

## Five questions for Sen. Anna Caballero

Senator Anna Caballero, D-Salinas Valley, represents the nation’s “salad bowl,” along with a portion of the agriculturally productive Central Valley. Her district stretches from portions of Modesto on the north to south of Coalinga and from the western edges of Fresno to Salinas.

While this is her first year in the Senate, Caballero has also served six years in the Assembly. Prior to serving in the state legislature, she served as mayor and councilmember of Salinas, California.

Two of the rural issues she is focusing on are improving water quality and incorporating hydroelectric power into the state’s renewable energy portfolio in order to finance infrastructure maintenance and to balance costs for Central Valley rate payers.

Caballero spoke with *Agri-Pulse* on representing agriculture along with farmworkers, the urban-rural divide among lawmakers, and her frustrations with important ag issues being heard in other committees. The conversation has been edited for brevity.



CA Sen. Anna Caballero

### 1. Describe your district?

I'm not from rural California, but I moved to Salinas to represent farmworkers. I'm an attorney by trade and I got hired by California Rural Legal Assistance. My district—whether it's been an assembly district or now the 12th Senate district—has always been primarily an agricultural region. That's the biggest part of the economy.

A lot of people are living in small little communities. Many of the issues are transportation and related to access. How do I get to the doctor? How do I get medical services? How do I get my kids to school?

## **2. Can you describe that transition to working with farmworkers and growers?**

A big part of the commitment to stay in Salinas was to get involved in community activities. I loved living in rural California. It was different than what I had been exposed to. I also saw people in rural California really care about each other in a way that you don't see in some of the big urban centers. I really appreciated that and realized that if I was going to stay, I needed to understand a little bit how the economy works.

I started doing tours of different agricultural facilities. I saw the changes that occurred with the introduction of technology: the breathable bag, for example. I was fascinated by all of that.

I've come to believe that we need as a country to make sure that we're feeding ourselves so that we're not dependent on foreign imports for our food source. It's a national security issue. The minute some country decides they don't like this, if they are the sole source of certain food products, we could see higher tariffs. We could see contamination come into our food system in a way that we can't control. We need to be in charge of that. I've learned as much as I can so that I can be informed when I'm making decisions.

## **3. What are the challenges in working with lawmakers not connected to ag?**

Well, the majority of the legislators are from big cities, in Sacramento, the Bay Area, LA, San Diego. Their connection to food is very distant. They go into a store, they buy it, and get pretty high-quality produce year-round. They have no idea when the season is and when they're buying imported produce, as opposed to California grown produce. There's this disconnect, in terms of where our food comes from and having to worry about maintaining the environment that makes it possible to grow that food. It's frustrating to me.

Because of the labor struggles of the '60s and the '70s, many of the individuals voting on really important things have a frame of reference from the '60s and the '70s. They don't know what's happening currently in agriculture. That disconnect means that they're not really concerned about putting restrictions on businesses that then make it difficult for small businesses to be able to continue.

My concern is that many of the policies drive the small farmer out of business because they're so onerous. It encourages the corporatization of farming in our state, which then loses a rich heritage. Many of these farmers are third and fourth generation farming families. They have a real commitment to the community.

## **4. Describe some of the challenges for farmworkers?**

A big, big part of the challenge is that many of our communities have sprung up in unincorporated areas. As a general rule, they're less expensive to live in. But they also don't get any services. They're on well water that overtime may have reduced quality, either because of nitrate contamination or naturally occurring contaminations, like arsenic, chromium six. The infrastructure is not as good as it needs to be, in terms of curbs, sidewalks, street lights. Over time, the community deteriorates.

They are a distance from any services they would need, whether it be medical services or pharmacy services or just simple grocery needs. If they don't have good vehicles, then they've

got to ask for a ride from someone else. That becomes a challenge in terms of trying to take care of basic needs and necessities and family.

As a general rule, farmworkers make the lowest wages in the community. Some of that has changed with the new immigration policies, which has forced farmers to pay more money per hourly wage. And the minimum wage going up has forced that as well. But still, the poverty is very high and access to services is very low.

