 — more than 10 times U.S. production.”

Monthly steel production worldwide hit about 147 million metric tons in January, according to the World Steel Association. That’s up from 132 million tons in February 2018, the month before the U.S. tariffs went into place. Those tariffs, Trump administration officials explained, were aimed at stopping subsidized Chinese production, which has also climbed. Chinese output rose to 75 million tons in January, up from just 65 million tons in February 2018.

A year ago, China was producing more than half of all the aluminum in the world and, as of February, that’s still the case, according to data from the International Aluminum Institute that showed Chinese output rising.

U.S. ag producers are seeing their exports of everything from pork to pistachios plummet, but the threat of foreign steel and aluminum is as strong as ever, and Trump’s tariffs are widely seen as successful in pushing up domestic metal prices.

Joel Nelsen, strategic advisor and past president of California Citrus Mutual, says the fact that the 232 tariffs have helped U.S. steel and aluminum producers but failed to address Chinese over-production puts the Trump administration in a difficult spot.

“As a result, the administration is left with fewer tools to accomplish its objective,” he told *Agri-Pulse*. “How they’re going to do it now without negatively affecting innocent victims like growers of citrus ... is yet to be determined. I don’t know what the answer is.”

Chinese importers now have to pay 51 percent in import taxes to buy California oranges thanks to China’s retaliation to the 232 tariffs as well as separate US tariffs aimed at punishing China for intellectual property theft. Many Chinese buyers, Nelsen said, are opting to import their citrus from elsewhere.



Joel Nelsen, CA Citrus Mutual

But it’s not just farmers and ranchers who are pushing back on the Trump tariffs. A long list of GOP lawmakers is supporting legislation to take back some of the tariff authority Congress gave away nearly 60 years ago.

“The U.S. Constitution gives Congress alone the job of regulating commerce with foreign nations,” Senate Finance Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley said in a statement last week as he claimed leadership of the efforts on Capitol Hill to counter Trump’s tariffs.

“During the height of the Cold War, Congress delegated sweeping power to the executive branch to adjust imports on the basis of national security,” Grassley said. “That was

understandable given the era, but the benefit of time and experience has proven our Founders right in tasking Congress with authority over tariffs.”

Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Penn., already has strong bipartisan support for his Bicameral Congressional Trade Authority Act, as does Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, for his Trade Security Act.

But calls from Congress for Trump to back off his steel and aluminum tariffs seem to be falling on deaf ears in the White House. Grassley, Toomey, Portman and others have their work cut out for them because Trump appears to be holding tightly to the tariff authority.

Mexican, Canadian and even U.S. government officials had expected the Trump administration to lift the 232 tariffs on Canada and Mexico after the leaders of all three countries signed off on the USMCA last year, but that didn't happen. And even now, after Canadian and Mexican officials warned the Trump administration that their legislatures will not ratify the pact with the tariffs in place, they remain in place.

U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer has said he is negotiating an end to the tariffs with Mexico and Canada, perhaps by requiring tariff-rate quotas, but those talks appear to be unfruitful so far.

"The existence of these tariffs for many Canadians raises some serious questions about NAFTA ratification," Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland told CBC Radio-Canada after leaving a meeting with Lighthizer last week.

As to China, the country has made no move to cut its steel and aluminum production, and it's unclear if the two countries are even discussing the issue as negotiators continue to meet. Lighthizer led a U.S. delegation to Beijing last week, and Chinese Vice Premier Liu He is leading a Chinese delegation for talks in Washington this week. China has shown signs it is willing to deal with the U.S. on issues like currency manipulation and intellectual property theft, but not on cutting back steel and aluminum output.

A USTR spokesperson refused to comment when asked if the metal tariffs were being negotiated.

In a February meeting with Liu in the Oval Office, Trump called on White House trade adviser and China critic Peter Navarro to chime in.

“Peter, would you like to say something?” Trump said. “This is a gentleman that loves tariffs, by the way. He’s like me. He and I — he loves tariffs. Peter, go ahead.”

