

Assembly ag chair seeks aid for overtime law, drought and wildfire prevention

Assemblymember Robert Rivas of Hollister plans to work with growers and other stakeholders on bills, bond measures and informational hearings to address issues on several fronts, especially drought.

“When you talk about the impacts of this drought and the tremendous pressure that this industry and growers are facing, certainly we need to do everything we can to support them,” Rivas, who chairs the Assembly Agriculture Committee, said at the Agri-Pulse Food and Ag Policy Summit West on Monday. “How we respond to that is incredibly important.”

Earlier in the year, Rivas sought to deliver pandemic relief through a [\\$3.1 billion food and ag bond proposal](#) for the November 2022 ballot. This and several other bond efforts were then put on hold as the budget outlook grew stronger, according to Rivas, who suggested he may return to the measure next year.

“The motivating factor behind our bill was really to focus on agriculture, focus on the future of agriculture, focus on creating a resilient food system,” he said. “We saw major disruptions to our food system amid the pandemic.”



Asm. Robert Rivas, D-Hollister

Rivas pointed out that some of the provisions in the bill and in other proposals for climate resilience bonds have been included in the current budget. When asked if funding for water storage could have a role in a future bond measure, Rivas worried investments in water “are going to outweigh the emphasis in other parts of the bill.” He added that the state must do “a

better job in administering those funds” from previous measures, referring to the Proposition 1 water bond voters approved in 2014.

In discussing his measure for granting agricultural workers access to the state’s stockpile for N95 respirators, Rivas explained how he has been engaging with industry to reach a compromise on the bill.

“I have no intentions of impacting the industry in a negative way,” he said.

While that measure has been progressing through the Legislature with broad support, another that was also related to wildfires was pulled before the first committee hearing. The measure would have made grazing on public lands more accessible, offering another tool to mitigate the spread of fires.

“This idea really came from the county of Sonoma, when we visited with the farm bureau there,” explained Rivas. “We got a lot of resistance from environmental groups, like the Sierra Club.” He held the bill in committee to buy time to reach out to those environmental interests, offering to tour these lands with them to see the opportunities presented in the bill.

“It's all-hands-on-deck, in my opinion, in how we mitigate the impacts and severity of these incredible wildfires,” he said.

As the 2021 legislative session winds down, Rivas is planning more informational hearings for the Agriculture Committee that focus on drought impacts to the industry. For the next session starting in January, he hopes to revive a 2020 bill that offered a dollar-for-dollar tax credit to offset the costs of agricultural overtime wages, with the aim of keeping California agriculture competitive.

“As the first state in the nation to have an overtime law,” said Rivas, “we've got to account for the impact it's going to have to the industry.”

Rivas has also requested a \$1 million allocation in a future budget trailer bill to address the threat of the plant pathogen known as INSV, which “is really wiping out the leafy green industry” in his Salinas Valley district.

The California agricultural landscape will look different a decade from now, but maybe not as different as you think

(Editor’s note: Rabobank’s Roland Fumasi spoke at the Agri-Pulse Food & Ag Policy Summit on Monday but we also captured some of his comments during an extended conversation about this year’s drought impact, industry consolidation and other changes ahead for California agriculture.)

With drought conditions worsening in many parts of California and more water restrictions, farmers will likely idle between 600,000 to 800,000 acres this year, says Roland Fumasi, EVP & North American Regional Head, RaboResearch Food & Agribusiness. That does not include the potential impacts of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).

While much of the western U.S. is experiencing drought conditions, California is one of the hardest hit. As of June 22, 2021, 100% of the state is experiencing some degree of drought.

About 33% of the state has been categorized under *exceptional drought*, the most intense drought classification. But water access varies greatly by region of the state.

During the last major drought, which ended in 2016, Fumasi said there were about 600,000 acres that didn't get planted. The number could be a little worse this year because soil recovery from the last drought has limited water availability even more, added the California native.

When it comes to SGMA, Fumasi says “we are still in the early stages.” But some of the water districts are already starting to implement higher costs for groundwater pumping or higher fees associated with trying to conserve groundwater – even though the SGMA plans have not yet been approved by the state.