**5. You currently serve on both the Senate Ag and the Natural Resources committees. Can you describe the differences?**

I chaired the ag committee in the assembly when I was there last year. So, I speak with some experience when I say that I requested that the bills dealing with pesticides and the bills dealing with water, particularly as they impacted rural California, and the environmental rules that impact rural California—that they go through the ag committee. The ag committees, in my mind, have been sanitized so that you really don't have democrats. They all happen in other committees. And it's frustrating. They should at least come through so we can put our fingerprint on what would make them better.

I encourage legislators to do tours. When we take our breaks, come down and spend some time in the valley and visit the multitude of businesses we have. There's a lot to agriculture. I'm hoping we can get them in so that they can take a look at what goes on and have a better understanding and ask questions.

**Prop 65: Leading the way to higher costs for ag equipment?**

The complexity over what should be labeled under California's Proposition 65 has created confusion among agricultural equipment manufacturers as well as a heightened fear of "bounty hunters" prowling for lawsuits. The response has been an abundance of warning labels, with a healthy skepticism about what any of them really mean.

**"As an industry, we love to push for standards and best practices to avoid regulation," said Curt Blades, senior vice president of agricultural services at the Association of Equipment Manufacturers (AEM). "Regulation has all kinds of unintended consequences, which you can see manifesting themselves in Proposition 65."**

Prop 65, or more specifically, California's Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, is a right-to-know law designed to inform the public of potentially harmful chemicals in products. Rather than a product safety law, it is a market mechanism to restrict and eliminate exposures to chemicals known to cause cancer, birth defects or reproductive harm. The determination of what chemicals are harmful is the responsibility of the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, within the California Environmental Protection Agency.



Curt Blades, AEM

Nearly a thousand chemicals have made the OEHHA list, which is updated annually. Companies failing to adequately warn consumers can fall victim to lawsuits.

Within the agricultural equipment industry, larger products like tractors are an easier target for compliance and there is more ability to pass on the costs to farmers and other purchasers. A warning label on the product, package or pop-up display can tell the consumer that harmful chemicals may have been involved in the process of making the equipment or that the product may produce carcinogenic materials from the emission of exhaust fumes. However, smaller after-market products are a much bigger challenge.

**“Due to the complexity and global nature of our supply chains, it makes at times the collecting of the data costly and difficult, which of course just gets folded into the cost of the products,”** said Michael Wurzman, the lead on Prop 65 compliance for RSJ Technical Consulting.

**One example he cites is zinc-plated bolts**, which are commonly used in manufacturing. Zinc is a naturally occurring contaminant on the Prop 65 list. It is not typically harmful, but at the right exposure level, it could be. The responsibility for calculating that exposure level—and whether each bolt should be reported—is left to the manufacturer. This grows exponentially complex in manufacturing precision machines, which often include lead compounds or monomers that retain traces of Prop 65 chemicals when added to a proprietary polymer.



**“And now you're talking about an extremely expensive process to deal with,”** said Wurzman, adding that the ambiguity with exposure levels is the most challenging hurdle for companies.

Wurzman also noticed what he described as “bizarre” cases where a consumer product was found harmful because - if used in a certain way - it could potentially create a dust that, inhaled over time, could lead to cancer.



Michael Wurzman

The litigation attorneys, known widely as citizen enforcers or bounty hunters, who seek out these vulnerabilities have typically not delved into this level of detail. Wurzman notes that companies are mostly safe from litigation, while the bounty hunter pursues the lower hanging fruit.

Most companies already want to meet the standards and create safe products for their customers, according to industry leaders. But tracking through a dozen different steps across several countries can be close to impossible at times. To further complicate the process, the manufacturer may not know whether a part is sourced from China or that a distributor is selling their product in California or another heavily regulated market. Any process for tracking this

information leads to delays and added costs. Adding to that frustration, a “warning” statement in California could be interpreted differently by Europeans.

Most equipment manufacturers are already making adjustments to meet European hazardous substances standards or the 21 variations of those standards in other regions of the world.

In response, AEM has established a regulatory compliance steering committee made up of more than 44 different companies. With a software platform for data collection, it is piloting a handful of projects that are tracking products throughout the supply chain in order to develop a “full material disclosure”. The goal is a common process using a simple tool that preserves proprietary data while ensuring accurate and reliable collection.

**“No matter what marketplace we’re going into, we’ll have a better understanding and knowledge of what’s in our product to be able to say if we are compliant or not,” said John Wagner, director of materials management at AEM.**

Companies will know what exactly is going into their products and will be able to identify potentially harmful substances to be phased out.

