

Disease, wildfires and rats: Water quality regulation raises more issues for growers

Farmers worry that a proposed water regulation requiring vegetative buffers along waterways would create new habitat for invasive pests as well as fuel for wildfires.

In the latest of several workshops the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board has held on Agricultural Order 4.0, Salinas Valley farmer David Costa argued the proposal has not considered the impacts on pest management. Costa has observed a lettuce disease spread rapidly throughout the valley and devastate crops.

“We're being hammered really badly,” said Costa during testimony to the board last week. “I can't overstate how bad this problem has become in certain hotspots.”



Habitat restoration near a field. Photo courtesy of Department of Water Resources.

The pathogen, known as impatiens necrotic spot virus (INSV), has affected 177 acres of Costa's fields, resulting in more than \$600,000 in losses—which is rising as harvest continues. Within one week, the disease consumed an additional 50% of one of his fields. It is spread by western flower thrips, which have been surviving winters in foliage near the farm. Costa said he has worked with CalTrans on mowing grasses along roadways more frequently to reduce the insects' habitat.

Costa's family operation spans 43 ranches along the Central Coast region, with an average size of 13 acres and more than 700 employees in all. At least 12 of the ranches run along various types of waterbodies and would require the buffers. Under the current draft of Ag Order 4.0, which is set to be approved by February, Costa would also have to create vegetative habitat along one of his ranches that is adjacent to a dry creek. He would not be able to use pesticides on the vegetation to manage the thrips.

The board expects the buffers to act as filters for pesticide and nitrogen runoff from fields. A review by a consulting firm, however, found the requirements were unlikely to achieve water quality objectives and “lack a sound scientific basis.”

The amount of vegetation called for under the order would be significantly more than the two or three inches of grass where the insects currently thrive.



INSV in lettuce

“We're on a pretty significant collision course between this disease proliferation and the riparian habitat proposal,” said Costa. “If I was a small grower along a riparian area, and I was losing all my crops like this, I'd be out of business.”

Costa argued the regulation would lead to a number of unintended consequences, such as having to apply much more pesticide to fields to control the insects.

The regional water board members were receptive to Costa's concerns and could revise the order later to address the problem. Yet they struggled to determine what that compromise solution could look like.

“Perhaps if the right species of vegetation was planted, that the thrips don't care for, maybe that would help to reduce or eliminate the problem,” suggested board member Jeffrey Young, adding that maybe monocropping was an issue.

Costa replied that the insects are simply looking for cover and even organic crops with beneficial flowers in and around the field have had to be destroyed due to the disease. Another board member pressed for other biological controls, like predatory insects. Costa did not rule those out but said sucking insects like thrips are quick to damage crops and beneficial insects would only “clean them up after the damage is done.” One thrip can infect between 150 and 300 plants in its lifetime.

Outside of clearing vegetation, Costa's pest control advisor was able to recommend just two products for controlling the thrips and only one for his organic fields. This makes rotating the chemistries difficult for integrated pest management (IPM) strategies. Other board members suggested pest management practices should not be the board's concern for implementing the order.

Board Chair Jean-Pierre Wolff placed his hope on new strides in research on pheromones for mating disruption and other IPM strategies yet to be discovered.

“Down the road, I’m sure there can be some solutions,” he said.

Because those solutions have not yet been found and crops have been lost, Costa has had to disk lettuce into the soil rather than harvest it. This practice would also conflict with Ag Order 4.0’s cap on nitrogen applications, which is 50 pounds per acre per year. Costa worried it would be impossible to meet this goal when he cannot remove from the field the crops that are absorbing that nitrogen.

He noted that climate change has enabled pests like the western flower thrip to overwinter in the valley. More invasive species have migrated into the valley for this reason as well. Vegetative buffers would also allow for rodents to live near fields, creating food safety issues, he added. In his written comments, Costa related concerns that the vegetation would create habitat for mosquitos carrying infectious disease, presenting new challenges for county health departments.



Central Coast Water Board Chair Jean-Pierre Wolff

“I don’t understand how habitat can be maintained without turning into a jungle,” he said.

The board has received a number of lengthy comments from farmers and grower groups concerned about the unintended consequences of the vegetative habitat.

