

## Ag Order 4.0 could cut \$700 million from Salinas Valley lettuce market

A new industry study shows how Ag Order 4.0, a regulation under proposal by the Central Coast Water Quality Control Board, could have disastrous impacts on both growers and the Salinas Valley economy.

One provision in the regulation would reduce the value of lettuce production in Monterey County by \$700 million annually and slash as many as 11,000 jobs. Agriculture supports more than 70,000 jobs in the county, or about one in four households, according to the Monterey County Farm Bureau.



The study found that disadvantaged farmworker communities would shoulder the greatest portion of the burden, which raises concerns over equity and environmental justice.

The study was commissioned by a coalition of agricultural groups and performed by the Davis-based consulting firm ERA Economics. The economists focused the analysis on a proposed cap on the amount of nitrogen that can be applied each year, which would limit applications to 50 pounds per acre. They calculated the impact this would have just on lettuce, one of several major crops produced in the region. Limiting nitrogen applications to 200 pounds per acre would still lead to a \$119 million loss, according to the analysis.

**“It’s pretty startling,” said Norm Groot, director of the Monterey County Farm Bureau. “The numbers they came up with are just eye popping.”**

The economists found that continuing to produce more than one crop each year would likely be “economically infeasible” for farmers under the nitrogen limits and would likely cause “a sharp reduction” in land values, lease rates, jobs and the number of local businesses.

“[The study] helped us to really dig into some of our biggest concerns with the regional board’s approach and what the consequences of those might be,” said Abby Taylor-Silva, vice president of policy at the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California.

The coalition is encouraging the board to move away from setting limits and instead focus on establishing targets. This approach would be more in line with the Central Valley regional board’s efforts to curb nitrogen use, which initially inspired the method for calculating nitrogen discharges.



Abby Taylor-Silva, Grower-Shipper Association of Central California (left)

“You can't look at what's being applied to one ranch and say this basic calculation is going to tell you how that's impacting groundwater,” said Taylor-Silva. “That's just simply not how the system works.”

The industry associations are proposing the Central Coast Water Board focus on identifying and educating the outliers and on narrowing regulatory efforts to specific geographic areas, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to the region.

Groot told *Agri-Pulse* the board also ignores the rising cost for water and the limits to supplies that will come as the state begins to implement the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act this year. He said the conflicting objectives between the state and regional regulations “are going to be very difficult for farm operators to manage and decide which way they have to go.”

Dozens of other farmers and grower groups have commented on the order as well.

“The proposed cure you are pursuing is more harmful than the problem you allege,” writes the board of the California Association of Pest Control Advisors in a letter to the Central Coast Water Board. “Unfortunately, this too often occurs in the siloed structure of government decision making, where one-dimensional thinking is applied to a multi-dimensional issue.”

In a separate analysis, ERA Economics finds the board failed to provide within its environmental review for the order an adequate analysis of the potential economic impacts, despite that information being readily available. The board also incorrectly references three studies to create a “misleading summary” of the regulatory costs, which is “inconsistent with the competitive market for most Central Coast crops.”

In reviewing other areas of Ag Order 4.0, an analysis by the firm Exponent finds that the board “inappropriately assigns responsibility for watershed concerns to individual growers, even though those concerns should be addressed holistically on a watershed level.” The firm also finds the riparian requirements are unlikely to achieve the board’s objectives and “lack a sound scientific basis.” The board’s approach to irrigation and nutrient management, meanwhile, is “overly simplistic,” inaccurate and likely infeasible for a farmer to achieve.

Taylor-Silva said the coalition instead has worked with conservation groups to come up with a more holistic approach to watershed management. She said the order should allow opportunities for the two parties to collaborate on projects that would benefit both riparian habitat and water quality.

“At this time, there's really not a mechanism to look at it within a regulatory framework,” she said. “We've built something to help incentivize that.”

Those efforts are reflected in a letter to the board by the Central Coast Wetlands Group.

“Recent interest by industry to participate in discussions reflects a significant realignment of industry to help solve environmental impacts and achieve water quality compliance,” the conservation group writes, as it recommends support for a coordinated and local approach.

Similarly, the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County urged the board to “consider third-party and cooperative proposals that leverage existing partnerships and expertise.”

In the comments, the industry coalition and others asked the board to credit existing conservation projects as well. Gregory Gonzalez of Scheid Family Wines in the Salinas Valley wanted recognition for existing sustainability certifications in the wine industry as an alternative pathway to compliance for the regulations. He argued these vineyards already meet a certain nitrogen loading threshold and should be excluded from the order due to their “low risk and minimal impact.”

The Central Coast Water Board will hold meetings in September on the comments submitted for Ag Order 4.0, which will include presentations from the agriculture sector. Despite delays due to the COVID-19 crisis, the board is still required to adopt the order before February 2021 and must seek a judge’s order for any extension.

## **Farmworkers, growers grapple with need for more COVID-19 tests and other resources**

Labor unions and social justice groups are fearing for the health and safety of farmworkers as COVID-19 infection rates rise in these communities and the governor steps back on reopening the economy.

At a meeting of the State Board of Food and Agriculture last week, farmworker groups shared these concerns and more, while grower groups called for more resources to support the many actions they have undertaken since the pandemic began, which range from daily outreach to purchasing millions of masks, piloting onsite testing projects and building new housing.

Several panelists at the meeting mentioned testing as the greatest hurdle in combating the virus. Kent Pinkerton, director of the UC Davis Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety, pointed out that 30% of the positive cases in Monterey County are among agricultural workers. He warned this number is likely higher, since another 29% are of unknown origin. Yet few counties are actually tracking that level of information in their testing.

Pinkerton noted other outbreaks in Solano, Tulare and Ventura Counties in packing houses and among field workers.

Though the state has opened up dozens of new testing sites in rural areas of the state, the wait times for a test can be weeks and labs, inundated with samples and lacking essential supplies, can add more than a week to the process.

