

## Water board rolls out a battle-tested drought policy, as it takes aim at the Delta

In adopting an emergency order last week to protect drinking water in the Russian River watershed, the State Water Resources Control Board revived a tool that several members cautioned is a blunt but necessary instrument.

The regulatory doctrine had withstood legal challenges during the last drought, bolstering its effectiveness as a means for quickly overriding some of the oldest and most robust water rights in California. **But the emergency authorities come at the cost of labeling agriculture as “waste and unreasonable use,” setting the stage for conflict as the board seeks to curtail senior water rights in the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta and the Scotts River Basin of Northern California in the weeks to come.**



Delta farms (Source: DWR)

The challenge along the Russian River has centered on declining storage levels in Lake Mendocino. The Sonoma County water agency is obligated under its permit and federal biological opinions to release a minimum amount of freshwater flow for the environment. Water rights holders below the reservoir are also guaranteed a portion based on pre-1914 and riparian rights. Since 2020 board staff and stakeholders in the region have been working on voluntary actions to conserve water in the event of the dry conditions seen today.

“There was a very serious effort by local stakeholders to do just that,” said Dorene D’Adamo, the state water board’s agricultural member, during a regional board meeting Thursday. **“But in the end, they were not able to present something to our board or to our staff that would have addressed these issues. So, it was important for our board to step in.”**

The inflow was so low, D'Adamo explained, that any voluntary agreements would basically be curtailments anyway.

The board's action last week cut off all diversions in the upper Russian River and preserved for human health and safety the minimal amount still flowing into the reservoir. D'Adamo felt the stakeholders understood the need for such actions but not the math going into the staff's calculations for water unavailability.

**“The proposed curtailment action will impact our farming and ranching members — many with senior water rights — without a full due process,”** said Devon Jones, who directs the Mendocino County Farm Bureau. **“This curtailment action doesn't account for the myriad of situations that we see up here within the watershed.”**

An infringement of due process was the central argument in lawsuits over emergency actions the board took during the last drought.

Jones called for the board to instead work with stakeholders in the upper river to develop a more thorough water unavailability analysis — to count every drop.

“This has been a man-made system for over 100 years. It has many layers of complexities related to water rights allocations,” said Jones. **“This complexity does not mean that a management action taken by the state board should follow the easiest pathway for achieving conservation goals.”**

While D'Adamo said the board has committed to continue working with community leaders and decision-makers at the local level, board chair Joaquin Esquivel argued the agency had enough data to take action. Seeking “a more perfect system” would delay board action into the fall, he worried.



State water board member Dorene D'Adamo

**“We need our water rights system to be pegged to our hydrology. Regrettably, we don't have that thorough of a system,”** said Esquivel. “I call on us all to have this be an opportunity to look and see how we might continue to do better ... as we grapple with a water rights system that sometimes makes it unfortunately needed to use these blunt tools.”

Board member Tam Doduc, a civil engineer, added that the board can't depend on just one lever. More resources will be needed for regulating other watersheds, she cautioned. **D'Adamo worried that telling farmers their diversions are waste and unreasonable establishes a mindset that is difficult to unwind. She added that the board does not have the resources to police all diverters and asked stakeholders for other options.**

**“Words really do matter,”** said Gail Delihant, who directs government affairs for the Western Growers Association. **“Our guys have been managing the water for many years and, frankly, do a great job.”**

Adding to that argument, Michael Müller, director of government relations for the California Association of Winegrape Growers, pointed out that 99% of the growers in Sonoma County are certified sustainable, with more than 54,000 jobs there tied to the industry. He said these growers would be interested in finding new tools to meet the drought challenges.

**Delihant appreciated that the board did remove the word “waste” in the final regulation, but urged staff to work more directly with stakeholders to avoid “words getting in the way of working together.”**

The words are only legal definitions, explained Esquivel before acknowledging they could have literal interpretations to the individuals and communities they impact.

“This isn't the board itself somehow trying to denigrate or reduce what we know is the beneficial use of agriculture and agricultural water in the state,” he said, sharing his family roots in farm work.