“We did see fires along the Salinas River during the River Fire and others in the last couple of weeks. That, as you know, leads to significant public safety concerns,” said Abby Taylor-Silva, vice president of policy at the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, during a board workshop earlier in September. “A mandate requiring more vegetation as part of the river would have likely created more challenges related to the fire.”

Norm Groot, director of the Monterey County Farm Bureau, explained that the dry native vegetation would serve as “prime” fuel and act as pathways for wildfires in areas previously protected as irrigated cropland.

Stakeholders have also raised logistical concerns for establishing the vegetation. Groot said it would require growers to transplant native plants from nurseries, irrigate the new plants, manage for weeds and “groom” the vegetation to ensure one plant species does not dominate—all costly and difficult practices even in already developed areas.

In other workshops, agricultural stakeholders challenged the board’s legal authority for the riparian requirements. Attorneys claimed the board was forcing farmers to take land out of production for what would essentially be involuntary conservation easements, violating state laws. Groot argued the added vegetation would come at a steep cost to the grower by trimming back acreage to accommodate the buffers, ultimately affecting land and rental values as well.

“It is not as simple as clearing a land area and throwing out some seeds and hoping for the best,” he said.

Farm groups see Prop 15 fight as ‘winnable’

The latest polling shows the fight over Proposition 15 on the November ballot to be a tight race, offering hope for the coalition of farm groups that has been among the earliest opponents of the ballot measure on property taxes.

“This is winnable,” said California Citrus Mutual President and CEO Casey Creamer, in a recent townhall event on Prop. 15. “With a good campaign strategy, good contributions from all businesses in California, we can be successful in defeating this campaign.”

A September poll by the Public Policy Institute of California found that a slim majority of voters, 51%, would vote in favor of the measure, reflecting a drop from 56% a month earlier.

“We just have to drag them down a little bit more,” said Josh Walters, a consultant for the Alliance of California Farmers and Ranchers, a coalition leading the ag opposition. “Our campaign hasn’t even had a chance to dig in.”

The poll also found that 61% of voters agreed that Prop. 13, the 1978 initiative Prop. 15 seeks to adjust, has mostly been a good thing for California. Prop. 15 aims to replace parts of Prop. 13 aimed at business property, while preserving the exemption for residential property in what’s known as a split-roll approach.

Creamer recognized the general fatigue in California over the many ballot initiatives over the years—including the dozen measures on the ballot this year—and the frustration farmers still feel over the defeat of the Prop. 3 water bond in 2018.



Josh Walters, Alliance of California Farmers and Ranchers

“We understand that,” said Creamer. “We’re doing this differently than what we’ve done in the past.”

He assured the trade group’s members that this has been a coordinated effort in agriculture and across other industries from the beginning.

The measure would generate an estimated \$11.5 billion in tax revenue by eliminating the 1% cap on property taxes for businesses—what opponents call the largest tax hike in state history and at a time when many businesses are already struggling due to the pandemic. The initiative’s backers, which include teacher and public service unions, argue the money generated would throw a much-needed lifeline to public schools.

While the measure does exempt farmland, ag groups have criticized it for including virtually everything else on a farm.

“If those properties have a commercial use, then this measure likely would shift those properties to a market value taxation,” Brian Mueller, a tax specialist with the Legislative Analyst’s Office, explained to state lawmakers in June.

Robert Spiegel, a policy advocate for the California Farm Bureau, explained that this could include barns, vineyards, wineries, fences, irrigation systems, milking parlors and “even our mature fruit and nut trees.”

“Ultimately, those higher costs to the food system would lead to higher food prices,” said Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson. “Make no mistake. A tax on farms is a tax on everyone.”

Johansson shared his disappointment with Gov. Gavin Newsom’s endorsement of the measure earlier in September.

“Unfortunately, Gov. Newsom has sided with public employee unions over the hardworking folks in California’s rural and agricultural communities,” he said.



Rachel Michelin, president of the California Retailers Association

The opponents of Prop. 15 argue that it is not a tax on large companies like Disney and Chevron, as it is portrayed. The definition of small businesses is “extremely narrow” and the measure scoops up a number of businesses perceived as being above the \$3 million threshold, according to Rachel Michelin, president of the California Retailers Association, who has been leading efforts for the opposition campaign.