**“If you're trying to get a test right now, it's extremely difficult,” said Hernan Hernandez, the executive director of the California Farmworker Foundation. “It’s just a big headache.”**

He said it is even more challenging for farmworkers who face language barriers and a complex healthcare system to navigate. To address this, the foundation is launching an effort to test up to 100 farmworkers a day directly in the field in Kern County.

**Don Cameron, the board’s president and a Fresno County farmer, has dealt with this issue as well. He partnered with the county health department and a local hospital to procure onsite testing. Otherwise, it would have been a nine-day wait for an appointment, he said.**

The Newsom administration has assembled a new task force to better coordinate efforts on testing in rural areas as well as providing isolation housing for those exposed to the virus, according to CDFA Secretary Karen Ross. The Federal Emergency Management Agency will reimburse 75% of this cost, while the state must account for the rest, which could come from a combination of local government, private or philanthropic funding, she said.

Ross pointed to the success of Monterey County in launching a program that could deliver test results within 48 hours.

Chris Valadez, a board member and the president of the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, explained how association members joined together to set up a clinic with onsite testing, along with infield education, building new housing and the procurement of hotel rooms.



Chris Valadez, president of the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California

“An overreliance upon Cal/OSHA – or even overreliance upon (the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services) for more masks – really just didn’t cut it for us,” he said. “Once the demand on the laboratories picked up, delays crept in, and it really became a disincentive.”

Ross clarified that the effort was completely privately funded. But she was hopeful the state could encourage this approach in the Central Valley as well as the Santa Maria area.

Farm groups across the state have been tirelessly reaching out to members. Bryan Little, who leads the California Farm Bureau's Farm Employers Labor Service, said he was sending more email updates on safety protocols than his members could keep up with. The Farm Bureau, CDFA and many others have been heavily engaged in dispensing millions of surgical and N95 masks into the ag community.

Yet Estella Cisneros, legal director for the agricultural worker program at California Rural Legal Assistance (CLRA), said her organization's farmworker clients feel their employers are not doing everything they can to protect them.

"Should they risk their own health as well as the health potentially of their family members or others that they come in contact with, or should they put food on the table for their own families?" she said.

Cisneros acknowledged that the CARES Act and the Newsom administration have expanded paid sick leave but warned that COVID-19 patients often take longer to recover. Assemblyman Ash Kalra of San Jose, who pushed the administration on the issue in March, has been advancing a bill to expand paid sick leave even further. Republican senators said the measure has been part of an existing agenda that lawmakers and labor groups were pushing long before the pandemic.

More enforcement by the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) is also needed, argued Cisneros, adding that county agricultural commissioners and county public health departments could step up as well. Asm. Robert Rivas of the Salinas Valley hopes to change that with a bill he has introduced that would grant Cal/OSHA more regulatory power to enforce statewide guidance.

Cisneros said more could also be done to prevent outbreaks among H-2A guestworkers when workers share the same vehicle.

This concern has also been echoed in legislation. Senator Bill Monning of Carmel has been charging forward on a bill requiring employers to notify H-2A workers of their rights when it comes to labor, housing, health and safety. CLRA helped craft the measure. Ag opponents argued the requirements already exist for these employers.



Estella Cisneros, California Rural Legal Assistance

During the board meeting, Giev Kashkooli, the political and legislative director for United Farm Workers of America, shared one lesson on communicating to farmworkers. He noted that the meeting was not translated into Spanish, the primary language among farmworkers. Before the meeting was over, Ross took steps to correct that for future meetings.

**Kashkooli said the coronavirus has been “exposing all the inequities” among farmworkers. They are more likely to have diabetes, for example, which puts them at greater danger when contracting the virus. According to Pinkerton, 40% of farmworkers are obese, which is about 10% higher than the overall California population.**

Unions represent less than 1% of farmworkers nationwide. Yet Kashkooli said they have been influential in certain regions through collective bargaining agreements that have pushed for stricter COVID-19 standards.

“We don't think it's an accident that, in the Central Coast, employer associations have been the most responsive,” he said. “That is the area of the state that has the largest number of farm workers who are part of a union.”

Kashkooli agreed with Bryce Lundberg’s approach to safety inspections. Lundberg, a member of the ag board, said his family rice farm has been implementing audits for COVID-19 safety compliance on every shift.

**“If we could work together with employer associations and we're encouraging more farmworker engagement and involvement, we can take this moment and take a big leap forward in dealing with some of these underlying and really serious health issues,” said Kashkooli.**

Hernandez elaborated on those issues. Food banks, for example, tend to host food distributions at times that are “not adequate” for farmworkers.



Hernan Hernandez, director of the California Farmworker Foundation

“We started sending food directly into the field,” he said, “so that the poor farmworkers can have a box to take back to their families during these times.”

The foundation also started a farmworker relief fund to help cover the costs of utility and medical bills, funded by grants from United Way and the Latino Community Foundation.

In surveys, the California Farmworker Foundation learned that 60% of farmworkers don’t have health insurance. They also discovered that 90% have received information from their employers on COVID-19 guidance, but most of that has been verbally through tail gate meetings.

Hernandez was also concerned about an erosion of the fear factors keeping people socially distanced. He noted that 62% of the farmworkers surveyed now feel safe going to work, though 53% don’t feel safe going to the doctor.

“We're seeing more activity in the communities and more social gatherings,” he said. “So now we're back to square one.”

Hernandez is also urging the state to extend more rent relief, since the cost for rent in the Central Valley has been “skyrocketing.” He also said the next federal stimulus package could do more to help undocumented workers.

Panelists and board members alike worried about the lasting impacts the pandemic would have on farmworkers and their families.

The closure of schools has forced many farmworkers to stay home to care for children and has presented new hurdles in obtaining school meals, while further isolating rural farmworker communities that lack broadband access, said Kashkooli. Cisneros added that farmworker parents also tend to lack the educational background or language skills needed to provide school instruction at home.

“This could be our time to get very serious about that,” responded Ross. “If this is ongoing more than a year, it's frightening to think about what's happening to kids.”