“I agree with you, sir,” Navarro replied tersely. “Tariffs are simple and they’re enforceable.”

“Right. Right. Okay,” Trump said. “That’s all you have to say? But it’s — it’s true.”

Farm Credit faces tough farm economy, hemp demand

The Farm Credit Administration will issue guidance as soon as next week to system institutions on lending to producers who are clamoring to get financing for industrial hemp, but the commodity’s future remains clouded by regulatory hurdles.



Dallas Tonsager

FCA's chairman and CEO, Dallas Tonsager, told reporters on Tuesday that the guidance will tell the 69 regional Farm Credit associations that they need to begin lending to prospective hemp growers **“and be cognizant that it's a market with extreme interest, and make sure you understand that market.”**

The 2014 farm bill legalized the production of industrial hemp nationwide and authorized coverage of the commodity under federal crop insurance. However, crop insurance policies will not be available this year and a major regulatory hurdle remains - FDA has not legalized the use of a key hemp product, cannabidiol, or CBD, in food or supplements.

FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb has told lawmakers that regulatory consideration of CBD is likely to take an extended period of time. On Tuesday, he announced several actions related to consumer products derived from cannabis, including a May 31 hearing and the formation of a high-level internal agency working group to explore potential pathways for dietary supplements and/or conventional foods containing CBD to be lawfully marketed.

At a House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on Tuesday, a senior Republican lawmaker questioned Tonsager why the Farm Credit System would start making loans for hemp, given the uncertainty about CBD.

“It's a little disconcerting now that we may be loaning money to farmers who might find out six months from now that when FDA regulates it ... that the vast marketplace goes away?” Maryland Republican Andy Harris asked. “If you're producing just for the ... the fiber, it's probably not a profitable crop for a lot of farmers.”

Tonsager said he had not evaluated the CBD issue itself. He told Harris that Farm Credit associations will have to “evaluate the risk for themselves.”

At least one major association, Farm Credit Services of America, which serves Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming and part of Kansas, is likely to hold off making loans.

“We're not going to do anything until the legal and regulatory hurdles are cleared,” the association's president and CEO Mark Jensen, told *Agri-Pulse* after the hearing.

He said there has been significant interest in hemp throughout his region. A loan officer in western Nebraska has contacted the association office three years in a row on behalf of a farmer who wanted to borrow money for hemp production. **“We certainly hope that we don't have a whole bunch of people jump in it, flood the market, outstrip the demand that's out there. Those are conversations we're going to have with customers,”** he said.

Jeff Hall, chairman of the Farm Credit System Insurance Corp., told the subcommittee that there was significant uncertainty around hemp because of the FDA hurdle, and he noted that USDA won't implement the farm bill provisions for hemp until 2020.

In the meantime, hemp restrictions vary between state and sometimes between counties. About half the states have pilot projects, and some are considering authorizing them, but some states haven't allowed its production at all, he said.

The broader farm economy remains fragile due to depressed commodity prices and rising production costs, Tonsager told lawmakers. "Many farmers and ranchers are facing declining financial conditions," he said.

Jensen and Paxton Poitevint, who is president and CEO of Southwest Georgia Farm Credit, said federal disaster assistance is critical in their areas. Producers in southern Georgia lost cotton crops and pecan trees to Hurricane Michael last October, while western Iowa and eastern Nebraska were swamped by flooding in March. A supplemental appropriations bill that would authorize up to \$3 billion in agricultural disaster aid for 2018 and 2019 losses is currently stalled in the Senate.

"It's a very critical situation at this time in our territory," said Poitevint.

Jensen is urging lawmakers to add provisions to the disaster bill to cover damage to corn and soybeans while being stored on farms. Those losses aren't covered by crop insurance and private insurance is too expensive, so few producers have it, he said.

The flooding was "a disaster that I don't think any of us were ready for or anticipated," he told the subcommittee.

Alternative protein labeling battle hits states

Lawmakers in 17 states across the West, Plains, and South are following Missouri's lead, proposing laws variously declaring beef, pork and poultry that isn't from a slaughter plant "fake" and "misbranded."