“Prop. 15 taxes every step of agriculture, from farm to fork,” said Michelin at an event last week for the Public Policy Institute of California. “It hikes property taxes on critical industries that also support our farm industry.”

Michelin added that it would affect restaurants, farmers markets and grocery stores, and the added costs would push more farmers to leave the business.

David Goldberg, vice president of the California Teachers Association, countered that the Prop. 15

proponents have gained the support of the more liberal Community Alliance with Family Farmers. He said the opponents were using the other farm groups to support the goals of big businesses “who don’t want to pay their fair share.”

“This initiative exempts farmland,” asserted Goldberg. **“County assessors know that all of agriculture—whether it’s land, whether it’s fixtures, whether it’s the buildings where they do the packing—it’s all 100% exempt.”**

Michelin argued that if Prop. 15 passes, the Legislature and governor would decide how to disperse the revenues, with a large portion needed to cover the added costs for assessors and state agencies to implement the new law. The loopholes Prop. 15 seeks to fix were created by the Legislature, she said, and should be debated at the Capitol rather than at the ballot box.

“We don’t need an initiative to do that—a constitutional amendment that raises taxes on every Californian,” she said, adding a word of caution. “You can’t undo an initiative without going back to the ballot.”



David Goldberg, vice president of the California Teachers Association

Supreme Court pick Barrett could create solid conservative majority

Amy Coney Barrett’s nomination to fill the seat left vacant by the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is being welcomed by ag industry groups that see an opportunity to cement a conservative majority for decades to come.

Environmental groups, on the other hand, say Barrett’s nomination could put environmental laws in jeopardy and make it more difficult for groups and individuals to sue the government to enforce those laws.

If the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals judge ascends to the high court, as appears almost certain given the unity of Senate Republicans, she would give the conservative bloc a two-vote edge. **“You’d have three liberal justices and a really solid majority of six conservative justices,”** SCOTUSblog editor Amy Howe said in an interview on the publication’s website.



Amy Coney Barrett speaks at the White House as President Donald Trump looks on.

National Cattlemen's Beef Association Environmental Counsel Scott Yager took note of that advantage in a statement released to *Agri-Pulse*.

"This will create a greater degree of certainty regarding the legal outcome of President Trump's regulatory reforms," he said, including the new Navigable Waters Protection Rule, broad revisions to the National Environmental Policy Act, changes to the Endangered Species Act, and the emissions reporting exclusion for farms under the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act.

"Some legal scholars are predicting the new court could issue a decision finding the Environmental Protection Agency does not have the power to regulate greenhouse gases, overruling, or narrowing, the 2007 decision in *Massachusetts v. EPA*," he said, noting that the only remaining justice in the majority from that case is Justice Stephen Breyer, "making the issue ripe for re-examination by the court."

Finally, Yager said "it's possible we will see a strengthening of property rights by this court and invoked, for example, to strike down applications of some laws, like the Endangered Species Act, where the laws impinge on private property rights."

Leonard Leo, co-chair of The Federalist Society, which believes in "limited government," told *USA Today* that "President Trump has again fulfilled his promise to appoint justices who are not only exceptionally qualified but willing to bravely stand up for the Constitution as it's written and not bend to political pressures or personal preferences."

Thomas Pyle, president of the American Energy Alliance, said that **"much like the beloved Justice Antonin Scalia, Judge Barrett has shown that she interprets the laws based as they are and applies the Constitution as it was intended — impartially and consistently."**

Barrett's environmental record is decidedly not robust, but decisions on legal standing and a single decision in a wetlands case are being used to raise questions about her commitment to environmental protection.

"She has written some stingy standing decisions, and since she's a Scalia acolyte I think we know where she'll land on those issues as well as a similar narrow view of agency authority under statutes where the text doesn't support it," says Vermont Law School Professor Pat Parenteau.

Eric Glitzenstein, director of litigation at the Center for Biological Diversity, said of Barrett, **"If she's a protégé of Justice [Antonin] Scalia, as she says, she will be devastating for the environment."** Barrett has said of Scalia, for whom she clerked, "His judicial philosophy is mine, too."