## **Stakes are high for ag as Senate crafts pandemic relief bill**

Farm groups and their Senate allies are making their final pitches to Capitol Hill for billions in additional aid as lawmakers look to pass what is expected to be the last major coronavirus relief package this year.

The stakes in the negotiations over the bill are especially high, because Congress will be in session for a limited amount of time starting in August until the election in November. The Senate returns to session on Monday, and Senate GOP leaders are expected to release a draft aid bill sometime after that.

**“There’s a very, very narrow opportunity starting next week and running for two weeks to make this happen,”** said Eric Deeble, policy director for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.



Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D.

The shape of the bill’s ag provisions isn't known yet, but a key senator, Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman John Hoeven, told *Agri-Pulse* that their total cost is likely to be in the range of \$30 billion to \$35 billion.

That would be in line with what the Democratic-controlled House included for farmers in the \$3 trillion HEROES Act that passed that chamber in May. The bill’s agriculture provisions were estimated to cost \$33 billion, including \$16.5 billion for a second round of Coronavirus Food Assistance Program payments that would supplement the original CFAP payments for

losses farmers have suffered since April 15.

Farm groups continue to push for more money than the HEROES Act would provide.

**In a letter to congressional leaders on July 9, leaders of 21 farm groups called for increasing USDA’s Commodity Credit Corp. spending authority to \$50 billion, up from the existing limit of \$30 billion, to provide “direct and temporary assistance to the broader agricultural supply chain beyond the farm gate.”**

The \$16 billion in CFAP payments that USDA is currently distributing “will provide some farmers with needed relief,” but the program “falls far short of addressing the vast needs of the agricultural economy as all commodities are facing unique and different challenges,” the

organizations wrote. The groups include the American Farm Bureau Federation, National Farmers Union, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture and 11 commodity groups.

Hoeven, however, said the \$50 billion CCC limit that the farm groups want is unlikely to pass. **“Right now, it doesn’t look like it’s going to go that direction,”** he said. However, he said he expects some additional spending authority for USDA to be included in the Senate’s coronavirus aid package to supplement the \$14 billion in CCC funding that is still available to USDA under the CARES Act, enacted in March. **“That puts us in pretty good shape to finish out this year and go into next year,”** Hoeven said.

**According to an AFBF analysis, eight major commodities have lost a total of \$42 billion in value because of the pandemic, with much of the loss coming on 2020 crops. The CFAP payments USDA is now distributing are largely designed to cover losses on crops grown in 2019 and marketed prior to April 15.**

According to the analysis, corn has lost \$9.1 billion in value because of the pandemic, with \$5.4 billion of that loss on the 2020 crops.

The AFBF analysis did not include fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops. USDA addressed some of that sector’s concerns with CFAP by announcing July 9 the eligibility of dozens of additional commodities.

**“This goes a long way to resolving the problems we had where crops are not being included,”** said Dennis Nuxoll, vice president of federal affairs at the Western Growers Association, which represents produce growers in Arizona, California, Colorado, and New Mexico.



Dennis Nuxoll, Western Growers

But Western Growers, like other producer groups, says a second round of CFAP will be needed to compensate for post-April 15 losses. Nuxoll hoped COVID-19 wasn’t around much longer but noted it’s clear that producers need quarter two covered, if not quarter three and they don’t have Title 1 programs, referring to the farm bill price-support programs for traditional row crops. “We can sort of already look into quarter three and it’s not going to be necessarily great,” he said.

Danielle Beck, executive director of governmental affairs at the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, said many cattle producers “were forced to sell cattle at a significant loss well beyond that April 15 cutoff date. We are seeing producers even today who are selling at a loss and aren’t being made whole by that part one payment.”

There appears to be broad support for major facets of the HEROES Act’s agriculture section, including an additional round of CFAP payments and payments for livestock and poultry that had to be euthanized.

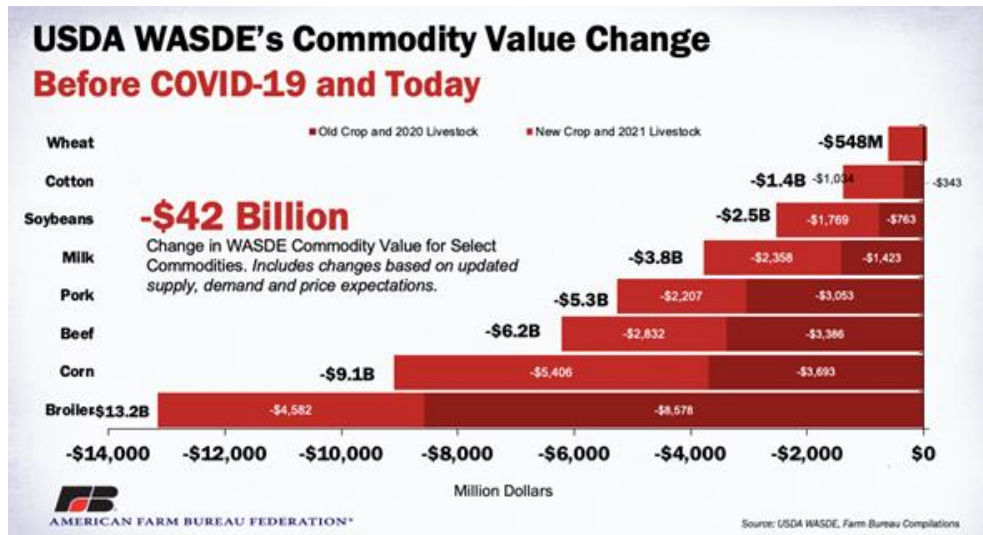
**Hoeven said another element of the House bill, a dramatic expansion of the Soil Health and Income Protection Program to 5 million acres, also is in the mix. The 2018 farm bill authorized SHIPP as a pilot program for 50,000 acres in the upper Midwest. The HEROES**



**Act would allow farmers to idle acreage in the program for three years in return for an annual payment of \$70 an acre.**

Ferd Hoefner, a policy adviser to NSAC, which has supported SHIPP, said the Senate package is likely to make the payment variable, rather than fixed, possibly tying it to a percentage of county rental rates.