Missouri got the ball rolling a year ago when it banned the term "meat" from any products not from slaughtered animals. That law is still tied up in federal court, challenged on constitutional grounds, as state officials and plant-based meat makers negotiate a solution tolerable to both the state's livestock producers and those wanting to sell alternative meats.

But Missouri's action helped prompt efforts in at least 17 other state legislatures this year to prevent cultured and plant-based meats from being labeled as meat,

To date, governors have signed such new laws in Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming, and Montana may soon follow suit.

The Montana legislative proposal would also outlaw the use of "hamburger" and "ground beef" on meat alternative products. The Montana Legislature sent its version, the Real Meat Act, to the governor last week for an expected signature. Bills in Georgia, Nebraska, Oklahoma and other states also appear to be viable.

Nebraska legislators stripped their bill's specific targets – "selling insect-based, a plant-based, or a lab-grown food product as meat" – from the bill as introduced and just made any such products

subject to “any provision of the Nebraska Pure Food Act relating to the labeling, packing or packaging, or advertising of food.”

Ansley Mick, director of state governmental relations for the Nebraska Farm Bureau, said despite the rewrite, “the intent was consumer protection,” and “the ag groups in Nebraska generally support what (the sponsor, Senator Carol Blood) is trying to do.”

Looking broadly at the state legislative proposals, “most of the proponents of these bills are very concerned about the livestock industry in their states,” says Jessica Almy, director of policy for the Good Food Institute, which promotes alternative meat products and is a principal opponent of the Missouri bill. The authors have advanced the bills “as a way of protecting ranchers” and livestock farms, she says.

State actions face murky future

However, Almy says, “I think the states are really choosing a (legally) perilous path forward” with the label restriction bills. She points to the six meat labeling laws passed so far as copycats of the Missouri law and that law’s holdup in court. **“It should put states on notice that there are significant constitutional problems with these laws,” she said.**

Almy says labeling is an established form of “commercial speech, (which) is protected as long as it’s truthful. There is no evidence that the government has a problem to fix,” she says, since consumers know and recognize veggie meat products on the shelf, and cultured meats aren’t even on the market yet. **“Without a problem to fix, the government doesn’t have a right under the constitution to censor labels,” she says.**



Jessica Almy, Good Food Institute

Plus, she points to the recent declaration by USDA and the Food and Drug Administration to jointly regulate cultured meats, and “it is very clear now that USDA is going to be regulating the labels for cell-based meat,” which, she says, will preempt related state meat labeling laws.

Lawmakers in some capitals are dealing with those caveats. Virginia Delegate Mike Webert, who raises Angus and Hereford cattle, says, “in Fauquier and Rappahannock counties we have a lot of cows, a lot of cattlemen.” Livestock owners requested his Missouri-like bill, which “was directed at the lab-grown stuff,” he says.

Webert said Virginia Assembly subcommittee members were aware of the court challenges to the Missouri law, and his bill faced various challenges, so the delegates handling it said “it wasn’t prime time” for his bill in this session.

“I plan on carrying something very similar next year,” Webert said, but his bill ensures that “when the feds come out with their (rules), we will revert to their definitions and rules.”

Just as FDA regulations list a standard of identity for milk as coming from a lactating cow, many livestock advocates want federal regulations to clarify that meat means products from slaughter

animals. The U.S. Cattlemen’s Association, for example, is petitioning USDA to add those terms to its definition of beef.

To be sure, livestock owners aren’t alone. Rice growers and processors, led by the USA Rice Federation, included their own bid for a legal standard of identity in the labeling bill passed earlier this month in Arkansas, where about half the country’s rice is grown.

The Arkansas bill would prohibit the marketing of any “agricultural product under the name of another food,” and specifically forbid labeling any product “as rice when the agricultural product is not rice,” including, for example, arrivals in food stores such as cauliflower rice or a blend of lentils, chickpeas, peas and rice, called RightRice.