Wagner also hopes that Congress will pass the Accurate Labels Act, which calls for consistent labels across the country. It would theoretically incorporate information specific to California standards, but the state agencies would need to make some changes first.

“That means California needs to reduce the complexity that’s required of everybody who has to be reporting these things,” he said.

## **Hemp producers stuck somewhere between two farm bills**

The delay in passing and implementing the 2018 farm bill has left hemp producers and state departments of agriculture dealing with a world of uncertainty regarding everything from importing seed to providing guidance to law enforcement about how to regulate the transportation of hemp across state lines.

The farm bill legalized hemp production in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, as well as on tribal lands within the United States. The bill also put hemp production under USDA control and removed hemp from the Drug Enforcement Agency’s list of controlled substances. By removing hemp from the list of controlled substances, the farm bill also relieved DEA from having to regulate hemp, defined as containing no more than 0.3 percent tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main intoxicant in the cannabis plant.

However, it is unclear whether schedule 1 permits required to import controlled substances are still needed to import hemp seed. The 2018 farm bill has yet to be implemented and states are still operating under the 2014 act as well as a patchwork of state and sometimes, county laws. **For example, in California, 23 counties have a moratorium on growing industrial hemp.** Under the 2014 farm bill, hemp seeds would still be regulated by DEA.

**“DEA has washed its hands of this,”** says Dave Kuntz, deputy communications director for the Washington office of Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont. Both the Montana Department of Agriculture and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture confirmed that statement.

Anthony Cortilet, supervisor of the Noxious Weed and Industrial Hemp Program at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, says, **“We are right now in a holding pattern. DEA was issuing permits until early March. The problem is customs. They appear to still be waiting for permits.”**

Sen. Tester raised this concern to Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue during an appropriations hearing of the Senate Ag Appropriations Subcommittee last week. Perdue, who was unaware of the issue, promised Tester he would look into it.

“All of the states are letting their federal congressional people know about it, and we hear there will be talks with federal agencies this week,” Cortilet said.



*Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont.*

In Minnesota, applications from farmers who want to grow hemp are up substantially, from 51 participants with 710 acres last year to 400 applicants wanting to grow 6,500 acres this year.

Because production of hemp is now legal throughout the United States, transporting it across state lines has also become legal. But there is still uncertainty regarding interstate commerce. Ben Thomas, the director of the Montana Department of Agriculture, pointed out the 2018 farm bill provides protection to legally grown hemp, but those protections are not provided in Section 7606 of the 2014 farm bill, which allowed states to implement pilot programs to grow hemp.

According to a [February CNN article](#), state police in western Idaho confiscated nearly 7,000 pounds of legally grown hemp from a truck driver. The plants, produced by a registered and licensed hemp farm in Oregon, were being shipped to Big Sky Scientific in Colorado, a startup that buys hemp rich in cannabidiol (CBD) to process into CBD powder and sell to product manufacturers.

According to the article, Big Sky Scientific said it tested 19 samples from the Oregon farm’s crop on January 17 and all tested at 0.043 percent for THC, lower than the federal legal limit. However, the tests used by the Idaho state police could not tell the difference between hemp and marijuana, defined as any cannabis plant with a THC content over 0.3 percent. To complicate matters, Idaho state law defines marijuana as all parts of the cannabis plant and considers a cannabis plant with any evidence of THC to be marijuana.

**According to the National Council of State Legislatures, hemp production is currently illegal in nine states: Idaho, Georgia, South Dakota, Texas, Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio, and Connecticut.**

Georgia’s lawmakers [sent a bill](#) to legalize hemp growth to the governor’s desk last week. Similar legislation has moved in the legislatures of Idaho, Iowa and Ohio, where one chamber has passed a legalization measure and full bicameral approval awaits.

In South Dakota, the legislature voted to approve industrial hemp growth, but Gov. Kristi Noem — who voted for the farm bill as a member of Congress in December — vetoed the bill, citing concerns of hemp growth leading to marijuana legalization.

Similar to federal law, most state statutes define industrial hemp as varieties of cannabis with THC concentrations of not more than 0.3 percent.