There are other major proposals that lawmakers and farm groups are trying to get included in the package:



**The Food Supply Protection Act:** An \$8 billion proposal by Democrats on the Senate Agriculture Committee and Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., that includes funding for protective equipment for farmworkers and processing plant employees. The bill also would help food banks expand their cold storage and fund new partnerships with restaurants to feed needy Americans.

“We’ve got to be able to figure out a way during this crisis when there are so many families in need to be able to move those (surplus food items) over to the food banks,” said Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow, the senior Democrat on Senate Ag.

**Farming Support to States Act:** The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture is urging the Senate to include the bipartisan measure, which would authorize \$1 billion in grants to states.

The grants could fund a variety of programs, including those that “contribute other resiliency, diversity and distributed production of agricultural products” and other projects that “build resiliency and long-term viability of rural economies” or increase the competitiveness of small and mid-sized entities. The bill’s Senate sponsors include Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., and Susan Collins, R-Maine.

**Pork, poultry producers:** The RELIEF for Producers Act introduced by four Senate Republicans earlier this month would compensate livestock and poultry producers for losses due to processing slowdowns and euthanization of animals. The bill also would provide \$300 million in additional funding for the National Animal Health Laboratory Network to combat animal diseases.

Producers would be reimbursed at 85% of the value of losses for the 30-day period beginning with the date of initial depopulation. Each 30-day period after that, the value of losses would be reduced by 10%.

**Textile industry:** The National Cotton Council is appealing to lawmakers to provide aid to textile mills and cotton merchandisers who have been hurt by the dramatic slowdown in apparel sales.

USDA estimates that global cotton consumption for the 2019-2020 marketing year, which ends July 31, will be 102 million bales, down from 120 million bales for 2018-2019. USDA estimates global usage will rebound to 114 million bales for 2020-2021, but the U.S. industry worries that is overly optimistic.

**“We’re just not seeing demand recover yet,” said Gary Adams, NCC president and CEO. A farm bill program provides assistance to domestic mills of 3 cents per pound, but that rate is based on actual usage, which has declined sharply. The cotton council wants to see the rate doubled to 6 cents and payments based on the mills’ 2017-2019 usage.**

**Local agriculture:** Some House members are raising concerns that USDA’s rules for CFAP are unfair to small farmers because they don’t reflect the premium prices that those growers get for selling to local markets. There may be an effort to get those concerns addressed in the Senate aid package, if advocates for the farmers can find senators willing to take on the issue.

In a letter Monday to USDA, two members of the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, Maine Democrat Chellie Pingree and Nebraska Republican Jeff Fortenberry, note that the CARES Act included specific language making farmers who supply local food systems eligible for payments.

“Despite this, USDA did not provide any specific accommodation for these producers in the design of CFAP payments,” the lawmakers say.

## **Conservation credit system allows Nevada ranchers to aid sage-grouse conservation**

With greater sage-grouse numbers continuing to decline throughout their range in the western United States, one state is engaging ranchers to preserve habitat for the bird, known for its elaborate mating rituals.

Nevada has set up a Conservation Credit System where developers of mining and other projects can purchase credits generated off-site that are used to mitigate for loss of habitat. They are required to do so if their attempts at avoiding or minimizing impacts on sage-grouse habitat are deemed insufficient.

Last month, the CCS achieved a milestone of sorts, approving an agreement between Coeur Rochester and Crawford Ranch that allows the mining company to proceed with operations at a silver and gold mining operation through the purchase of credits developed by the ranch on about 3,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat.

It's the first transaction under the system between two private parties; previous credit purchases have been conducted internally — that is, the mine operator transferred credits also generated by a company owned by the mine.

It's also in line with similar proposals bubbling up at the national level, most notably a bill introduced by two Republican senators, Mike Braun of Indiana and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, and two Democrats, Debbie Stabenow of Michigan and Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island.

The Growing Climate Solutions Act would establish a USDA-run system for certifying third-party verifiers and technical service providers. The third-party verifiers would, in turn, certify the credit-generating farm practices.

**Proponents of the credit system say it's a positive development, but also just a small part of what's needed to preserve habitat for the bird, whose range includes 11 western states. About 80% of its habitat is concentrated in five states: Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Colorado, and Wyoming.**

The sage-grouse was left off the federal endangered species list in 2015, when the Obama administration announced that conservation commitments by states and federal agencies (mainly the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service) in the bird's range were sufficient to preclude the need for listing.

But the Trump administration weakened protections surrounding oil and gas development in BLM's plans, which have been stalled by federal courts in response to environmental challenges.

**"I sometimes need to remind folks that mitigation is just a small portion of the conservation efforts that are needed," says Kelly McGowan, who heads up the Sagebrush Ecosystem Program in the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.**

The main threat to sage-grouse, he says, is loss of habitat due to fires and invasive grasses, which will continue to be a challenge.

"Mitigation itself is not going to provide enough habitat or save enough habitat to protect the species," he says. "We have to be proactive in many other areas to address the threats." But the CCS can help, he says, and the latest agreement has spurred interest among other "debit creators" — companies that plan to disturb habitat and need a way to mitigate for it.

"We've had four or five sales" since the Coeur Rochester/Crawford deal, he says, including purchases to offset impacts of a geothermal plant, a solar project and mining exploration. About 114,000 acres are enrolled in the program, including seven approved transactions that protect over 20,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat.



*Sage Grouse. Photo credit: NRCS*

The rest of the credits include those available for immediate sale and those that are pending because they still need to be approved under what McGowan calls a “robust” system of verification.

“We’re finally gaining some momentum,” McGowan says. “Things are starting to move.”

Shane Hall, Crawford’s ranch and operations manager, says the agreement benefits the ranch because in addition to preserving sage-grouse habitat, it allows the ranch to tap into another revenue stream.