The point of the rice provisions, says Michael Klein, USA Rice vice president for communications, is not to quibble about names linked to the process of ricing vegetables or seeds — riced potatoes, riced parsnips — but to block sales of non-rice items as rice.

“We’ve been pushing the Food and Drug Administration for the better part of two years now to get a standard of identity” for rice, and the state laws may nudge FDA in that direction, he says. A similar bill was introduced this week in the Louisiana Senate.

New USDA help on farm loans, H2A visas

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced today that USDA launched two new features on farmers.gov to help customers manage their farm loans and navigate the application process for H2A visas. “Customer service is our top priority at USDA and these new features will help our customers as they manage their farm loans and navigate the H-2A temporary agricultural visa program,” said Secretary Perdue. “In my travels across the country, I have consistently heard people express a desire for greater use of technology in the way we deliver programs at USDA. As we adopt new technology, we are introducing simple yet innovative approaches to support our farmers, ranchers, producers, and foresters as they support the nation every day. It’s my goal to make USDA the most effective, most efficient, most customer-focused department in the entire federal government, and farmers.gov is a big step in that direction.”

The farmers.gov H-2A Phase I release includes an H-2A Visa Program page and interactive checklist tool, with application requirements, fees, forms, and a timeline built around a farmer’s hiring needs. You may view the video at this following link: youtu.be/E-TXREaZhnI

The H-2A Visa Program – also known as the temporary agricultural workers program – helps American farmers fill employment gaps by hiring workers from other countries. The U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Department of State, and state workforce agencies each manage parts of the H-2A Visa Program independently, with separate websites and complex business applications. Over the next several months, USDA will collaborate further with the U.S. Department of Labor on farmers.gov H-2A Phase II – a streamlined H-2A Visa Program application form, regulations, and digital application process that moves producers seamlessly from farmers.gov website to farmers.gov portal to U.S. Department of Labor’s IT systems.

The website also enables agricultural producers to login to view loan information, history and payments. Customers can access the “My Financial Information” feature by desktop computer, tablet or phone. To access their information, producers will need a USDA eAuth account to login

into farmers.gov. After obtaining an eAuth account, producers should visit farmers.gov and sign into the site's authenticated portal via the ["Sign In / Sign Up" link](#) at the top right of the website. Currently, only producers doing business as individuals can view information. Entities, such as an LLC or Trust, or producers doing business on behalf of another customer cannot access the portal at this time, but access is being planned. Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox or Microsoft Edge are the recommended browsers to access this feature.

News Briefs:

Can walnuts help with breast cancer? New research from [Marshall University](#) suggests walnut consumption could suppress growth and survival of breast cancers. Led by W. Elaine Hardman, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Biomedical Sciences at the Marshall University Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine, a Marshall University team revealed that consumption of two ounces of walnuts a day for about two weeks significantly changed gene expression in confirmed breast cancers. This pilot, two-arm clinical trial is the latest of a series of studies related to dietary walnut links to tumor growth, survival and metastasis in breast cancer. "Consumption of walnuts has slowed breast cancer growth and/or reduced the risk of mammary cancer in mice," Hardman said. "Building on this research, our team hypothesized that walnut consumption would alter gene expression in pathologically-confirmed breast cancers of women in a direction that would decrease breast cancer growth and survival." The work was described in a paper published last month in the journal *Nutrition Research*. The study was funded, in part, by the California Walnut Commission (CWC), which provided the walnuts and necessary funding. The CWC did not influence the development of the study, analyses of the data or decision to publish the results. All data is available online. The National Institutes of Health also provided funding. Hardman [notes in a press release](#) that additional, larger studies are needed of the nuts' effects.