California Farm Bureau Senior Counsel Chris Scheuring questioned if the political risk of escalating conflict and eroding trust with the agriculture community was worth the benefits of the regulatory action.

“The doctrine of reasonable use and wastefulness is an excellent doctrine perhaps for judges to use on an adjudicatory basis,” said Scheuring. “But administrative agencies should tread lightly.”

He contended the current water rights system is adequate for the task of managing scarcity and avoids the inflammatory and broad language that can lead to lengthy court battles.

Valerie Kincaid, a water law attorney representing contractors under the San Joaquin Tributaries Authority, called the language offensive and unnecessary. She said it was ill-advised to issue a curtailment regulation when little natural flow is feeding into the system, leaving nothing for farmers and other rights holders to divert. Those diversions, she added, would already be considered unlawful, which takes precedent over any determination of unreasonable use.

She went on to argue that the board seizing jurisdiction over stored water from reservoir operators compromises the agency's position as a neutral decision-maker.

**“It's very, very important when you get to the Delta, where stored water is a major issue,” said Kincaid. “Don't use tools that you don't need to use. Let's be as precise as we can.”**

The sole person defending the label of waste and unreasonable use was Chief Counsel Michael Lauffer.

“It would be unreasonable to essentially curtail those minimum health and safety needs when there's no feasible alternative for them,” argued the water board attorney, adding that the traditional approach does not recognize this. “The power is not being wielded indiscriminately. It's being used in a very narrow way, and it's really the only way to avoid that unbending force of the priority scheme.”

## **A handful of decision makers could hit the brakes on easing workplace COVID-19 rules**

While California loosened restrictions last week for masks in workplace settings, agricultural stakeholders were disappointed the regulatory board did not rescind the emergency regulations entirely.

The standards board for California's workplace health and safety agency, Cal/OSHA, plans to continue refining the regulations and has the option to renew them in January for another year. One concern for the board and labor interests has been the rapid spread in California of an aggressive and more dangerous COVID-19 mutation, known as the delta variant.

**The new changes to the emergency temporary standard drop mask mandates for fully vaccinated employees in all settings, though unvaccinated employees must still wear masks indoors and in vehicles.** Under the previous version, employers were required to supply N95 respirators to all unvaccinated employees when physical distancing and barriers were not deployed. The board has changed that to providing N95s only at an employee's request.

Vaccines approved by the agency now include those listed for emergency use by the World Health Organization, which is key for employers of foreign guest workers who are vaccinated outside of the U.S.



The new changes to the emergency temporary standard drop mask mandates for fully vaccinated employees in all settings, though unvaccinated employees must still wear masks indoors and in vehicle (Source: [Pixabay](#))

Immediately following the decision, Gov. Gavin Newsom used the executive authority under his state of emergency declaration to waive the standard 10-day review period for regulations, allowing the changes to take effect earlier while also extending the regulations another two months beyond the board's end date. The governor said the state and industries are prepared to tap into N95 stockpiles for distribution to employers.

While the proposal exempts employer-provided housing from certain requirements when all residents are fully vaccinated, it still maintains some housing and transportation standards. **It also requires employers to train workers on**

**safety precautions, immediately notify public health departments and employees of outbreaks, and provide exclusion pay and resources for quarantining.**

A coalition of business groups that includes the Western Growers Association called the revisions and the governor's order a step in the right direction, but warned that more work is needed for the economy to recover from the pandemic closures.

**“[The regulations] continue to not align with the [Centers for Disease Control] and are inconsistent with other large states like New York, which have fully opened without similar confusion and frustration,”** the coalition argued in a statement following the Cal/OSHA board's action. “The California standard continues to raise questions related to privacy, liability and duration of the standards.”

The board received sharp criticism after rejecting proposed changes earlier in June only to rescind that vote an hour later and approve the changes. It then pulled those changes from administrative review the following week to adopt further revisions.

The coalition and several other stakeholders also worry the added workplace protections send the message that vaccinations alone are not adequate to prevent severe illnesses.