“We're going to see a lot more groundwater pumping this year than we would otherwise, just to keep crops alive. But that's going to come at a higher cost.”

As a result, “we're going to see less water find its way to thirstier crops like alfalfa, cotton and rice. Some farmers in the Sacramento Valley are going to sell water and plant less rice,” Fumasi said.

The Nasdaq Veles Water Index, which tracks the spot rate of surface water per acre foot in California, dropped down to \$480/acre foot last winter and as of July 9, was about \$841/acre foot – about a 75% increase.

Fumasi says there'll be growers who will be paying more for water to keep permanent crops alive - whether that's blueberries or pistachios, and almonds in some cases. However, he points to a weak almond market that may complicate decision-making.

“We've had a really weak almond market where, if you consider cash costs as well as amortized costs, have been below breakeven, and by my projections are likely to remain relatively weak for the next season, as well.”

Fumasi says we will likely see almonds “being pushed out at a more aggressive rate. And 6-9 months from now, you are really going to see a heightened pace of older almond trees coming out.”

The other challenge with almonds is that they are very sensitive to salinity, he adds. “If you have to rely on groundwater and you don't have enough surface water to blend to reduce the salinity of that groundwater, almond yields are challenged. If you've got weak prices and pile weaker yields on top of that, that's a disaster.

However, he says that's not the case with pistachios, which are more of a salt-tolerant tree. Pistachio markets have held up well and were very profitable over the last 12 months. “You might see people start to favor that crop, because of those two aspects. But that's not to say there won't be some pistachios come out if folks just can't get water,” he adds.

The coastal crops in the Salinas Valley, the leafy greens, the berries and some peppers rely heavily on groundwater, but their groundwater situation is a little different than the Central Valley. They rely heavily on the Salinas River, which is an underground flowing river, rather than a stable aquifer like in the Central Valley.

Will flows be impacted by the dry weather? “Absolutely, but our reports from our clients so far report they're still going to have reliable groundwater. That river runs a pretty long stretch so the northern part sounds like it's going to be okay. As you move south and other little pockets on the coast, you start to run into trickier groundwater situations. So, there's going to be some acreage that is reduced.”

But Fumasi says there's a different scenario in the desert region. “The Imperial Valley tends to rely on Colorado River water, so growers there usually have the most robust water access of any place in California. But given what's happened, not just now but after that last five-year drought, there has been a lot of contention on Colorado River rights.



Roland Fumasi and Sara Wyant speak during the 2021 Agri-Pulse Food & Ag Policy Summit

“People are really battling for water there, but the Imperial Irrigation District, which would be the biggest irrigation district in the California desert, is still expecting, anywhere from about 80% to 100% flows from the Colorado River, depending on which specific canal is used.

“When you go up to the north coast and the major wine growing regions, they've had some major water cutbacks,” he added. “We could see an impact on grapes, to some extent. In certain pockets, even in the Sacramento Valley, it just depends on where you are. There's a big part of the Sacramento Valley that has extremely reliable groundwater and they're going to be fine.”

Fumasi says one of the brightest spots of the federal water system in California is the Friant division, which relies on the Friant/Kern canal.

“Where I live in the southern San Joaquin Valley, that allocation still stands at 20%. Not a high allocation, but generally speaking that's typically the segment of the federal system that at least gets the highest allocation down here in the San Joaquin Valley. So, they'll be able to combine some groundwater pumping with some surface water availability.”