Eric Glitzenstein, Center for Biological Diversity

"One of Scalia's missions on the court was to make it as difficult as possible for environmental plaintiffs even to get through the courthouse doors," Glitzenstein said, citing decisions such as *National Wildlife Federation v. Lujan* and *Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife*, which "erected standing barriers for environmental plaintiffs. A Justice Scalia acolyte replacing Ginsburg will push the court much

more in the direction of blocking citizen suits and impeding other efforts to enforce the environmental laws."

In a case decided Aug. 31, Barrett authored an opinion finding that opponents of plans for the Obama Presidential Center in Chicago could not demonstrate standing to pursue their lawsuit, in part because they alleged damage to a park.

"Even if the Obama Presidential Center will damage Jackson Park, '[t]he relevant showing for purposes of Article III standing ... is not injury to the environment but injury to the plaintiff,'" Barrett wrote, notably quoting a 7-2 Supreme Court decision written by Ginsburg that Glitzenstein said "pushed back" against Scalia's earlier standing decisions.

"On substance, she can be expected to side with corporate interests consistently and reliably regardless of any professed adherence to statutory text," he added. "This will very likely further undermine enforcement of the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and Clean Air Act, especially when it comes to any effort to regulate greenhouse gases. There is also a grave concern that her purported 'originalist' approach to constitutional interpretation in conjunction with her allegiance to corporate interests will result in the creation or resurrection of new property 'rights' that will be used to invalidate environmental statutes and regulations."

Earthjustice, an environmental law organization with more than 150 lawyers, said Barrett's environmental record is sparse. The group said it's **"concerned because Judge Barrett's record is too scant for us to evaluate."** But **"what little we *can* see raise serious concerns."**

The group pointed to the possibility that Barrett will help revive the "nondelegation doctrine," described as **"the long-dormant principle that Congress cannot transfer its power to legislate to another branch of government"** in a SCOTUSblog article about a Supreme Court decision last year that found four justices "willing to reconsider the nondelegation doctrine from the ground up."

"Congress must be allowed to tell agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to flesh out the details of our environmental laws," Earthjustice said. "In recent years, right wing judges have sought to overturn these precedents on behalf of powerful corporate interests. Adding justices who want to revive the nondelegation doctrine will undermine EPA's ability to protect communities — especially communities of color — from pollution and climate change."

Barrett also is likely to bring more skepticism to *Chevron deference*, or the *Chevron* doctrine, named for a 1984 Supreme Court decision that said courts must defer to the expertise of administrative agencies when their interpretation of an ambiguous law is reasonable.

The Supreme Court has been chipping away at the doctrine, long a target of industry, in recent years, and Barrett's move onto the court could shorten its life expectancy.

A 2018 analysis of her scholarship on the matter concedes there is "little direct evidence of what she thinks about *Chevron*."

But author Evan Bernick, executive director of the Georgetown Center for the Constitution and a visiting professor of Law at Georgetown, continued, "That said, her scholarship strongly suggests that she will think about not only *Chevron* but any administrative law questions which involve determining the meaning of legal texts, reconsidering controversial precedents, and

shaping doctrine in a way that enables the judiciary to perform its constitutional function without exceeding the limits of its institutional competence, in a careful, cogent, and humble manner.”

Nevertheless, in an [article](#) published Monday, Bernick told The Washington Post his “expectation remains that she will join in Justice Gorsuch's successful-thus-far project” in whittling away at *Chevron*.

In a 2018 wetlands case, Barrett joined in a 3-0 [decision](#) rejecting an Army Corps of Engineers’ finding of Clean Water Act jurisdiction over wetlands that were holding up a development project. The court found fault with the Corps’ conclusion that a “significant nexus” existed between the wetlands on the site, alone or in combination with other area wetlands, and the Little Calumet River, 11 miles away.

The Corps had argued that the court should defer to its decision, but courts “extend no deference to agency decisions that lack record support or explanation,” the 7th Circuit said.

“Barrett’s record demonstrates her willingness to interpret environmental laws like the Clean Water Act narrowly in favor of industry interests,” Earthjustice said of the decision.