**“Land that you would otherwise just pay taxes on can be used to raise beef and generate credits,” he says. “Most responsible cattle owners want reliable and logical multiple use” on their lands, he says. “We want to be aggressive stewards of the land. We want to see the birds, the healthy fish and the deer.”**



*Kelly McGowan*

While he concedes “it might not be for everybody,” he also says he thinks it’s something other ranchers should probably examine to see if it’s right for their land. Crawford, he says, will end up spending about \$250,000 on the project when all is said and done.

The price of the credits, which is not disclosed, varies depending on several factors, including the cost of maintaining the habitat and whether the credit-creator is conducting other conservation measures on the land, McGowan says. On the Crawford Ranch, the targeted land, which is in two separate parcels, is especially valuable because it contains late brood-rearing habitat.

**“The biggest chunk came from their credit site that’s in the Sonoma Mountains,” McGowan says. “It’s a very high value, late brood rearing site — probably the scarcest habitat we have here in Nevada.”**

Another factor is proximity. The closer the credits are to the area being disturbed, the higher the potential value of the credits. “We have a proximity ratio that we apply and in the end, worst-case scenario, the credit buyer may end up having to purchase 15% more credits the further away the credit project is from the disturbance,” McGowan says.

In one of the areas, Hall says the ranch doesn’t really have to do anything except maintain the habitat as is. On the other piece of land, Crawford is putting in a management fence — not a permanent enclosure — to ease the pressure on a creek.

“We want the option to be able to put cattle back” on the land for short, intensive grazing if needed, he says.

The ranch also has done some spraying for cheatgrass due to a recent fire on that parcel and is planting forbs — herbaceous, flowering plants that are not grasses — which provide food for sage-grouse.

Hall says he doesn't know how many sage-grouse are on the ranch, but says on one of the parcels "it's very common to drive your pickup and see one flying across the road." Not everyone is thrilled with the idea of the program. Patrick Donnelly, Nevada state director for the Center for Biological Diversity, says, **"We really challenge the idea that you can mitigate the loss of pristine habitat."**

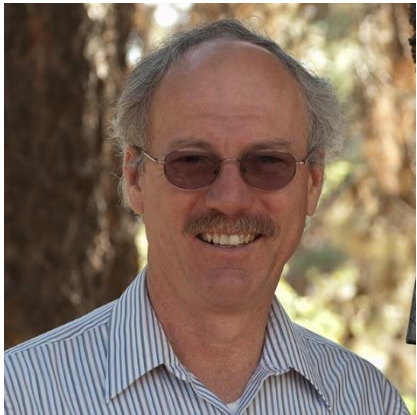
"The loss of habitat, the loss of leks is irreplaceable," Donnelly says. Leks are the areas where sage-grouse gather in the spring to mate.

Donnelly says the group is not opposing the CCS and says keeping cattle away from sage-grouse habitat is valuable, but also says CBD supports listing the sage-grouse under the ESA." Citing "catastrophic declines" in sage-grouse numbers, he says "preserving intact habitat" is the way to go.

**McGowan agrees that "we need to do the very best that we can to protect the intact habitat that we do have," McGowan says. "That is one of our highest priorities."**

Both McGowan and Sherman Swanson, a former professor at University of Nevada-Reno who specializes in riparian systems say that so far, many of the authorized projects do not occur within prime habitat.

"In most cases that I'm aware of, these disturbances occur within habitat, but it might just be a small portion of the overall range, and I don't know of any that we've worked on where the footprint of the project overlies an actual lek," McGowan says.



*Sherman Swanson*

And Swanson, who represents the public on the state's Sagebrush Ecosystem Council, which oversees the CCS program and establishes policy for it, says the man-made disturbances "are really not the big deal for sage grouse." Instead, the risk comes from "mega-fires" that sweep across the landscape due to increased fuel loads such as cheatgrass and pinyon-juniper trees.

**"We need to think about landscape-scale fires and we need to think about the tools in our management toolbox," including using grazing to create fire breaks, he says.**

As for the CCS, "the goal is for there to be a supply-and-demand situation," Swanson says. **"Just because we think this is a good idea doesn't necessarily mean that it's easy to get that balance just right. But in the end, we believe the flexibility of the marketplace is going to be a powerful tool for motivating positive action in an ongoing manner."**

"It's certainly not the only sage grouse habitat conservation measure we're doing, which is good because it wouldn't be sufficient, but it does provide some utility on the margins for dealing with these [man-made] impacts and motivating some ranchers to do some things and get some benefit from putting some conservation actions onto the ground — I kind of think that's a good thing."

## **News Briefs:**

**Pilot program maps diamondback moths in Salinas Valley.** Using a combination of predictive modeling and real-time data, some growers in the Salinas Valley should be able to better manage diamondback moths in brassica crops this summer. The effort is part of a pilot program between FMC Corporation and Nutrien Ag Solutions to use the new FMC Arc™ farm intelligence platform. The diamondback moth is one of the most prolific pests on brassica crops throughout the world with an estimated annual economic impact exceeding \$4 billion, according to FMC. Crops being monitored include Brussels sprouts, broccoli and cauliflower. "This unique technology will enhance the ability of Nutrien Ag Solutions representatives to help growers better manage destructive diamondback moths through an integrated pest management strategy." said Ronaldo Pereira, president FMC Americas Region.

The pilot program will run through mid-September 2020, the peak season for diamondback moths. Nutrien Ag Solutions PCAs and scouts will be actively monitoring insect traps throughout the Salinas Valley while FMC Arc farm intelligence will visualize that data as detailed maps on a proprietary mobile app. The innovative platform offers a full suite of features, including customized alerts through a mobile app to indicate when action is needed in a field, two-way communication between the user and the FMC technical services team, reliable data and high-quality graphics, including graphs and heat maps. This functionality helps PCAs and growers easily track the progression of pest pressure and, ultimately, predict it. The highly visual and accessible pest information will help Nutrien Ag Solutions PCAs be more efficient and effective in scouting and delivering pest management recommendations to growers than in the past. FMC plans to refine and validate an advanced pest prediction model for diamondback moths based on current and historical data.