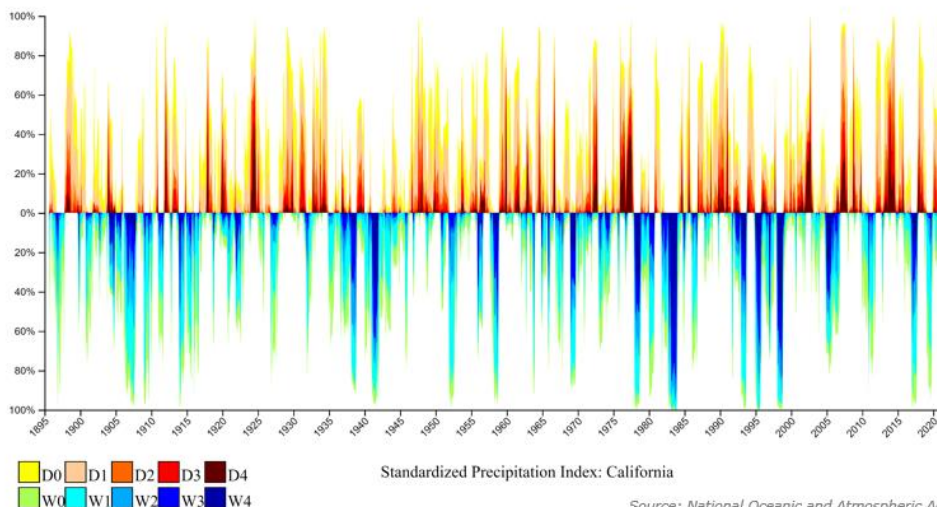
Regardless of the current drought and water cutbacks, Fumasi says he's still sees California as a specialty crop production powerhouse well into the future, albeit one that will look different.

“As I look forward, yes, we will we have less acreage that's irrigated in California in 5 - 15 years from now,” Fumasi says. “You'll continue to see some consolidation, which we've seen big time over the last 10-15 years. You'll continue to see farms that have economies of scale buy some of the smaller players.” Other highlights from Fumasi:

- “Although it's counterintuitive in some ways, we'll continue to see the water that we do have available go to permanent crops - even though there's greater risk in that because you've got to water permanent crops. That has been the trend, even in the last drought.”
- “We'll continue to see genetic improvements, as well as creative management practices, whether it's for annual fruits and vegetables or trees and vines that will continue to drive higher yields.”

- “There's going to be winners and losers - given SGMA. For example, the land values in the areas that are not covered by an irrigation district and rely 100% on groundwater. Those land values have really deteriorated over the last 3-4 years because they have no surface water availability to recharge the groundwater. And without that tool, it's just too risky given SGMA. Those in California that have the most robust water rights and are in the most robust water districts are going to continue to be more valuable.”
- “Any policy that is implemented that challenges California’s ability to produce food necessarily has a negative impact on billions—with a ‘b’—of consumers globally, all else remaining constant.”
- “There’s a reason that 80% of all the leafy greens come from California because it's just got an ideal climate, but when you consider access to water, the need for a shorter value chain, increased shelf life - all these things fuel that protected culture trend, because it extends growing seasons outside of California.”
- “Traditional greenhouses have been all about tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, plus high-value leafy greens and some specialty lettuces. But now, we're starting to see strawberries move in that (protected culture) direction with Driscoll’s and Plenty, working on true, indoor farming under LED lighting – not a greenhouse. We know that Berry World from Europe has partnered up with Mastronardi, based in Canada, to experiment with growing more strawberries in greenhouses, so there’s movement in that direction.”
- “The precipitation index in California over the last 125 years shows that, over the last decade, the dryness has intensified a bit, and you also see that the wet years have intensified a bit. The wet years have actually gotten more extreme than the dry years. We need more ability in California to capture and store water during these wet periods, so that we can get through the dry periods. That is the most logical solution to the water challenges.”

Nature is Serving Up the Solution.....Will We Capitalize On It?



Decade after end of marketing order, stone fruit acres mostly down, but sector remains strong

Fewer acres of California farmland are dedicated to growing stone fruit compared to 10 years ago when growers of freestone peaches and nectarines voted to end the California Tree Fruit Agreement. But apricots, nectarines, peaches, plums, prunes (which USDA distinguishes from plums in its data) and sweet cherries continue to perform well.

“When I look across the landscape at the stone fruit industry in California, I really do think that they’ve found a sweet spot,” said Ian LeMay, president of the **California Fresh Fruit Association**, despite what he called **“a significant decline in production and number of shippers”** after the marketing agreement ended.

For peaches, plums and prunes, the number of acres bearing fruit decreased in the past decade,



but the total sales dollars increased. Nectarines and apricots saw values drop but not in consort with the amount of reduction in acres. Only cherries saw an increase in both acres bearing fruit and cash value between 2011 and 2020, according to USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service data analyzed by *Agri-Pulse*. (Cling peaches, prunes and cherries have their own marking orders in the state.)