Biden’s CSP expansion could face Hill resistance, staffing questions

The centerpiece of Joe Biden’s plan to help farmers address climate change is a “dramatic” expansion of the Conservation Stewardship Program, but he’ll quickly find skeptics on Capitol Hill and among environmental groups if he gets elected and tries to carry out the proposal.

Even supporters of the program say Biden also would face a major challenge in ramping up CSP, which is designed to reward producers for improved environmental practices on working lands: a shortage of USDA staff and private consultants to provide the advice and help farmers would need to apply for CSP and other forms of USDA conservation assistance.

One of the key lawmakers Biden would have to win over if he gets reelected this fall is the chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Collin Peterson, D-Minn.

“I’m not sure that by itself is going to be a solution. It’s going to be a combination of things that I think we have to focus on,” Peterson said in a recent interview with *Agri-Pulse*.

Peterson, for one, would also push for an expansion of the Conservation Reserve Program, which unlike CSP removes land from production.



House Ag Committee Chair Collin Peterson

“Putting all of our eggs in one basket is a mistake. If the CSP is going to be expanded it’s going to take some reforms and it’s also going to take a lot more people that are going to be on the ground in order to implement this,” Peterson said.

Biden hasn't been alone in eyeing CSP as a key way to provide new financial support to farmers while paying them to undertake practices that remove carbon from the atmosphere and protect water quality at the same time.

While campaigning for the Democratic Party's presidential bid in 2019, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren proposed to increase CSP spending to \$15 billion a year from its current level of \$1 billion, and New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker introduced a bill that would expand CSP to \$7 billion a year.

Biden hasn't specified a number, but his rural plan calls for making agriculture carbon-neutral while using CSP to help farmers "earn income as we meet this milestone."

To do that, a Biden administration would "dramatically expand and fortify the pioneering Conservation Stewardship Program, created by former Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Tom Harkin, to support farm income through payments based on farmers' practices to protect the environment, including carbon sequestration," the plan says.

To help fund the expansion, Biden would allow corporations, individuals, and foundations to offset greenhouse gas emissions by contributing to CSP to subsidize the payments to producers.

"This will not only help combat climate change ... but also create additional revenue sources for farmers at a time when many are struggling to make ends meet. And, this approach will create a whole series of new businesses that survey, measure, certify and quantify conservation results," the plan says.

The plan doesn't directly address the staffing and technical assistance requirements, a concern raised not only by Peterson but also by outside groups that follow CSP and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, which provides cost-share assistance to help with the upfront costs of implementing practices and buying equipment. Farmers can obtain CSP contracts based on the conservation practices they undertake and receive annual payments for five years.

"You are not going to be able to double the size of CSP or EQIP without increasing the staff at the local level," said Coleman Garrison, director of government affairs for the National Association of Conservation Districts.

"You have to realize the way these programs get out the door is by having people at the local level to get them out the door," he said.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service, which administers both programs, had a budget for conservation technical assistance of \$720 million for fiscal 2020 and a staff of 3,066, the same amounts as in FY19 and well below the FY18 levels of \$769 million and 3,507 employees. The 2021 budget year begins Thursday, but Congress has yet to pass a funding bill for USDA or any other departments.

Ferd Hoefner, a senior policy adviser for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, a longtime supporter of CSP, says that the Biden plan, by proposing to enlist nongovernmental funding sources, merges two schools of thought about the best ways to reduce agriculture's carbon footprint: Use conservation payments to do it directly, or rely on corporations to provide the financial incentives.

“It was very clever of them to say, ‘Hey, we can marry these and have companies that are interested in this buy into the public program.’ ... That’s a novel way of increasing public funding,” Hoefner said.

By routing corporate funding through CSP, the Biden approach would provide some public accountability for the way the money is spent.

Craig Cox, senior vice president of agriculture and natural resources for the Environmental Working Group, says he would like to see a heavy emphasis within CSP on promoting soil health and regenerative farming practices. But he says there needs to be a dedicated long-term source of funding for technical assistance at NRCS to ensure that farmers get the advice they need.

CSP still has its detractors who think federal conservation dollars are better focused on EQIP to pay for upfront costs. Those detractors include Texas Rep. Mike Conaway, who as House Agriculture Committee chairman tried to eliminate CSP through the 2018 farm bill. The House version of the bill would have repealed CSP and replaced it with a stewardship contract under EQIP. But the Senate insisted on maintaining funding for the program through the end of the farm bill in 2023; CSP is slated to be cut sharply after that.