**Bayer, Prospera Technologies to work together on data collection for vegetable growers.** Bayer announced Thursday that it will team up with Prospera Technologies Inc. to create tools that track and analyze greenhouse data for vegetable growers. Prospera will bring data and Artificial Intelligence capabilities to the table, while Bayer will provide expertise in vegetable and crop production. "At Bayer, we believe in the power of collaboration to bring more innovative, digital solutions to life," Chris Moore, the head of digital transformation for Bayer's vegetable seeds business, said in a statement. "Our partnership with Prospera is our first step into solutions beyond the seed for the vegetable greenhouse market. We look forward to innovating with customers to find new ways of solving the problems that growers face every day." According to a release, the project will "enable vegetable greenhouse growers to make more timely and insightful decisions that help optimize both the profitability and sustainability of their crops and operations." "We are very excited to partner with Bayer, the world-leading provider of vegetable seeds and crop protection solutions," Daniel Koppel, the CEO and Co-Founder of Prospera Technologies, said in a release. "We believe this collaboration can unleash tremendous value for vegetable greenhouse growers."

**Western reps urge USDA to extend aid to cotton producers.** Five representatives from southwestern states sent a letter Friday asking Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue to include extra-long staple (also known as Pima) cotton producers in coronavirus relief programs. The letter — signed by Reps. TJ Cox, D-Calif., Jim Costa, D-Calif., Josh Harder, D-Calif, Ann Kirkpatrick, D-Ariz., and Tom O'Halleran, D-Ariz. — argues ELS market prices saw a 7.2% decline between January and April, meaning its producers meet the requirements to be eligible for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program. "Many Extra-Long Staple or Pima cotton producers have faced a disproportionate amount of loss compared to upland cotton producers because of the lack of support and exclusion from the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program," the letter states. "ELS producers are continuing to lose money as the demand for ELS cotton has

largely disappeared, resulting in larger carryover stocks, and ELS loan interest costs have increased.” The USDA says that ELS cotton is one of two types of cotton that is cultivated for commercial use and typically has longer fibers than its counterpart, upland cotton. According to the letter, there are approximately 500 ELS cotton farms in Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas. Last week, USDA announced additional commodities that were newly eligible for CFAP funds, including many fruits and vegetables.

**USTR spares French Champagne from new tariffs.** The U.S. Trade Representative announced Friday its intentions to hit \$1.3 billion worth of French products with a 25% tariff, but omitted French Champagne from the punitive taxes, much to the gratitude of U.S. importers and distributors who are already struggling with tariffs on European wine. The USTR had threatened to hit Champagne along with soap, cosmetics, handbags and other items, but it left out the bubbly in the final determination, which won’t be implemented until January. The tariffs are aimed at punishing France for its plan to hit U.S. internet companies with a digital service tax. That’s a separate issue from retaliatory U.S. tariffs on European wine and other goods over the EU’s subsidization for Airbus. “It’s a small but important victory,” Benjamin Aneff, president of the U.S. Wine Trade Alliance told *Agri-Pulse* about the Champagne decision. “The major lift in front of us is the World Trade Organization Airbus case. We hope the USTR is starting to understand that tariffs on imported wine do significantly more damage to U.S. businesses than their targets overseas.” The considered tax on Champagne could have hurt U.S. importers, distributors and producers much the same way as the U.S. tariffs on European wine are hurting the sector. U.S. wine imports from France have already dropped off by about 50% while the French diverted exports to other countries. And when U.S. distributors hurt, so do domestic producers that rely on them, Aneff said.

**Ag interests ‘disappointed’ by Burger King methane campaign.** Fast food giant Burger King launched a new social media campaign Tuesday to announce their plans to reduce methane emissions from cattle used to produce beef for their Whoppers, a push that left many in production agriculture disappointed. In a combination of a corporate press release and a catchy song, the company says adding lemongrass to a cow’s diet in the last four months of its life could reduce the animal’s methane emissions by up to 33% per day. Burger King has also made the plan open source, enabling other companies to use the strategy in their own production systems. “If the whole industry, from farmers, meat suppliers, and other brands join us, we can increase scale and collectively help reduce methane emissions that affect climate change,” said Fernando Machado, global chief marketing officer for Restaurant Brands International, Burger King’s parent company. Burger King also plans to sell a Reduced Methane Emissions Beef Whopper sandwich “made with beef sourced from cows that emit reduced methane” at select locations in Miami, New York, Austin, Portland and Los Angeles. Many in ag circles criticized the rationale for Burger King’s announcement. The company cited an estimate from the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization that said livestock is “responsible for approximately 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions.” In a tweet, John Newton, the chief economist for the American Farm Bureau Federation, said the number, according to analysis by Farm Bureau and the Environmental Protection Agency, is actually closer to 3%. In a statement, National Cattlemen's Beef Association CEO Colin Woodall criticized the effort as well as the lemongrass study, saying it was “so small and poorly conceived, it was dismissed by many leading (nongovernmental organizations) and beef industry experts.” “America’s cattle producers are disappointed that Burger King has decided to follow a path that is misaligned with those who are already making real-world efforts to reduce beef’s environmental footprint, opting instead to score easy points with consumers by launching a misleading public relations campaign,” he added.

**US, Japan agree to expand organic equivalency agreement.** An organic trade pact between the U.S. and Japan has been expanded to include livestock products, the Department of Agriculture and U.S. Trade Representative announced Tuesday. The change, which goes into effect Thursday, allows livestock goods certified as organic in either country to be sold as such in both markets without additional certifications. According to USTR, plant-based products have been certified as meeting both countries' organic standards since 2014. "Opening new markets for America's organic farmers and ranchers continues to be a priority for USDA," Greg Ibach, USDA's undersecretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, said in a statement. "Japan is already one of the top export markets for U.S. organic products. This agreement opens additional opportunities for everyone involved in the international supply chain for livestock, from farm to table." Gregg Doud, chief ag negotiator at USTR, said the expanded agreement "protects and increases access for American organic farmers, ranchers, and businesses to the third largest U.S. organic export market." USDA says it has established equivalence arrangements with major organic export markets including Canada, the European Union, Japan, South Korea, Switzerland and Taiwan. These arrangements eliminate the need for dual certifications, avoiding double fees, inspections and duplicative paperwork.