The board launched its first subcommittee hearing on Monday aimed at gathering stakeholder input and coalescing policy decisions in a quicker and more efficient process than the current eight-month timeline for adopting changes.

“That subcommittee work is going to be key, and it's going to be a lot of work,” said Kate Crawford, a management representative on the board during a hearing Thursday. “They've got quite a task ahead of them.”

Board member Laura Stock, an occupational safety representative, was the only vote against the new changes to the emergency standard.

**“I'm disappointed in this revision and concerned it actually goes too far in rolling back essential protections while the pandemic is still going on,”** said Stock, as she pledged to serve as one of the three board members on the subcommittee.

Stock argued that employers should maintain partitions between workers.

“If they're already in place, why not leave them there, if they provide any kind of protection?” she asked. “In certain workplaces, like meatpacking for example, where people are just up against each other, those things really can make a difference.”



Cal/OSHA standards board member Laura Stock

With concerns for farmworker safety, Anne Katten, a policy advocate for the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, said she was alarmed by the elimination of housing and transportation requirements when not all workers are fully vaccinated.

**“It's also important that any mask and N95 respirators be made available to employees readily, and not merely upon request,”** said Katten. **“Fear of retaliation and language barriers will prevent mask and respirator access by low-wage workers, who need the protection most.”**

Mitch Steiger, a legislative advocate for the California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, who has questioned the effectiveness of vaccines, worried the delta variant has added a new threat to workers.

“This version will sicken many and likely kill some workers, particularly in rural areas, and especially among underserved communities that are more likely to remain unvaccinated,” said Steiger. “[The regulatory changes] essentially pretend that the pandemic is over and ignore the harsh realities that dozens of workplace outbreaks and several hundred new work-related cases are reported to the state every day.”

Farm groups have maintained that the emergency standard has played only a minor role, if any, in reducing coronavirus exposures in California.

“Workplaces in California are reopening primarily because of the effectiveness of vaccines and efforts by employers in helping to get employees vaccinated,” said Michael Miiller, director of

government relations for the California Association of Winegrape Growers. “[The emergency standard] is going in the opposite direction by needlessly increasing workplace requirements.”

Miiller asked if California is really getting back to normal if the state has to continually provide employers with N95 masks from the emergency stockpile.

The California Chamber of Commerce pulled back from some of its opposition to the standard, with policy advocate Rob Moutrie applauding some of the changes, despite the slow pace. He worried about the logistical hurdles in determining which employees have been vaccinated. The Newsom administration has rolled out a new database tool for employers that is already fraught with technical issues.

**“At some point, we have to trust workers when they tell us they are or are not vaccinated,” said Moutrie.**

The regulations are set to expire in mid-January, but a simple majority vote by the board could postpone that timeline. The subcommittee plans to meet twice a month to discuss recommendations to the board, which could include applying metrics like rising vaccination rates as triggers for winding down the emergency standard.

**During the subcommittee hearing, Moutrie said he expected any substantive changes to the regulations to take four months or more to adopt — a point when the state is likely to arrive at a 75% vaccination rate.**

Stock, however, replied that she would like the board to instead adopt new metrics based on more rigorous enforcement of public health data on workplace outbreaks that would reinstate some of the previous workplace protections if case numbers rise again.

Another board member hoped to establish permanent regulations that could act as a blueprint for the next pandemic or infectious disease scenario.

## **Farm groups worry UN initiative could set back US ag practices**

A United Nations-led effort to jump-start progress on meeting global sustainability goals is raising fears among U.S. farm groups that it will lead to recommendations that denigrate U.S. farming practices and discourage meat consumption.



*Agnes Kalibata (Photo: AGRA)*

The initiative is known as the U.N. Food Systems Summit, a process intended to result in national commitments and global goals for progress between now and 2030 on 17 sustainability measures that range from eradicating hunger to ensuring the availability of clean drinking water and addressing climate change.