LeMay says cherries are unique among stone fruits in that they are harvested early — in part to beat the significant competition from the Pacific Northwest. But he says that leaves them vulnerable to spring storms, so “you do have some volatility in terms of weather conditions on that crop.”

Even though terminating the marketing agreement did “change some of the business dynamics for the industry,” LeMay said “for any permanent fresh fruit commodity in the state of California the most significant pressure is labor.” And ripe peaches, apricots, plums, cherries and nectarines, for the most part, have to be hand-picked.

LeMay said his members are exploring or implementing “all sorts of different changes in the orchard to try to minimize the labor demands” such as installing permanent platforms that reduce the need to move ladders from tree to tree and making efficient use of workers ahead of peak harvest. **Some, he said, have “crews in the orchard every day doing some sort of preparatory work to make the orchard the right scenario for the perfect piece of fruit.”**

A paper published in *California Agriculture* last year looked at the marketing order referendum and identified some key reasons why certain growers either wanted to continue or end the agreement. Farms that relied on it for industry information largely supported it and some may have been hurt by its termination, the researchers found. Organic producers also tended to support it.

But growers organized as corporations generally voted against the agreement, while the farms making a high percentage of their profits from the fruit, and the biggest producers overall, more often voted against it. The researchers suggest a partial explanation for this is likely that bigger businesses were doing more in-house marketing. Smaller farms may have been disproportionately hurt when the agreement ended, the paper found, and “[t]his termination may thus have accelerated the exit of farmers from this industry.”

South of Fresno, Masumoto Family Farm is one example of a stone fruit business that has experienced the ups and downs of the industry. Nikiko Masumoto doesn’t remember how her family ultimately voted in the referendum, but she does remember thinking the industry marketing attempts seemed rather out of touch by the time she returned to the farm full time in 2011. She said toward the end, she remembers an effort to couple free iTunes songs with peach purchases.

“I am also an artist, so I appreciate music and art but I just think they were completely missing the mark,” she said.

It was a time when everyday consumers had started paying more attention to where their produce came, from and she says many members of her Millennial generation were “much more willing to spend more money on food that aligns with us ethically.” But from her perspective, the “tree fruit (industry) kind of missed that.”

Increases and decreases in stone fruit acres and production values from 2011 to 2020*

* Data for plums and prunes only through 2018

Fruit	% change in acres	% change in value
Apricots	-24	-11
Nectarines	-35	-5
Peaches	-26	6
Plums	-37	31
Prunes	-31	8
Sweet cherries	9	6

Table: Amy Mayer • Source: USDA • Created with Datawrapper



Nikiko Masumoto works on her family farm. (Photo by Alan Sanchez, courtesy of Masumoto Family Farm)

Like other growers, she is doing what she can to reduce the costs associated with looking for, training and retaining new workers. She’s adjusting the way the farm operates in order to employ a consistent set of workers throughout the season.

“We’re even changing some of our equipment to fit our employees,” she said, because buying

ladders that weigh just a few pounds less can make a big difference for the person moving them all day long.

She values diversity in the workforce, too, and wants to retain workers who contribute different perspectives and offer fresh observations. She had an a-ha moment when it dawned on her that pallets don't have to be stacked seven layers high, which is standard and also challenging for a person her size (she's 5'1").

“There’s no reason why we shouldn’t be questioning the norms that are built into tools,” she added.

She's the fourth generation of her family to grow fruit, and she's part of some of the recent changes. This year is the operation's first season with an apricot harvest. They're certified organic and also grow peaches, nectarines and grapes for raisins. Back when she was born, they grew only peaches, and the spring lady peaches they planted that year took up twice as much acreage as they do now because “we continue to add more varieties so that there's more of a stagger in ripening.” That's part of the strategy to employ one crew all season long.

The expense of labor and other challenges have made it “really apparent in our ‘farm neighborhood’ that more people are pulling out tree fruit.” She’s not interested in replacing fruit with their less labor-intensive cousins, nuts, but she does see that it’s unlikely she can stay exclusively in tree fruit (and grapes) given current conditions.