**“The law is clear. Hemp is legal. But the problem is you are dealing with a plant that based on its THC content is either completely legal or an illegal drug,” Cortilet says. Law enforcement agencies across the country are still not quite sure how to deal with it, he adds.**

The federal government still does not recognize any form of marijuana as legal, but 10 states have legalized marijuana and at least 18 others have legalized medical use of marijuana, including CBD oils and tinctures. Thus, under federal law, any hemp grown in the United States has to be made into grain or fiber products.

Edible grain products, such as hemp flour, are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. Hemp growers can feed hemp to their own livestock, but they will not be able to sell it as feed until the Association of Animal Feed Control Officials determines its safety.

The 2018 farm bill stipulates that all states with hemp production programs must submit a state plan to USDA for approval. This plan must include a reliable testing procedure to determine



*Anthony Cortilet, Minnesota Department of Agriculture*

THC levels in cannabis grown as hemp, a detailed description of the land on which hemp is produced, a procedure to dispose of plants and products made from hemp plants grown in violation of the regulations, and a procedure to conduct annual inspections of hemp farms.

**“We are telling our hemp growers, ‘You have to take this very seriously,’” Cortilet says. “Sometimes law enforcement gets calls from people saying, ‘My neighbors are dealing drugs.’”**

Because hemp and marijuana plants look identical, the only way to tell the difference between a legal plant and an illegal drug is to test it for THC. Of course, staying at or below the allowed 0.3 percent threshold is highly dependent on what seed variety is planted.

Until 2015, no hemp seeds were grown in the United States. In January, Colorado, the first state to pass an industrial hemp production law, announced six new industrial hemp seed varieties were eligible to be grown by members of the Colorado Seed Growers Association. Other states growing hemp seed include California, Washington, and Oregon.

In 2018, Montana planted more acres to hemp than any other state, with 22,000, followed closely by Colorado, with 21,578 acres. To ensure all of its hemp acres were legal and to fully comply with DEA regulations, Montana’s hemp pilot program relied on long-established Canadian seed

companies to supply hemp seed to its growers. But now that DEA says it no longer regulates hemp, importing hemp seed has become a problem.

**“There is confusion at the border,” says Thomas. “We are unable to secure access to seed. We need clarity as to what variety of seeds are fully legal.”**

Without approved seed, some Montana growers may not be able to plant hemp this year. Under the 2018 farm bill, Thomas says Montana plans to be more flexible in what seed varieties it allows growers to plant, but until its new state plan is approved by USDA it will continue to operate under the 2014 law.

Even though USDA has one year to implement the farm bill, Section 297B of the 2018 bill states that the secretary of agriculture shall accept or reject a state plan no later than 60 days after receipt. So far, at least two states, Kentucky and Montana, have already submitted state plans to USDA, well over 60 days ago.

In an online statement, USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), the lead agency administering the new Hemp Production Program, says it expects the final rule on hemp to be “implemented by the end of calendar year 2019.

**“Until the final rule is implemented, all rules and restrictions must be followed per Section 7606 of the 2014 Farm Bill,”** AMS continued. “In other words, no one should try to implement the 2018 Farm Bill production provisions before the final USDA rule is established. USDA cannot help with interpretation and implementation of the laws related to your state permitting and interstate commerce.”

Over the past few years, transporting hemp plants and seeds across state lines has become easier as more states have implemented pilot programs and U.S.-grown seed has become more available.

“We are now allowing folks to buy seed from other countries and from a licensed person in another state’s program,” Cortilet notes. However, some of the hemp plants grown in Minnesota from seed produced in other states have tested high in THC and have had to be destroyed, he adds.

Thomas and others remain frustrated. “I fully understand that implementing the farm bill is an incredible amount of work,” Thomas says. “But the power USDA has is to review and accept, or reject, our state plans.”

## **Farm groups, enviros at odds over EPA/Corps WOTUS proposal**

The Trump administration’s proposed new definition of “waters of the United States” in the Clean Water Act is either a radical policy shift that misinterprets Supreme Court precedent and will leave up to 70 percent of tributaries and half the nation’s wetlands unprotected, or it’s a constitutionally valid approach to regulating the nation’s waters that preserves the states’ lead role over water pollution control and land use planning.