Ferd Hoefner, NSAC

The Trump administration has proposed to eliminate CSP in its annual budgets. "The program has struggled to demonstrate outcomes and may provide payments that overcompensate for enhancement," USDA said in explanatory material provided to Congress with the FY21 budget proposal.

Conaway, who is retiring from Congress, still thinks conservation spending should be concentrated on EQIP and the Conservation Reserve Program. “CSP is outdated and needs to go away,” he told *Agri-Pulse*.

USDA: Record-high supplies of nuts, spike in orange juice sales

The latest data from USDA’s Economic Research Service’s “Fruit and Tree Nut Outlook” provides a snapshot of production and prices, with tree nuts producing record-high supplies in 2020/21 and a spike in orange juice sales as COVID-19 hit the U.S. Here are some highlights:

The 2020/21 season for almonds. According to the 2020 California Almond Objective Measurement Report released by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) on July 7, another record-setting 3-billion-pound crop (shelled basis) is forecast for the 2020/21 season, up 18% from 2019/20. Bearing acreage rose to 1.26 million acres in 2020. California experienced good growing conditions with dry, hot weather in May and June in the final stages of production. The forecast larger crop, and high stocks carried over from last season, are expected to increase supplies in the domestic market and likely will put downward pressure on 2020/21 grower prices.

Walnut production in 2020/21: In the 2019/20 (September to August) season, lower production and higher imports led to increased domestic consumption and reduced ending stocks. Tariffs in China, COVID-19 port issues, and lower U.S. supplies, reduced U.S. walnut exports from the previous season. The 2020 California Walnut Objective Measurement Report, released by NASS on August 28, forecast walnut production for the 2020/21 season at a record 1.56 billion pounds (or 780,000 tons), in-shell basis, up 19% from last year. This forecast is based on 380,000 bearing acres, up 4 %, and average nut per tree of 1,197, up 22 % from last year.

Hazelnut production soars in 2020/21: Oregon’s 2020 hazelnut crop is forecast to be 61% larger than the 2019 crop which was an “off-year” cycle in the alternate bearing tendency of hazelnut trees. A smaller crop, low carryover stocks in 2019/20 (July-June) and smaller imports in 2019/20 put upward pressure on grower prices this season. The large 2020/21 season crop could put downward pressure on grower prices.

Low U.S. pistachio exports in 2019/20: In the 2019/20 season (September-August) U.S. production dropped 27% due to lower yields in an off-year. U.S. exports dropped 33% with large decreases to key markets Hong Kong, India, and Turkey through July, compared to a year ago. High tariffs affected U.S. exports prior to COVID-19 port closures. Iran and the United States are the top suppliers of pistachios. Iran’s exports are expected to increase while U.S. supplies are down. High beginning stocks and low exports likely put downward pressure on grower prices.

Lower U.S. pecan consumption in 2019/20: Domestic pecan production was up 11% in 2019/20 (October-September) and in-shell pecans in storage also went up. Imports were down from top U.S. supplier Mexico after a record setting year in 2018/19. High year-to-date exports to China, Thailand, and South Korea likely decreased U.S consumption and drove up 2019/20 grower prices from the previous season. The rise in prices in 2019/20 drove the crop value to \$471 million, up 12%