“If we as a region don't make some very big strides toward groundwater recharge,” or otherwise move away from perennials, she said, “I don't know if this livelihood is going to be possible 2-3 generations from now.” She sees a “dreadful need” to figure out what a future with significantly less water would look like. While she hasn't started to experiment with annuals, she's opening her mind to the possibility. The heart is harder to convince.

“I love tree fruit,” she said. “It's really hard to imagine our home without that.” Other challenges — such as the inability to provide health insurance to her workers, and herself, from the farm business — also weigh on her.

“I worry about climate change so much. I worry about growing inequality in our country every day and whether I'm doing enough,” she said. But she also finds strength from the legacy of her grandparents and great-grandparents who were interned during World War II because of their Japanese ancestry.

“For them to leave that experience and not be bitter but transform that awful, traumatic experience into a place that, for my brother and I, has just been an oasis of love,” she said, means that she's decided, “I have no right to give up on what I think is right.”

So, she keeps growing fruit, marketing it to customers willing to pay a premium for exceptional taste or sensory memory. She takes



Masumoto markets her organic fruit to discerning customers. (Photo courtesy of Masumoto Family Farm)

very seriously her role as someone who doesn't just transact in business but nurtures other people with nutrition.

“Other than sex, I really can't think of anything more intimate than eating,” she said, “and feeding someone.”

Lawmakers struggle with how to regulate legal cannabis farmers

In the four years since California voters legalized cannabis cultivation, the illegal market has remained dominant as legal growers have often struggled to comply with the state's environmental requirements. The two issues have spurred lawmakers to propose legislative fixes each year.

With the backing of environmental groups, the Legislature has been quickly advancing a measure to bring the state's many provisional licenses into regulatory compliance and to fund more than 600 staff positions for a new centralized cannabis agency.

Yet the budget trailer bill revived long-held concerns over adding more burdens for small family farmers and for not addressing racial inequities in the distribution of licenses.

“I really am torn by this particular budget trailer bill,” said Senator Anna Caballero of Salinas during a budget committee hearing last week. “The treatment of the provisional licenses has me gravely concerned.”

With 80% of the licenses being provisional, Caballero worried about letting them expire this year, forcing those growers to go through a time-consuming process to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Caballero and other lawmakers recognized that Proposition 64 for legalizing cannabis put the responsibility on local governments to undertake the CEQA process on behalf of their growers, but provided inadequate resources and time to do so, leaving a patchwork of counties with varying levels of permits and regulations.



California lawmakers are struggling with how to regulate cannabis growers. Image by [NickyPe](#) from [Pixabay](#).

Caballero worried, on the other hand, that adding CEQA changes “on the fly” through a trailer bill would have unintended consequences for smaller growers.

“We don't want to do anything that that drives them out of the market because we've taken a hasty action here in this process,” said Caballero.

Sen. Monique Limón of Santa Barbara pointed out that counties in her district were quick to establish a CEQA process for growers. Santa Barbara County approved 800 licenses within the first four months of the law being passed, leading the county to hold a third of the state's legal licenses at one point. Limón appreciated that the trailer bill sought to correct an unexpected outcome from Prop. 64, that of stacked licenses. Prop. 64 aimed to support small growers, but larger growers could stack multiple county licenses to acquire as much as 900 acres.

In response to Caballero’s concerns, **Kimberly Harbison, a budget analyst at the Department of Finance, noted that the administration has included \$100 million in the budget to help local jurisdictions meet the provisional license timeline. Larger growers have one year to comply, while smaller ones would have until 2026 under the trailer bill.**

Sen. Mike McGuire of Healdsburg, however, acknowledged the problem of getting small growers to come into compliance through the legal market has been more challenging than a single bill could ever address.

“We have spent the last several years cleaning up some of the gaps,” said McGuire. “The timelines were simply too aggressive for small family farmers to be able to achieve this.”

He called the process for coming into CEQA compliance incredibly challenging and overly burdensome.

“By the way, we do not do this for any other agricultural crop here in the Golden State,” he added, referring to the delays for CEQA requirements allowed under the provisional licenses. “We don't do it for tomatoes, we don't do it for grapes and we don't do it for asparagus.”

McGuire offered four amendments that would delay the timeline for some growers.