The process is building to a hybrid in-person and online “pre-summit” based in Italy next month and will culminate with a conference in New York in September. **The Food Systems Summit's stated goal is to identify “solutions and leaders, and issuing a call for action at all levels of the food system, including national and local governments, companies and citizens.”**

The initiative is led by Agnes Kalibata, an agricultural scientist and former Rwandan agriculture minister who is president of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, an organization that has embraced technology and innovation in building agricultural production and food security on that continent.

**However, U.S. farm groups fear critics of large-scale agriculture have taken key positions in the process that will enable them to shape the recommendations in ways that would be detrimental to U.S. trade and the implementation of ag technology globally.**

**“This UN food summit from our standpoint is simply the latest iteration, chapter, battleground, you know, in an ongoing global debate around science and innovation, technology and innovation in agriculture and food production system,” said Chris Novak, president and CEO of CropLife America, which represents the crop protection sector.**

While U.S. groups welcomed Kalibata’s role, their concerns focus on some key European figures involved in the UN process, including Martin Frick, a German who is serving as her deputy. Frick previously served as director of the climate, energy and tenure division at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

Another concern is the leadership of five “action tracks” including one assigned to develop recommendations for sustainable food consumption. That track is led by Gunhild Stordalen, founder and executive chair of the EAT Foundation, which funded the 2019 EAT-Lancet recommendations that called for a global reduction in meat consumption.

In a recent report laying out potential “game-changing” solutions, Stordalen’s action track said “accelerating the diversification of proteins that are appealing, accessible, and affordable will be key to feeding 10 billion people within planetary boundaries by 2050.”

Among the potential “game changers” detailed by the action track’s report: **Accelerating “the scale-up of alternative proteins by building evidence on science-based targets, pathways, key challenges, and opportunities; developing strategies to scale up alternative protein production and consumption; and mobilizing cross-sector alliances to deploy these strategies at global and local levels.”**

Kip Tom, who served as the Trump administration’s envoy to FAO and the UN World Food Program, believes the U.S. industry is right to worry about the direction the UN process will go, but told *Agri-Pulse* he’s increasingly doubtful that the participants can ultimately agree on meaningful recommendations.



*Kip Tom*

He fears the European Union is trying to use the process to advance the goals of the EU’s Farm to Fork initiative, an effort to increase agricultural sustainability by decreasing producers’ access to farming technology like pesticides, fertilizers and antibiotics. But he also believes bureaucratic inertia and infighting are undermining the work.

**“It’s not going the direction we want it to go, but the reality is the bureaucracy that’s embedded within this organization is really slowing it down to accomplish any goal,” Tom**

**said, citing what he described as discussions that have become emotional at recent meetings. He believes the process has also lacked the strong leadership it would need to deliver a comprehensive agreement on recommendations.**

But that doesn't mean the Food Systems Summit's work will be discarded. There is a good chance, he said, that its work around climate change gets folded into the separate work being done to reach a new agreement to slash global greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Those discussions will culminate at the UN Climate Change Conference, known as COP26, this November in Glasgow.

**"I think what comes out of (the summit) is going right to COP," he said. "There's one place that we all seem to coalesce and that's around climate."**

Kalibata's UN staff didn't respond to a request for an interview with her, but she recently talked about the Food Systems Summit in a webinar with Catherine Bertini, a former leader of the UN World Food Program and 2003 World Food Prize laureate.

Kalibata emphasized the need to include young people and craft solutions that fit local situations. Kalibata, who has a doctorate in entomology from the University of Massachusetts, also noted the summit has a scientific advisory committee that is "trying to make sure that whatever we are saying is grounded in the realities of science."

**But she seemed to downplay somewhat the impact of the action track reports, stressing there is "no one group that is right." Instead, she said the goal of the summit process was to "listen to the whole world" and then reach broad agreement on three or four priority recommendations that, as she put it, "would actually shift things."**

She suggested there will be other recommendations that come out of the process "that are going to be context-specific, that are going to be region-specific. Those will also be available." The U.S. industry's ability to shape the outcome of the deliberations has been hampered in part by the change in administration in the middle of the UN initiative information-gathering process. U.S. groups have been largely dealing with career staff rather than political appointees at the Agriculture Department and State Department, one industry official said.