**White Castle to pilot autonomous kitchen assistant.** A company known for its sliders will soon have a new piece of technology doing the flipping. Burger chain White Castle plans to partner with Miso Robotics to pilot the first autonomous grilling and frying assistant in its kitchens. According to a release from the company, the pilot "will put autonomous frying to work for enhanced production speeds, improved labor allocation and an added layer of health and safety in the cooking process." Lisa Ingram, White Castle's CEO, said the move has the potential to "transform the industry. With 100 years of quick service success, the time has never been more perfect to envision what the next century of White Castle and the restaurant industry looks like," she said. "Miso Robotics understood where we could improve and stay true to White Castle's brand of taste, innovation and best-in-class dining." The pilot will use Flippy's latest model, Robot-on-a-Rail (ROAR) in kitchens with an eye on testing and future integration. Miso Robotics CEO and co-founder Buck Jordan said artificial intelligence like that round in Flippy ROAR "brings a very real opportunity to continuously enhance the cooking process and optimize taste for restaurants." The project will begin later this fall and will test speeds in production, taste, quality, and operational optimization with back end point-of-sale system integration.

**FAO says 690M people went hungry in 2019.** Almost 690 million people went hungry in 2019, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization. The number of people the "State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020" marked as going hungry increased by 10 million from 2018 and has risen by about 60 million in five years. According to the report, the COVID-19 pandemic could bring over 130 million more people into chronic hunger by the end of 2020. The report states that in 2019, 191 million children under five were stunted or wasted (too short or too thin), while another 38 million of these children were overweight. The report also says that "among adults ... obesity has become a global pandemic in its own right." A healthy diet costs far more than \$1.90 a day, and approximately 3 billion people could not afford to have one, the report stated. Nutrient-rich dairy, fruits, vegetables and protein-rich foods are the most expensive food groups worldwide. About 3 billion people worldwide cannot afford a healthy diet, FAO notes. "The report urges a transformation of food systems to reduce the cost of nutritious foods and increase the affordability of healthy diets," the organization stated in a release. "While the specific solutions will differ from country to country, and even within them, the overall answers lie with interventions along the entire food supply chain, in the food



environment, and in the political economy that shapes trade, public expenditure and investment policies.”

**Rabo: Fertilizer prices 'at or near' 10-year lows.** A semi-annual global fertilizer report published by RaboResearch in June shows that imports of nitrogen, phosphate and potash to North America in the first quarter of 2020 were down 22% from last year, despite an increase in the number of planted acres. Sam Taylor, a U.S.-based farm inputs analyst, said factors "point to continued downward pressure" on the price index for the key inputs in the coming months. “The near-term upward movement in North American phosphate prices does little more than change the trade flows longer term," he said in a statement. "We remain in a structurally low corn/soybean price environment, with high global potash inventory, global economics weakening the ammonia complex and uncertainty around trade.” The increase in corn acres planted worldwide is linked to an increase in demand for nitrogen. However, ammonia prices reached their lowest value since 2016 in May, which was “pressured by sharp reductions in energy commodity prices and lower,” according to the report. The report states that prices for sulfur and ammonia declined about 20% from last year; in the second quarter of 2020, a fall in phosphate prices indicates that there is still an oversupply in the market. Lower demand caused muriate of potash prices to drop 25% worldwide. Potash prices in North America and Europe are expected to decline with the “end of seasonal high-demand periods and on uncertainties regarding the economic recession.”

## Farm Hands West: Marrone Bio taps Helash

Marrone Bio Innovations has tapped **Kevin Helash** to serve as its new chief executive officer, effective Aug. 1. He will also be appointed to serve as a member of the board of directors.



Kevin Helash

Helash brings over 28 years of experience in the agriculture industry to this position, most recently working for Agrinos AS the company’s CEO. Before that, he was a vice president and corporate officer with Agrium, which is now known as Nutrien.

Homegrown Organic Farms has promoted **Amanda Vietti** and has brought on **Stefaun Avakian** as sales account managers. Vietti was previously in the role of marketing specialist, and before that was a sales associate at Flavor Tree Fruit Co. LLC. Avakian most recently was a produce buyer for Imperfect Foods and before that was a sales and logistics coordinator at Trinity Fruit Co.

**Sebastián Sánchez** of Los Angeles has been appointed associate secretary for farmworker liaison and immigrant services at the Labor and Workforce Development Agency. Sánchez has been staff attorney at Bet Tzedek Legal Services since 2015 and was staff attorney at California Rural Legal Assistance from 2014 to 2015.

**Dominique Amilien** is the new CEO at Vilmorin-Mikado, seed company. Amilien brings more than 30 years of experience in the international agricultural sector. He joined Limagrain in 1987 and was in commercial, managerial and executive positions. In 2011, he joined Vilmorin-Mikado as director of global sales and was promoted to deputy CEO in 2018.

After 44 years in the wine industry, **Emilio Miranda**, viticulturist and grower relations representative for Allied Grape Growers, has retired. Miranda started with AGG in 2004 after working for Constellation Brands from 1997 to 2004 and Paul Masson Vineyards from 1977 to 1997. Miranda has served on numerous industry boards and committees, including the California Winegrape Inspection Advisory Board, California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance, California Association of Winegrape Growers, Central California Winegrowers, and more.

**Meredith Rehrman Ritchie** has started working on communications projects for Allied Grape Growers. She is still working in communications for the California Association of Winegrape Growers.

Naturipe has promoted **Aribel Aguirre-Beck** to chief administrative officer and chief financial officer. **Andrew Bruno** has also been promoted to president of Naturipe Avocado Farms.