During subsequent floor sessions, budget committee chairs clarified that a future budget trailer bill will add similar amendments to address these concerns.

Sen. Steven Bradford of Gardena said that offers very little confidence to the equity applicants for provisional licenses.

“We do the same thing time and time again of promises, promises,” said Bradford. “Dr. Martin Luther King stated in the March on Washington, ‘America has continued to write a promissory note to the Negro that keeps coming back insufficient funds.’ Here we are 57 years later and we're still getting promissory notes.”

He added that the state has spent more money on enforcement than on helping equity applicants.

“Why should you have to have a CEQA qualification just to open up a dispensary?” asked Bradford. “It makes absolutely no sense.”

Republicans pushed back, arguing that the state should ensure the legal market succeeds by spending more money on helping counties with enforcement for illegal cannabis grows.

“There's such a tsunami of illegals out there that we can't even patrol them all,” said Sen. Brian Dahle of Lassen County. “And they're doing a lot to the environment that is not healthy, especially during this drought.”



Sen. Steven Bradford, D-Gardena

Dahle cited widely reported cases of illegal growers stealing water and damming off wildlife habitat that serves as spawning grounds for endangered coho salmon. In his district, counties have just one code enforcement officer covering 4,500 square miles.

Republican Senator Patricia Bates of Laguna Niguel argued the illegal sites add to wildfire risks and can endanger wildlife, like mountain lions, through the illegal use of pesticides and rodenticides.

Dahle also worried about adding more regulatory hurdles for the industry.

“When you talk about small farmers versus big farmers, look, this is California,” he said. “You better grow [your business] if you're going to be a farmer. Or you're not going to stay in business because of all the regulatory laws that are passed in this body.”

He urged his Democratic colleagues to slow down on this measure and spend more time on these issues before passing any further legislation.

Senate Budget Chair Nancy Skinner of Berkeley explained that the timing of the bill was critical, since the Newsom administration already consolidated the three siloed cannabis programs into one department beginning on July 1. The trailer bill would provide the needed 624 staff positions and \$154 million in funding for the program.

While Republican Assemblymember Vince Fong of Bakersfield felt the bill ignored the input of important stakeholders, he admired the spirit of the effort.

“It is certainly a remarkable day in Sacramento when we consider a bill that actually consolidates the size of government,” said Fong.

The measure passed along party lines in each house.

Technology isn't taking away farm jobs, panelists say

Technology that automates weeding, harvesting or other farm work is not taking jobs away from humans. Rather, it's helping bridge the gap between work that needs to be done and a labor force that isn't sufficient, a panel of ag technology leaders said during the Agri-Pulse Summit in Sacramento Monday.

Pauline Canteneur, business strategist at FarmWise, a start-up that has designed autonomous weeding machines, used the term “cobot” to refer to collaboration between robots and the people needed to work with them. She said FarmWise has already hired 20 equipment operators this year “so there's also job creation.”

“We need a new type of ag worker,” said Walt Duflock, vice president of innovation at Western Growers, “part biologist, part agronomist, part engineer, part computer scientist.” He said he's exploring initiatives around a new curriculum that prepares students to



Agri-Pulse Associate Editor Brad Hooker moderates a discussion with (l to r) Walt Duflock, Pauline Canteneur, Gabe Youtsey and Jenny Maloney during the Agri-Pulse Food and Ag Summit on Monday.

fix robots and develop new ones, in addition to operating them. But alongside big, visible technological innovations, the crops themselves need to be bred for success.

Jenny Maloney of Bayer CropScience said genetics can't be left out of the equation. Mechanized harvesting, for example, will demand different traits in a crop "but developing those genetics takes time."

Private money hasn't flowed as generously to ag tech start-ups as it has to other Silicon Valley companies, Duflock said. "It's hard for us to compete with Uber, Airbnb and some of the really, really cool unicorn companies." Public-private partnerships help, but he said grant funding for new tech businesses typically doesn't allow for scaling up once a concept is proven. In contrast, he said in Europe, "I saw a lot more investment in the actual collaboration to go to market and the commercialization of technologies." He urged lawmakers in D.C. and Sacramento to consider ways to fund that stage of business development.