A coalition of groups, including major commodity, seed and agrochemical organizations, appealed to the Biden administration in April to help shape the outcome of the Food Systems Summit to ensure it reflects international consensus and recognizes the importance of "science, innovation and technology" and doesn't do things like denigrate certain foods or diets.

**"Without sustained, political-level U.S. leadership (in addition to important and ongoing work by career staff), the FSS's outcomes could miss opportunities to support proven agricultural practices that must be part of the solution to tackle food insecurity and protect our environment,"** the groups said in a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. The State Department is the lead agency for UN issues.

"In fact, encouraging shifts to less efficient production practices could worsen food insecurity and damage environmental outcomes," the letter goes on.

In an extensive response to questions posed by *Agri-Pulse*, USDA said the summit "is a valuable opportunity to focus the world's attention on these shared goals and to act with urgency for the health of the planet and the wellbeing of current and future generations."



The department said the U.S. contributions to the summit “will focus on improved nutrition for the most vulnerable, climate-smart agriculture and food systems, and inclusive food systems.” USDA also emphasized the need for technology and research addressing climate change:

**"The United States is committed to bringing the best science and innovation to grow climate-smart agricultural production. The United States is a leader in agricultural research and development to improve productivity and promote more efficient and climate-smart use of natural resources in agriculture. By leveraging evidence-based innovation and science, including biotechnology, we can expand the toolbox for farmers, fishers and other producers to improve sustainability and resilience throughout food systems."**

Deputy Agriculture Secretary Jewel Bronaugh will lead the U.S. delegation at July’s pre-summit. USDA is working with State as well as other agencies, including the U.S. Trade Representative, Environmental Protection Agency and Commerce Department, in planning for the summit.

**In conjunction with the summit, USDA is conducting a “national food system dialogue,” a series of input-gathering sessions that launched Jan. 13, continued May 19 and will conclude June 30. The meeting next week “will focus on pathways forward,” USDA said.**

USDA also has posted [a compendium of actions](#) that companies and trade groups say are being taken to improve the sustainability of U.S. agriculture. USDA and State Department officials also have met with industry representatives in recent weeks.

"We are seeing a stepped-up engagement by U.S. government," said a leader of the industry coalition, Constance Cullman, the president and CEO of the American Feed Industry Association. Because of the transition in administration, "they've been a little bit delayed, but they are making up for that quickly," she said.

## **Farmland prices up in Corn Belt, mixed in California**

Farmland values in parts of the U.S. are on the rise as commodity prices and government payments spur buyers in the Corn Belt while water access fuels the market in California's drought-stricken Central Valley.

The increase comes after farmland values were unaffected by the pandemic, remaining stable throughout 2020.

In the Corn Belt, farmland prices are up 5% to 15%, according to a Land Values Report released earlier this month by the Farmers National Company.

The prices of both high- and low-quality farmland have increased significantly, and pastureland prices have risen modestly as well. The report says farmers are feeling optimistic due to large government payouts in 2020 and increasingly high commodity prices.

**Farmers make up roughly 80% of buyers while new investors make up the other 20%, according to Randy Dickhut, senior vice president of real estate operations at FNC.** Dickhut told *Agri-Pulse* that while commodity prices encourage potential buyers, they also help increase incomes so purchasers can afford down payments or have the financial wherewithal to purchase more land.

New investors are looking to capitalize on the current low-interest-rate environment by making long-term real estate investments. However, farmers largely outbid investors unless the investors have 1031 tax-deferred exchange funds that need to be used quickly, according to the report.

**Dickhut told *Agri-Pulse* he began to receive calls last summer from individuals who had never owned farms but were looking to invest for various reasons; some were concerned about inflation in the long term, others were alarmed by food supply chain failures and wanted to own a piece of the supply chain, and a few wanted to invest in rural real estate to escape the city.**

These new investors, coupled with cash-flush farmers, led to an increase in buyers post-pandemic. Auctions, like the ones held by Farmers National Company, allow bidding to drive prices up.