March barometer: Half of producers pessimistic about their financial future. Fifty-two percent of producers nationwide are less optimistic about their farm's financial future compared to 2018, according to this month's [Purdue University/CME Group Ag Economy Barometer](#), based on a survey of 400 producers nationwide. Financial stress and concerns about future conditions in agriculture largely contributed to this month's decrease in the overall score, which declined from 136 in February to 133 in March. "This month's drop is largely due to producers' weaker outlook regarding future economic conditions in agriculture and, in some cases, stress regarding their farm's future financial performance," said the barometer's principal investigator, James Mintert. The index of future expectations dropped 6 points, from 145 to 139. However, the index of current conditions remained relatively steady at 120. When looking at financial performance expectations for 2019 compared to 2018, 59 percent of producers expect their farm's performance to remain the same, 21 percent expect better and 20 percent expect things to get worse. Producers remain confident about ag exports, with 68 percent expecting exports to increase and only 8 percent expecting them to drop in the next five years. Regarding the current trade dispute with China, 77 percent of producers were confident that the trade war will be resolved in a way that benefits U.S. agriculture, but less than half expect the trade situation with China to be resolved before July 1.

Burger King pilots Impossible Whopper. Possibly coming soon to a Burger King near you: A plant-based burger that some analysts believe will challenge the restaurant's signature Whopper, a quarter-pounder billed as "100 percent beef with no fillers, no preservatives, no additives, no nonsense." Burger King started testing the zero-beef Impossible Burger in 59 stores

in the St. Louis area on April 1, with the potential to expand to its other 7,100 fast-food restaurants. Founded in 2011, Impossible Foods says it was first to use an ingredient called heme, a blood-like compound found in all living things and that can replicate the taste, color and aroma of meat. Its burger is now sold in more than 5,000 restaurants and chains across the US, including Momofuku Nishi, Umami Burger and White Castle. One difference at Burger King: The cost will be \$1 more than the traditional Whopper. U.S. retail sales of plant-based foods that directly replace animal products have grown 17 percent in the past year ending in August 2018 to over \$3.7 billion, according to Nielsen research commissioned by the Good Food Institute.

Farm Hands on the Potomac...

President **Donald Trump** plans to nominate **Scott Soles** to be Chief Financial Officer at the Department of Agriculture. Soles, from Houston, currently works as an independent consultant and a Senior Special Financial Projects Analyst. He has over 30 years of experience at global Fortune 500 companies such as Occidental Petroleum, Atlantic Richfield, and Arctic Slope Regional Corporation. Trump also plans to nominate **Frederick Nutt** to be assistant administrator for management at U.S. AID. Nutt previously served as managing director and senior adviser for management at the Overseas Private Investment Corporation

USDA tapped **Michael Durando** to serve as deputy administrator and **James Ivy** as associate deputy administrator of the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) for the Fair Trade Practices Program. Durando has served the past 14 years as the director for the AMS Marketing Order and Agreement Division, which oversees regulatory programs that enable the marketing efforts of the nation's fruit, vegetable and specialty crop industries. Before coming to USDA, Durando served as president of the New York Apple and New York Cherry Growers associations. He has also served as president of the California Grape and Tree Fruit League, which is now called the California Fresh Fruit Association, and he was a presidential appointee to the U.S. Commission on Agricultural Workers. Ivy comes to AMS from the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, here he most recently served as associate deputy administrator for legislative and public affairs. He has also led the APHIS human resources division.



Laura Wood Peterson

Laura Wood Peterson is leaving Syngenta later this month to take on a new role as senior director of government relations for Indigo. Most recently, she has been serving as Syngenta's head of federal government and industry relations for business sustainability in North America. Prior to joining Syngenta almost 5 years ago, Wood Peterson was director of government affairs for the National Association of Conservation Districts.

The International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA) named **Matt Herrick** to the new position of senior vice president, executive and strategic communications. Herrick will be responsible for leading all of IDFA's communications and reputation management activities. He comes to IDFA from The Rockefeller Foundation, where he served as managing director. Before that, he was senior vice president with Story Partners public affairs. Herrick also was a spokesman at USDA under former Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack.

Sen. **Martha McSally**, R-Ariz., adds **Amy Lawrence** to her staff as press secretary. Lawrence comes to the senate side from Rep. **Markwayne Mullin's**, R-Okla., office.