Gabe Youtsey, chief innovation officer for U.C. Agriculture and Natural Resources, said among his goals is to advance innovations "in better and smarter ways (to) help adapt the workforce to this onslaught of new technologies." He added he's excited that the state is "bringing back the budget footprint for Cooperative Extension, so we can do this work."

News Briefs:

UC Davis gets \$6M for pesticide education. UC Davis will receive \$6 million over five years to develop materials and projects promoting safe pesticide use, the Environmental Protection Agency announced Monday. Under a cooperative agreement, the campus will establish the Pesticide Educational Resources Collaborative (PERC) 2.0, the second phase of a program now in its sixth year, EPA said. Under the agreement, UC Davis may award grants to nonprofits to implement community-based projects providing "on-the-ground" expertise and perspective "to develop effective and audience-appropriate pesticide education and training material," EPA stated. UC Davis will put more emphasis on applicator certification programs, including updated training and examination materials with national reach. The program coordinates development of educational resources to meet national needs, the agency said, including multilingual manuals, pamphlets, webpages, videos and guides for different targeted audiences. "In just 2020, more than 75,000 PERC resources were downloaded off the site," EPA said.

Chlorpyrifos lawsuits allege neurological damage in kids. Four lawsuits have been filed in California state courts on behalf of families who claim repeated exposure to the insecticide chlorpyrifos left their children with lasting neurological damage. The suits filed in Fresno, Tulare, Kings and Madera counties name as defendants Dow Chemical and Corteva Agriscience – which was spun off after the merger of Dow and DuPont – as well as growers who applied the insecticide. "These four cases set the stage for class action seeking residential cleanup and medical monitoring that the legal team estimates will be required for at least 100,000 homes and will cost, at the minimum, \$500 million," noted a press release announcing the lawsuits. Corteva stopped making the insecticide at the end of 2020, and EPA is facing a court-ordered deadline in August to decide whether to revoke or modify its tolerances. Corteva spokesman Gregg Schmidt said the company believes the lawsuits are "without merit" and that it "will vigorously defend against these recent unfounded allegations."

USDA's NIFA invests \$6.2M in educating more teachers about food and ag. The USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture recently announced plans to direct \$6.2 million to 21 Professional Development for Agricultural Literacy grants, which aim to increase the number of K-14 teachers educated in the food and agricultural sciences. The grants, part of NIFA's Agricultural and Food Research Initiative, will be awarded to educational institutions in 17 states. The funded programs will prepare teachers to integrate food and agricultural science into their classrooms, help them explore career paths in food and agricultural science, and connect them to a network of agricultural professionals, business leaders, and university faculty. "As we work to build the talent pipeline for agricultural science, technology and business, we have to reach young people while they are in high school," said NIFA Director Carrie Castille. Examples of some projects awarded funding include Iowa Agriculture Literacy Foundation's program to train secondary teachers in educating students on foundational skills in agriculture; Montezuma School to Farm Project's Teacher Professional Development for Ag Education in Montezuma County, Colorado, and Purdue University's Growing the Workforce for Digital Agriculture.

Farm Hands West: Flores appointed CDFA deputy secretary

Gov. **Gavin Newsom** has appointed **Michael Flores** to be the deputy secretary at the California Department of Food and Agriculture. Flores has been a Political Consultant since 2019. He previously served as a senior adviser for the California Correctional Peace Officers Association from 2005 to 2019.

Pear Bureau Northwest has elected new officer to serve for the 2021-22 season. **Scott Martinez**, Medford, Ore., will be the new PBNW chairman, with **Jordan Matson**, Yakima, Wash., elected as first vice chair. **Don Gibson** will serve as second vice chair and **Ron Gonsalves** will serve as third vice chair. The Fresh Pear Committee also elected new officers with **Andrew Peterson** serving as chair for his second and last term. **Jorge Arias** will serve as first vice chair, **Matt Borman** as second vice chair, and **Ed Ing** will serve as secretary and treasurer.

Farmers Business Network has hired **Ken Barbic** as the new head of policy and global government relations. Barbic previously served as assistant secretary for the Office of Congressional Relations at USDA during the Trump Administration. Before that, he was the senior director of federal government affairs at Western Growers.