Those brief descriptions demonstrate the distance between environmental and farm groups in the long-standing debate over the meaning of WOTUS. In comments submitted to the regulatory



docket Monday, the National Wildlife Federation and American Rivers offered the dire estimates of the Trump administration’s proposal, while the American Farm Bureau Federation and about 80 other farm groups and cooperatives were generally supportive of it while suggesting changes that would make farmers' lives easier.

The Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers issued their proposal in December, but it wasn’t published in the Federal Register until Feb. 14 because of the prolonged government shutdown. Now comes the job of sifting through thousands of comments, many of them packed with scientific and legal analysis. EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler has said he wants to finish the rule by the end of the year.

Among the major changes from the Obama administration’s 2015 rule (which is still in place in about half the country despite numerous court challenges): **The federal government would no longer assert jurisdiction over ephemeral waters, which flow in response to rain or snowfall, and would define intermittent waters as “surface water flowing continuously during certain times of a typical year, not merely in direct response to precipitation, but when the groundwater table is elevated, for example, or when snowpack melts.”**

NWF and American Rivers estimate 20 to 70 percent of tributaries could lose federal protection and the proposal “threatens the drinking water sources for over 200 million people in the United States.”



Don Parrish, AFBF

**“I think they’ve missed the mark by a lot,” said Steve Moyer, Trout Unlimited’s vice president of government affairs. “Why pick on streams? It doesn’t make sense.”** Moyer said while he sympathizes with the notion of keeping the regulations as simple as possible, the agencies “may be unrealistic in what they’re shooting for. Water is just inherently complex. Sometimes you need an expert to help you figure it out.”

Don Parrish, AFBF’s senior director of regulatory relations, said the proposal “protects the policy that states are an important piece of the process” and clarifies federal jurisdiction for growers. **The proposal “respects the careful federal-state balance that Congress struck when it enacted the CWA in 1972” and “will bring an end to ... decades-long regulatory creep,” the group’s comments say.**

But AFBF, which took the lead on comments for more than 80 farm groups, also had a number of suggestions to improve the proposal. For example, the agencies should adopt a “bright-line” test to determine when intermittent tributaries of traditionally navigable waters should be regulated — at least 90 days of continuous surface flow in a typical year.

In addition, “We recommend that the agencies clarify that the definition of ‘intermittent’ does not broadly encompass all features in which water pools or flows as a result of melting snow and that ‘snowpack’ is a more limited term of art that applies only in certain parts of the country.”

AFBF, which was joined by associations representing corn, soybean, sorghum and wheat growers (and many others), also urged the agencies to drop their proposal to create a stand-alone category of jurisdictional ditches. “Although we agree that it would be appropriate to assert jurisdiction over some ditches because they are constructed in WOTUS, we strongly feel it

would be better for the agencies to do so by clarifying the ditch (jurisdictional) exclusion” AFBF said. “A stand-alone category of ditches risks creating the wrong impression that the default status of ditches is that they are jurisdictional.”

AFBF said the proposed rule “respects the unique roles of federal, state, and local entities in this country’s overall regulatory scheme.” In their proposal, EPA and the Corps say the federal government “should avoid pressing against the outer limits of its authority when doing so would infringe upon the traditional rights and responsibilities of states to manage their own waters.”

**Parrish said states can fill in the gaps left by the change in federal authority. “States will do what they need to do,” he said. “Some states are probably going to be pretty aggressive, some will take it slow.”**

But the Natural Resources Defense Council, in comments submitted with the Alliance for the Great Lakes, the Environmental Law & Policy Center, and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, said “the proposal relies on a factor — wholesale speculation about what states might do in the absence of a federal program — that Congress did not intend to be considered.”

NWF said the CWA preserves “important roles for states, giving them the first obligation and authority to develop water quality standards as well as the ability to be delegated CWA permitting authority.” However, “Congress and the text and structure of the CWA make clear that the states’ CWA obligation and authority is always subject to EPA’s federal review and backstop.”

Federal law and EPA “set the CWA minimum water quality, effluent limit, and permitting standards in order to address the ‘race to the bottom’ shortcomings of the water pollution framework that preceded the 1972 Clean Water Act,” NWF said.

As for ditches, NWF recommended the agencies “retain CWA jurisdiction over all ditches that alter or relocate a natural stream or drain a wetland, lake, or pond.” But it said it’s worried about the agencies’ placing the burden of proof on EPA and the Corps to show that ditches are jurisdictional, as when they say in the proposal, “If field and remote-based resources do not provide sufficient evidence to show that the ditch was constructed in a tributary or adjacent wetland, then a determination would be made that the ditch is not jurisdictional under this proposed rule.”