Travis Horne started Monday as the new communications director for Rep. **Ami Bera**, D-Calif. Horne previously worked as head of media relations for the Atlantic Council. He fills the shoes of past communications director **Jack Miller**, who moved to the office of Rep. **Eleanor Holmes Norton**, D-D.C., as her new communications director.



Matt Herrick

Rep. **Tom O'Halleran**, D-Ariz., hired **Sally Adams** as his new legislative director covering a variety of issues including foreign trade, labor and employment, science and technology and appropriations. She previously held the position of vice president at Crossroads Strategies.



LuAnn Adams

Steven Williams will serve as the new CEO of PepsiCo Foods North America, which includes Frito-Lay North America and Quaker Foods North America effective immediately. Williams currently serves as senior vice president and chief commercial officer for Frito-Lay's U.S. He replaces **Vivek Sankaran**, who will leave the company on April 12 to become president and CEO of Albertsons Companies Inc.

LuAnn Adams, commissioner of Utah's Department of Agriculture and Food, announced her retirement from the department, which will take effect later this month. Deputy Commissioner **Scott Ericson** will serve as interim commissioner until a replacement can be appointed by Gov. **Gary Herbert** and approved by the legislature. Adams became commissioner in 2013.

The Urban School Food Alliance named **Katie Wilson** its first executive director. Wilson previously served as Deputy Under Secretary of Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services at USDA and as executive director of the Institute of Child Nutrition. The alliance was created in 2012 and is made up of the nation's largest school districts. It works to share best practices among school districts, leverage purchasing power, and incorporate sound environmental practices.



Katie Wilson

The CEO of one of the largest farm lenders in the country is stepping down. Wells Fargo CEO **Tim Sloan** announced his resignation from the company March 28. **Allen Parker**, Wells Fargo's general counsel, will serve as interim CEO until the company finds a new leader.

Two will retire from and two will be appointed to the board of directors for The Campbell Soup Company. **Les Vinney**, chairman of the board and director, announced his retirement to focus on other personal commitments. Campbell Soup has elected **Keith McLoughlin** to succeed Vinney as chairman. **Sara Mathews** will also retire from the board, and Campbell Soup appoints **J.P. Bilbrey**, former CEO

of The Hershey Company, to fill her spot. Vinney joined the board in 2003 and has served as chairman since 2015. McLoughlin has been on the board since 2015 and most recently served as Campbell's interim president and CEO from May 2018-January 2019. Prior to joining Campbell, McLoughlin served as president and CEO of AB Electrolux. Serving on the board since 2005, Mathews has chaired the audit committee during her tenure. New to the board, Bilbrey joined The Hershey Company back in 2003 and served as president and CEO from 2011-2017. Before coming to Hershey, he served more than 20 years at Procter & Gamble. McLoughlin's appointment to chairman is effective immediately, while Vinney will remain a director until his retirement April 15. Mathews' retirement is also effective April 15. Bilbrey's appointment is effective in May.

Best Regards,

Sara Wyant

Editor

Copyright Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction or distribution in any form is prohibited without consent from Editor Sara Wyant, Agri-Pulse Communications Inc., 110 Waterside Lane, Camdenton, MO. 65020. Phone: [\(573\) 873-0800](tel:5738730800). Fax: [\(573\) 873-0801](tel:5738730801). Staff: Managing Editor Spencer Chase; Executive Editor Philip Brasher; Senior Trade Editor Bill Tomson; Associate Editor Steve Davies; Associate Editor Ben Nuelle; Associate Editor Hannah Pagel; Associate Editor Brad Hooker; Contributing Editor Daniel Enoch; Contributing Editor Jim Webster; Contributing Editor Ed Maixner; Director of Marketing: Allan R. Johnson; Administrative Assistant: Sandi Schmitt; Marketing Manager: Jason Lutz; Circulation Manager: Paige Dye; Marketing Consultant: Tom Davis. A one-year subscription (48 issues) is \$697.00. To subscribe, send an e-mail to: Sara@Agri-Pulse.com, or visit: www.Agri-Pulse.com.