Further, the supply of good farmland does not currently meet demand, making the market even more competitive.

Since farms are a legacy for many families, they can go generations without ever going on the market. However, with high farmland prices and the Biden administration's potential tax increases, Dickhut notes farm owners who have been considering selling have new incentives to do so.

**In California's Central Valley, farmland price trends are driven by an entirely different factor: water.**

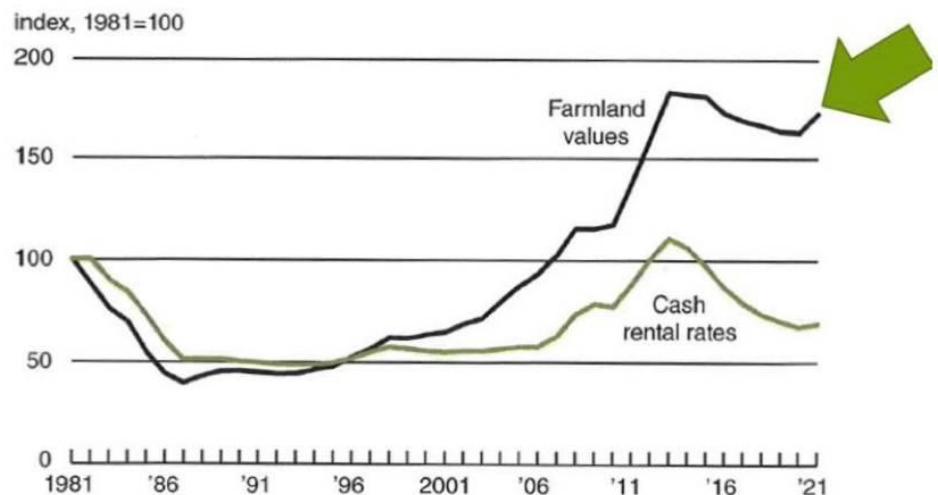
While farmland values have been increasing for properties with reliable water sources, farmland prices have been dropping in areas where single groundwater sources are being restricted by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, said Janie Gatzman, owner of Gatzman Appraisal and co-chair of land values survey for the California Branch of American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, during an interview with *Agri-Pulse*.

[ASFMRA's California Chapter puts out an annual land and lease value trend report that breaks down the farmland values throughout that state's regions.](#)

In California, farmland values were not impacted by the pandemic, according to ASFMRA's report.

Gatzman told *Agri-Pulse* the northern San Joaquin Valley, which roughly includes San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Merced counties, has seen the greatest increases in farmland value because it

## 2. Indexes of Seventh District farmland adjusted by PCEPI



Note: Both series are adjusted by PCEPI for the first quarter of each year.  
Sources: Author's calculations based on data from Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago surveys of farmland values; and U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Personal Consumption Expenditures Price Index (PCEPI), from Haver Analytics.

contains two of the three sub-basins that have yet to be deemed critically over-drafted by the state. Further, property in these areas generally has two or three inexpensive water sources.

However, the southern San Joaquin Valley is heavily impacted by the drought. There are minimal federal allocations of water in the valley, which also is subject to groundwater pumping restrictions due to SGMA because its basins have been deemed critically over-drafted. The farmland in this area with minimal water access decreased in value.

**Gatzman told *Agri-Pulse* that in the Central Valley she has seen 15% to 20% price increases in areas with reliable water, and decreases in about the same range in areas where water is restricted.**

Beyond water, Gatzman said a strong driver of farmland value is the profitability of nut crops. She said the yields for most nut crop orchards are optimal in the southern San Joaquin Valley but decline as one goes north. However, there's more water in the north. "So, there's always that tension."

With extreme drought conditions more widespread than they've been in 20 years, Gatzman said there has been a greater migration within California from water insecure areas to water secure areas.

Further, "A lot of ag, especially pistachio growers in California who have long history in the market, is moving to Arizona and New Mexico, and buying up land there, even though the water and some areas of those states look a little iffy. Compared to where they're coming from in California, it looks pretty good."