Ken Barbic

Kate Gordon now serves as a senior adviser to Energy Secretary **Jennifer Granholm**. She most recently was director of California Gov. Gavin Newsom's Office of Planning and Research. Before that, she served as a board member of the Sustainable Investing Advisory Board.

Karla Thieman is the newest partner of Finsbury Glover Hering, joining the public affairs and communications firm's food and ag practice. Thieman served as a senior policy adviser for Agriculture Secretary **Tom Vilsack** during the Obama administration and also served as the chief of staff to then-deputy secretary **Krysta Harden**. She most recently worked at The Russell Group and

earlier in her career advised three Democratic chairs of the Senate Agriculture Committee: **Tom Harkin** of Iowa, **Blanche Lincoln** of Arkansas, and **Debbie Stabenow** of Michigan.

President **Joe Biden** has announced his intent to nominate **Chester John Culver** to serve on the board of directors of the Federal Agricultural Mortgage Corporation. Culver served as the 40th Governor of Iowa from 2007 to 2011. He previously served on the Federal Agricultural Mortgage Board during the Obama Administration and before he was governor he served as the secretary of state of Iowa from 1999 to 2007.

Matt Herrick has moved back to the International Dairy Foods Association to be senior vice president of public affairs and communications. He will also launch the IDFA Foundation and serve as the executive director. Herrick most recently served as Vilsack's communication director for the first five months of the Biden Administration.



Karla Thieman

IDFA has also announced a handful of promotions: **Heather Soubra** has moved from chief of staff at IDFA to become senior vice president of strategic initiatives; **Tracy Boyle** is the new senior director of employee relations and administrative services; **Rob Carpenter** now serves as the senior director of information technology; **Colin Newman** has been promoted to director of industry relations and political affairs; **Michael Goodin** will be the director of multimedia and digital content.



Matt Herrick

Smithfield Foods has promoted **Shane Smith** as the company's new president and chief executive officer, succeeding **Dennis Organ**, who is stepping down for personal reasons. Smith has been with Smithfield since 2003, most recently as chief strategy officer.

Victoria Maloch has joined the House Ag Committee staff under Ranking Minority Member Glenn "GT" Thompson, R-Pa., as a legislative assistant covering issues related to the Commodity Exchanges, Energy and Credit

Subcommittee and the Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research Subcommittee. Maloch is a former Truman Albright Fellow in the federal Office of Rural Health Policy. She also interned at USDA in the Office of Rural Development.

Compassion in World Farming has tapped **Ben Williamson** as the organization's new U.S. executive director. Williamson previously served two and a half years as U.S. programs director

at World Animal Protection. Before that, he worked for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) in London and Los Angeles.

The American Meat Science Association has awarded **Shai Barbut** with the 2021 AMSA Distinguished Research Award. The award, established in 1965, recognizes members with outstanding research contributions to the meat industry. Barbut serves as a Professor in Food Science at the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

He Kang, 1993 World Food Prize laureate, passed away on July 3. He was 98. Kang was the seventh World Food Prize laureate and the first from China. He was recognized for instituting reforms as China's Minister of Agriculture helping lead the nation's agricultural growth in the 1980s. In 1946, Kang graduated with a degree in agronomy from Guangxi University. Later that year, he began his career in government as a manager of an agricultural experimentation station in Nanking. His personal research became the foundation for China's tropical rubber industry. From 1979 to 1990, he served in several government leadership positions, including deputy commissioner of the State Commission of Agriculture, deputy commissioner of the State Planning Commission, and Minister of Agriculture.



Victoria Maloch

Tule River water master, **Richard Schafer**, passed away on July 1 at the age of 95. Schafer was a longtime advocate of water for farmers in the Central Valley. Born in South Dakota, Schafer served in World War II and later attended South Dakota School of Mines and Technology and received his degree in Civil Engineering. In 1960, Schafer started his own company, R. L. Schafer and Associates. He worked as a consulting engineer for many water districts through his early 90s. He served on the San Joaquin Valley Water Quality Coalition. He was also a big advocate for the enlargement of Success Dam. In 2019, the dam was renamed in his honor as the Richard L. Schafer Dam.

Best regards,

Sara Wyant
Editor

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