NRDC called the agencies’ ditch proposal confusing “because it requires features to ‘satisfy the conditions of the tributary definition,’ while the tributary definition requires a ‘naturally occurring surface water channel,’ and ‘ditch’ is defined to mean ‘an artificial channel used to convey water.’” In addition, “treating tributary ditches exclusively as point sources raises confusing questions about which entities are responsible for discharges that reach protected waters and where compliance with any applicable discharge standards should be measured.”

AFBF said the proposal “properly puts the burden of proof on the agencies to demonstrate whether a ditch was constructed in a jurisdictional tributary or wetland” but asked EPA and the Corps to clarify the type of evidence they would need to meet their burden.

AFBF and environmental groups offered starkly different interpretations of the 2006 *Rapanos* decision, in which a split Supreme Court tried to parse the CWA’s “waters”

language and ended up with a four-justice plurality opinion authored by Justice Antonin Scalia, a four-justice dissent, and a concurring opinion from Justice Anthony Kennedy that set forth a “significant nexus” test to determine when a water should be regulated by the federal government.

In directing EPA and the Corps to craft a new WOTUS rule shortly after he took office, President Donald Trump said they should use Scalia’s opinion as a guide. **Scalia said the WOTUS phrase includes only "relatively permanent, standing or continuously flowing bodies of water" and that it "does not include channels through which water flows intermittently or ephemerally, or channels that periodically provide drainage for rainfall."**

NRDC, however, said “the Corps’ jurisdiction ... depends upon the existence of a significant nexus” between the water at issue and a traditional navigable water. “The proposed rule completely jettisons this central requirement. The rule does not use a water’s significant nexus to downstream waters in determining whether it is a “water of the United States,” and makes no real attempt to assess whether it will lead to the exclusion of waters that do have such a significant impact.”

AFBF said although Kennedy stated “absent a significant nexus, jurisdiction under the (CWA) is lacking,” that is not the same as saying the agencies must apply that test, “let alone that they must assert jurisdiction over any water feature that meets such a test.”

## **Much yet to be determined about FCC’s \$20B rural broadband fund**

The Federal Communications Commission plans to invest about \$20.4 billion in rural broadband infrastructure, a move the agency says will add high-speed internet service in about 4 million homes and businesses.

The billions will be part of a Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, FCC Chairman Ajit Pai announced at the White House on Friday. The push comes as part of an effort to build out 5G infrastructure across the country and increase access to rural broadband through a bevy of programs. Some of those programs — like USDA’s ReConnect program — are created by new appropriations from Congress; others, like this one, repurpose funds from existing areas to address a different issue.

**“What this is, is basically a natural evolution of some of the existing universal service programs that the FCC has already been running, but with a little bit of a rebranding around that,”** Shirley Bloomfield, CEO of NTCA — The Rural Broadband Association, said in an interview with *Agri-Pulse*.



*Shirley Bloomfield, NTCA*

“It’s not new money,” she added. “I think that’s the important thing for people to realize. This money is already money that’s been in this pot on the Universal Service Fund program side, it’s really being repositioned.”

An FCC spokesman tells *Agri-Pulse* the program – which is still subject to public comment and commission approval – **will be “technology neutral, open to cable, rural electric coops, (telecommunications companies), fixed wireless, or whoever.”** The plan is designed to

**replace the Connect America Fund Phase II funding, which expires in 2020 and has a one-year transition period.**

New or not, more than \$20 billion to address rural connectivity dwarfs previous government investments. The ReConnect program, by contrast, was started with \$600 million. But there's still much to be learned about how the money will be spent and who will be eligible to receive it.

Bloomfield doesn't expect that clarity "for the next couple of months, but that doesn't mean we won't all be thinking about what we think would be the best way to have this new program work."

In announcing the opportunity fund, Pai also announced "**the largest spectrum auction in our nation's history**," the third such auction for 5G spectrum. That will occur in December, giving companies a chance to bid for 3,400 megahertz in three different bands of spectrum. "**For those who aren't wireless experts, that's a lot of spectrum**," Pai emphasized.