## **News Briefs:**

**ERS tracks, quantifies bee pollination.** Honey bee pollination services are worth between \$250 million and \$320 million annually, USDA's Economic Research Service said in a new report, which also valued the honey production market at about \$330 million per year. There is limited data on the transportation routes of commercial honey bees, according to the report. USDA ERS used a National Agricultural Statistics Service survey of beekeepers to understand the seasonal movement of honey bees, quantify the pollination and honey production markets, and study colony loss. About 30% of all commercial honey bee colonies are taken to the Northern Plains for the summer so they can forage to produce honey. The flowering grasslands of the Northern Great Plains, including Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota, offer the bees a concentration of Conservation Reserve Program acreage, which is optimal for bees due to its high-quality forage and low risk of chemical exposure. Before the winter months, there is a large influx of honey bees into California and other warmer southern states. Pollinator season begins in February, when more than 68% of all commercial honey bee colonies move to pollinate almonds in California. Almond producers accounted for 80% of demand for pollination services in 2017, while the apple and blueberry industries each purchased around \$10 million of pollination services. Other crops pollinated by honey bees include melons, cherries, cranberries, peaches and pumpkins. The report says long-distance transportation, mites, and pesticide exposure are associated with colony stress and loss. Using data from 2017 and 2018, ERS estimated commercial honey bees travel an average of 1,153 miles. While around 30% of colonies were lost due to Varroa mites in the winters of both 2017-18 and 2018-19, the colonies have since started to recover due to intensified colony management, including splitting hives and purchasing new queens. With limited data, the report indicated that demand for honey bee

pollination services is growing, meaning an increasing number of honey bees will travel these long distances.

**Report lays out three crucial components for successful state rural broadband efforts.** State governments across the nation are looking to improve broadband service for their residents, using different approaches and with unique end goals in mind. However, a recent fact sheet published by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that there are three important components that the most successful states have implemented: a broadband office, planning and technical assistance for local and regional entities, and a competitive grant program. According to the Pew Charitable Trusts, centralized broadband offices within state government can specialize in broadband issues and help to plan and direct funding for broadband projects, be the point of contact for stakeholders and become a “neutral voice” on broadband to community and state leaders. Some states like Minnesota and Colorado have created offices that deal with broadband, while others like Tennessee have designated staff within another agency that focus on broadband. The Pew Charitable Trusts also suggests that state agencies lead planning efforts, particularly because many local governments may not have the proper resources or expertise to do so. These efforts include both strategic planning — creating goals, working to establish endorsements from stakeholders, conducting surveys and connecting with internet service providers — and technical planning, which involves designing the network, applying for funding and business planning. Finally, states looking to establish successful broadband coverage should create a competitive grant program that will “provide limited subsidies to internet service providers to extend service into rural and unserved areas.” These programs help to create an evaluation criteria for proposed projects, lessen costs in areas that would typically be expensive to cover and help determine what local needs are being met.

## **Farm Hands West: Morgan appointed to California Water Resources Control Board**

Gov. **Gavin Newsom** appointed **Nichole Morgan** to serve on the State Water Resources Control Board. Morgan has served as the assistant deputy director of financial assistance since 2019 and also served in several positions from 2009-2019. She previously worked for URS Corporation, RMC Water and Environment, Kimley-Horn and Associates, California Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Sacramento County Regional Sanitation District. This position does require Senate confirmation. Morgan succeeds **Tam Doduc**, a civil engineer, who served in various staff roles with both the State Water Board and the Air Resources Board, stretching back to 1989.

**Pramod Thota** has been tapped to be the next president of FMC U.S. Most recently, Thota was president of FMC India. He has held a variety of strategy and engineering leadership roles throughout the U.S. and India, including positions with Booz & Company, GES Inc., Virginia Tech and Wipro Technologies. Thota joined FMC in 2012 as director of strategy and development and then was named business director of FMC Global Specialty Solutions in 2014. In 2017, he was tapped to be president of FMC India.