**Dan Avakian** has joined FreshXperts as a produce industry consultant. Starting his career in 1976 in an open-air market, Avakian worked his way into the industry. He moved to a supermarket chain in 1985 as a produce manager and then started Dan's Fresh Produce, a retail-wholesale market in 2006.

Raley's has promoted **Laura Croff** to senior vice president of people, responsible for all of the company's human resource strategies. She has been with the company for 13 years and was promoted from senior director of human resources to vice president of people in December 2018.

After 33 years of studying the science of growing fruit, **Rachel Elkins**, University of California Cooperative Extension pomology farm advisor for Lake and Mendocino counties, has retired. Elkins has earned two master's degrees, in pomology and plant protection and pest management at the UC-Davis campus, before joining the cooperative extension as a farm advisor intern in 1986. She was hired as a farm advisor in Lake and Mendocino counties in 1987. Elkins will continue ongoing research trials by working part-time, funded by the California Pear Advisory Board and Pear Pest Management Research Fund.

**Emily Zakowski**, California Department of Food and Agriculture environmental scientist, and **Tristan Hudak**, vice president of Ag BioTech Inc. and director of new business development for Ag Plutos, Co. Ltd., based in Sacramento, have been named a 2020-2021 cohort for the Farm Foundation's Young Agri-Food Leaders and Young Farmer Accelerator programs. To see the full listing of individuals, click [here](#).

Secretary of Agriculture **Sonny Perdue** has selected **Parag Chitnis** as acting director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) following the departure of **Scott Angle**. Chitnis brings over 31 years of scientific research and experience. He was named associate director for programs earlier this year and has led the implementation of NIFA's research programs. Angle accepted a position as vice president of agriculture and natural resources at the University of Florida in Gainesville. **Bryan Kaphammer**, associate area director for the Agricultural Research Service's Plains region, will serve as NIFA acting associate director of programs.

Rep. **Xochitl Torres Small**, D-N.M., was appointed to the General Farm Commodities and Risk Management subcommittee and the Biotechnology, Horticulture and Research subcommittee of the House Agriculture Committee. Torres Small has served on the Agriculture Committee since February 2020.

**Cory Wightman** is now the global head of R&D communications for Bayer Crop Science. She previously was the global communications director for environmental science and vegetable seeds. Wightman has been with the company for 11 years.

**Leigh Picchetti** has been hired as the new director of strategy, enablement, brand and culture communications at Nutrien. Picchetti has previously worked for Farm Credit and Qwest Communications.

**Christopher Gerlach** has been hired by the U.S. Apple Association as director of industry analytics. He most recently was director of research at the International Council of Shopping Centers. Gerlach will assume the portfolio of **Mark Seetin**, director of industry information, who is now part time and transitioning to retirement.



Christopher Gerlach

After 34 years, **Maggie Ernst** has announced she will retire from the National Chicken Council. Ernst most recently was senior director of meetings and member services. Before joining the council in 1986, Ernst worked for the governmental affairs office of American Cyanamid as the assistant director for environmental and EPA issues. Before that, she served as the communications manager and publications editor for the American Society for Microbiology.

The International Dairy Foods Association has announced the names of the 28 individuals who have been accepted into the second class of the NextGen Leadership Program. To view the second class of leaders, click [here](#).

The Organic Trade Association tapped two new members to serve on the association's board of directors. New to the Board are **Adam Warthesen**, director of government and industry affairs at CROPP Cooperative/Organic Valley and **Kellee James**, founder and CEO of Mercaris Corporation. The Board also chose **Kim Dietz**, business development director for organics, extracts and sustainability at Firmenich, as its president for the fourth year in a row. To see the other election results, click [here](#).

President **Donald Trump** has sent his nomination to the Senate for **William Perry Pendley** to be director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Pendley currently serves as deputy director for policy and programs at the BLM. Pendley was president of Mountain States Legal Foundation for 30 years and also practiced law in the Washington, D.C., area. He served in the Reagan administration as deputy assistant secretary of the Interior for Energy and Minerals, and was an attorney to Sen. **Clifford Hansen**, R-Wyo. He had also nominated Neil Gregory Kornze to be vice.

The International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA) has added **Becky Rasdall** to its legislative affairs team as the new vice president of trade policy and international affairs. Rasdall previously served nine years for the U.S. government, most recently working at USDA as a senior policy adviser in the Foreign Agricultural Service.

**Courtney Knupp** now serves as the chief of staff to USDA's assistant secretary for administration. Knupp has been at USDA since August 2018, and previously served as the chief of staff for the research, education, and economics office.



Courtney Knupp

**Ryan Clough** is now senior counsel to Rep. **Zoe Lofgren**, D-Calif. He handles the portfolio for commerce, small business, taxation, and telecommunications.

**Sean Ryan** has moved to the office of Rep. **Barbara Lee**, D-Calif., to be the new communications director. Ryan previously served as the press secretary for Rep. **Earl Blumenauer**, D-Ore.

**Lindsay Reilly** joined the office of Rep. Katie Porter, D-Calif., as the new digital director and press secretary. She previously was working on Mike Bloomberg's campaign.

Longtime rice grower **Kenneth Collins** passed away July 2, at the age of 65. Collins founded Biggs Farming in 1985 and spent 38 years in the rice industry. He was named the 1999 California Rice Farmer of the Year and served on many agriculture boards of directors, including Farmers' Rice Cooperative (FRC) where he served as the vice chair for the past 12 years.

**David Sandretti** passed away on June 22 from a heart attack. Sandretti was the director of legislative and public affairs for USDA Rural Development under Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. Before joining USDA, Sandretti worked on Capitol Hill in many communication roles, including as communications director for Sen. **Barbra Boxer**, D-Calif., and communications director for the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works under ranking member Sen. **Jim Jeffords**, I-VT. A memorial service is tentatively scheduled for July 22.

**Best regards,**

**Sara Wyant**  
**Editor**

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