While the 5G auction and opportunity fund were announced in a joint announcement, Bloomfield and others don't necessarily see the speedier signal as the rural broadband silver bullet. Full conversion to the technology will likely require new infrastructure on the company side and new technology on the consumer side, something that will take time.

"I think we've got to be honest about the fact that even some of the largest carriers in the world are just now trialing cities like Minneapolis," she said. "It's going to take a little bit longer to get out to rural markets."

## **News Briefs:**

**APHIS asks for comments on GE tool to fight citrus greening.** The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has reopened the comment period until April 30 on a 2017 proposal to use a protein found in spinach to combat citrus greening disease. Southern Gardens Citrus, a major Florida citrus producer, plans to deliver the bacterial-fighting protein *defensin* to citrus trees using genetically engineered Citrus Tristeza Virus (CTV). APHIS said a new scientific paper on CTV necessitated the comment period extension, even though the paper does not change APHIS's conclusion last year that the use of CTV does not constitute a plant pest risk. In announcing the comment period extension, APHIS said "applying (genetically engineered) CTV does not involve genetically engineering the trees." In a comment submitted on the original permit application, Texas A&M plant pathologist Kranthi Kiran Mandadi called the technology "a vital tool that can save our citrus industry and fight citrus greening disease, and I support its approval and use." Citrus greening disease has sharply reduced production in Florida and cost the industry billions in lost revenue. The disease has been detected in a growing number of trees in California, but has yet to be found in a commercial grove. The regulatory docket is here.

**Harnessing field crops to combat climate change.** The Salk Institute's Harnessing Plants Initiative to combat climate change using plants, led by Professor Joanne Chory, executive director of the Harnessing Plants Initiative, will receive funding of more than \$35 million from over 10 individuals and organizations through The Audacious Project, a highly competitive program housed at TED, the nonprofit devoted to ideas worth spreading. The collective commitments represent one of the largest gifts to a single project in the Institute's history. "We are overjoyed with this strong show of support for the Harnessing Plants Initiative from donors

through The Audacious Project,” says Chory, director of Salk’s Plant Molecular and Cellular Biology Laboratory. “Plants have evolved over time to be an ideal vehicle for carbon capture and storage. If we can optimize plants’ natural ability to capture and store carbon, we can develop plants that not only have the potential to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (negative emissions) but that can also help enrich soils and increase crop yields.” The key to the Harnessing Plants Initiative’s plan lies in a substance called suberin (one form of stem suberin is cork), a naturally occurring carbon-rich substance found in plant roots that resists decomposition. By understanding and improving several genetic pathways in plants, the Salk team will develop plants that grow bigger, more robust root systems containing an increased amount of suberin to absorb larger amounts of carbon from the atmosphere, and bury the carbon-rich suberin deep in the soil.

## Farm Hands on the Potomac...

**Christopher Valadez** has been appointed to serve as the new president of the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California. He succeeds **Jim Bogart**, who has been with the Grower-Shipper Association for over 21 years and is its longest serving president. Valadez brings 11 years of work from the California Fresh Fruit Association where he most recently served as the director of environmental and regulatory affairs. Before that he spent four years focusing on federal policy related to immigration and water policy, by serving as deputy district director for former Congressman **George Radanovich**.



*Christopher Valadez*

FMC Corporation announced **Christina Coen** will take over as the U.S. commercial director after the retirement of **John Kasper** in June. Coen currently serves as the North American marketing director, a position she's held since 2017, and has lead marketing for FMC’s portfolio of herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, plant health and technology products. She came to FMC from The Dow Chemical Company where she served as the North America crop protection project success leader. Kasper has been in the role of commercial director since 2009. The last 15 years of his career have been directly related to sales, marketing, and business development for agriculture products. Coen will assume his role effective May 1.

**Gregory Hanes** is set to become the new CEO of the Cattlemen’s Beef Promotion and Research Board (CBB), effective June 17. Hanes comes to CBB from the U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF) where served as the liaison to the beef industry and led the marketing team through global strategic planning processes. From 2006-2009, he served as director of the USMEF’s Tokyo office and lived in Japan for 11 years. Currently, he serves as the chair of the U.S. Agricultural Export Development Council, representing the interests of growers and processors of U.S. agricultural products for nearly 80 different national and state trade associations and farmer cooperatives.