President Joe Biden has selected Xochitl Torres Small, a former member of the House Ag Committee, as USDA's next undersecretary of rural development. Torres Small served one term in Congress representing New Mexico's second congressional district, which includes roughly the southern half of the state. She was elected in 2018 and served on the House Agriculture Committee as well as Armed Services and Homeland Security Committees. Before her time in Congress, Torres Small was a staffer for former Sen. **Tom Udall**, D-N.M., and a judicial law clerk for a federal judge. If confirmed, Torres Small would be in charge of a mission area with wide-ranging responsibilities, including rural electric cooperative loans, broadband expansion,

community development and infrastructure funding, value-added producer grants and funding for renewable energy and biofuel projects.

Biden also announced a pair of Interior Department officials who will hold roles key to ag and food policy. **Laura Daniel-Davis** has been picked as the next assistant secretary for Land and Minerals Management at DOI. Daniel-Davis was chief of staff to Interior Secretaries **Sally Jewell** and **Ken Salazar** during the Obama administration. She currently serves as the principal deputy assistant secretary in the same mission area she is nominated to lead, where she oversees the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement and the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement.



*Xochitl Torres Small*

Biden also picked **Camille Calimlim Touton** as the next commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. She is currently the BOR's deputy commissioner and also has experience on Capitol Hill at the Transportation and Infrastructure as well as Natural Resources committees in the House and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

In addition, Biden plans to nominate **David Uhlmann** to be the EPA's assistant administrator for enforcement and compliance assurance. Uhlmann, now a law professor at the University of Michigan, served for 17 years as a federal prosecutor, including seven years as the chief of the Justice Department's environmental crimes section. The White House says Uhlmann "earned a reputation for prosecuting polluters aggressively and fairly, presided over expansion of the environmental crimes program, and strengthened relationships with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Coast Guard, and other law enforcement partners."

**Radhika Fox** has been confirmed by the Senate with a vote of 55-43 to serve as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Water. She previously served at the U.S. Water Alliance as the CEO.

**Matt Herrick** has left the Department of Agriculture where he served as Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack's communications director. He handed off his responsibilities to **Mickeala Carter**, who will serve as the acting communications director at USDA. Herrick has worked for Vilsack on three separate occasions. Before returning to USDA for the third time, Herrick was the senior vice president of public affairs and communications at the International Dairy Foods Association. He plans on taking a few weeks to spend time with his family before starting his next job.

The National Aquaculture Association selected **Jacob Jones** to be the new director of membership recruitment and public outreach. The Arkansas native spent most of his life working in the fisheries and aquaculture industry. He spent some time in North Carolina teaching high school science and has a research background in genetics, fish reproductive physiology, and aquaponics.

MyLand Company has tapped **Pradeep Monga**, former deputy executive secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), to serve on its board of directors. At UNCCD, Monga focused on global efforts to reverse and prevent desertification and land

degradation while mitigating the effects of drought in affected countries to reduce poverty and increase environmental sustainability. Monga also previously served as director of energy and



*Robert Holifield*

climate change at the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and as sustainable development adviser and assistant resident representative for energy and environment at the United Nations Development Program, India.

**Dan Errotabere** and **Bill Kennedy** have retired from the Family Farm Alliance board of directors. Errotabere is a third-generation farmer and raises diversified crops such as Pima cotton to wheat, tomatoes, pistachios and almonds in Riverdale, California. He has held leadership positions at Westlands Water District, Fresno County Farm Bureau, Fresno Madera Farm Credit Association and San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority. He is a past board member of the California Cotton Growers Association and the California Farm Bureau Federation. Kennedy and his family have ranched in Klamath County, Oregon and Glenn

County, Calif. He served as a board member of the Alliance from 1995 and is a past president.

**Robert Holifield**, co-founder and a principal of Lincoln Policy Group and a longtime Capitol Hill staff member, died June 16. He was 43. Holifield is a former staff director of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry Committee, where he served as the principal adviser to then-Chair Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark. He is survived by his wife, Kat, and three young children. For more on memorials for Holifield and his family, click here.

**Best regards,**

**Sara Wyant**  
**Editor**

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