Growers Edge Financial Inc. appoints **Dan Cosgrove** as its new chief strategy officer. Cosgrove brings over 20 years of experience to Growers Edge, previously serving as the global leader of corporate development and licensing at Corteva Agriscience. During his time with DuPont Pioneer, now a part of Corteva Agriscience, Cosgrove served as vice president of business

development and the chief patent counsel. Kicking off his career, he worked as a lawyer focusing on patent litigation and was a partner in a law firm.

**Caleb Crosswhite** has moved on from the House Agriculture Committee to begin a new role at USDA, serving as the senior adviser and counsel to the Undersecretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs **Greg Ibach**. On the House Ag Committee, he served as deputy chief counsel and professional staff member for Rep. **Mike Conaway**, R-Texas.

The American Farm Bureau Federation is welcoming two new additions and an internal promotion. **Marsha Bernard** will serve as executive assistant to president Zippy Duvall and executive vice president Dale Moore. Before joining AFBF, she worked for the National School Boards Association. She replaces **Emily Jordan**, who left AFBF to join the Lincoln Policy Group as director of operations. **Michael Sistik** joins the AFBF team as the new director of grassroots program development on the advocacy and political affairs team. Sistik comes from Phoenix, Ariz., where he served as senior director of government relations at the Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health Board. Prior to that, he worked for the University of Arizona's Office of Government and Community Relations and also worked on former Sen. John McCain's 2010 senate re-election campaign and Mitt Romney's 2012 run for president. AFBF also promoted **Paul Schlegel** from managing director of public policy to vice president of public affairs.

**Louise Fresco** will join the Syngenta board of directors as an independent non-executive director. Currently serving as president of Wageningen University & Research in The Netherlands, Fresco focuses on policy and development in Africa, Asia, and Latin American countries. She's spent 10 years of her career as assistant director-general of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN.

U.S. Gold Corp. appointed **Ryan Zinke** to its board of directors. Zinke, a retired Navy Seal and former member of Congress, served as Secretary of the Interior before resigning in December.

SNAC International installs new officers and directors for the 2019-2020 year. The executive committee's new chairman is **Fritz Kohmann**, who currently serves as the CFO of Shearer's Foods. The vice chairman is **Rob Sarlls**, who serves as president and CEO of Wyandot Inc. To see the full list of executive committee members and new directors-at-large click [here](#).



*Louise Fresco, Photo courtesy of Jeroen Hofman*

**Riley Pagett** has moved from the National FFA Organization to begin a new role with the USDA, as the new chief of staff in the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement. During his time with FFA, Pagett served as the director of advocacy and government relations. National FFA has not yet named his replacement.

**Jordan Bonfitto** has transitioned back to the White House from USDA as the policy adviser covering the agriculture portfolio for the National Economic Council, working under NEC director Larry Kudlow. Bonfitto was assigned to USDA in March of 2018 and served as the associate director for external and intergovernmental affairs.

**Lauren Wolman** joins Rep. **Debbie Wasserman Schultz's**, D-Fla., staff as her new legislative director. She comes from the office of Rep. **Brad Sherman**, D-Calif., where she served as legislative director and deputy chief of staff.

**David Schutt** is the new agriculture and natural resources legislative assistant for Rep. **Julia Brownley**, D-Calif. He previously worked in the office of Rep. **Mike Capuano**, D-Mass., and Sen. **Tammy Baldwin**, D-Wis.

**John Lynch** has joined the staff of California Democrat **TJ Cox** to spearhead issues related to water resources and quality in California's Central Valley. Lynch previously worked for Sen. **Dianne Feinstein** covering her water quality portfolio.

**Carolyn Just** joins NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association as the new PR manager. She will oversee media and PR strategies for NTCA and is currently working towards her master's degree from American University. She most recently worked at the Glover Park Group.

The Council for Agricultural Science and Technology named **Frank Mitloehner** the 2019 Borlaug CAST Communication Award recipient. Mitloehner is a professor and air quality extension specialist in the Department of Animal Science at the University of California-Davis and is recognized for his work to inform experts and various members of the public around the globe about animal agriculture's influence on greenhouse gas emissions. His goal is to change societal views about the influence of animals on our climate through various channels of communication.

**Best regards,**

**Sara Wyant**

**Editor**

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