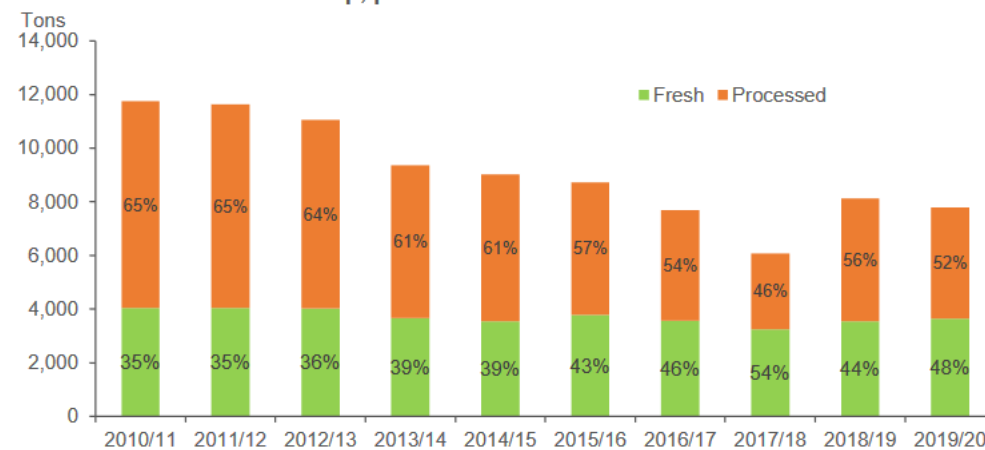
from the previous season. NASS will release the initial U.S. pecan production forecast for the 2020/21 season in its October 2020 Crop Production report.

Total U.S. Citrus Production is Down but Fresh Production is Up in 2019/20.

NASS final estimates

for the 2019/20 citrus season show U.S. citrus production reached 7.8 million tons, down 4% from 2018/19. Total production is below levels forecast at the outset of the season, mostly due to a lower than anticipated orange crop in Florida. As most Florida oranges are for processing into juice, this decrease resulted in lower overall citrus production for the processing market. A larger share of total production went to the fresh market, therefore fresh market citrus is up this season.

U.S. citrus for fresh market up, processed market down



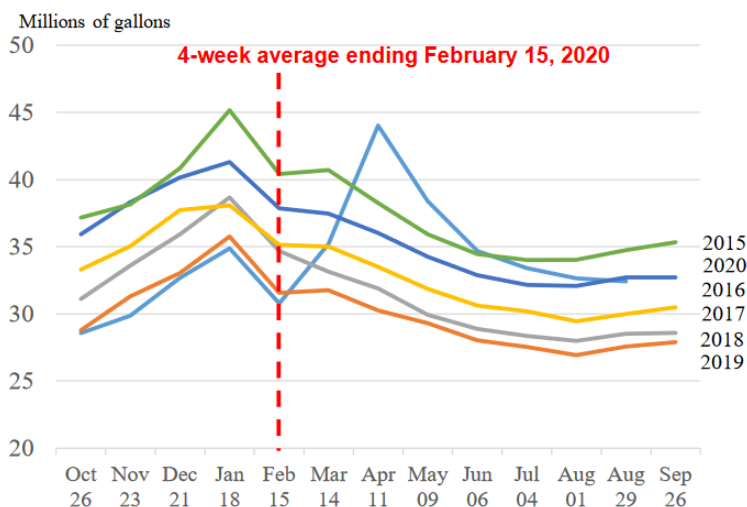
Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, *Citrus Fruits Summary*, various issues.

Total citrus volume in 2019/20 was slightly higher than the 2016/17 volume. Total citrus production in Florida decreased to 3.3 million tons in 2019/20, down 5% from the previous season. Texas growers also experienced declines in production reaching a 5-year low of 232,950 tons (down 3 % from last year). In California, increases in production of oranges and lemons for the fresh market were offset by decreases in grapefruit and tangerine production, resulting in production levels 2% below last season (4.19 million tons). Arizona experienced a significant increase in lemon production this year (33%).

U.S. citrus fresh-market crop larger in 2019/20: U.S. citrus production for the fresh market was estimated at 3.7 million tons in 2019/20, up 5% from the previous season, with larger fresh-market crops of oranges (up 10%), grapefruit (up 5%), and lemons (up 3%). Representing just under half of all U.S. citrus production, the fresh-market orange crop increased from the previous season to 1.88 million tons, thanks to larger fresh market crops in California and Florida. Overall, the average equivalent-on-tree price for a box of fresh oranges increased from \$15.09 in 2018/19 to \$17.08 in 2019/20, mostly due to higher prices in the months of May, June, and July. These higher prices may suggest an increase in demand for fresh oranges this season, as per capita availability is up 9% from 2018/19. Whether this increase in prices over last year correspond to a temporary spike in demand or a new trend in the market, remains to be seen. U.S. imports of fresh oranges in 2019/20 (November through July) were down 1% from the same period last year, while fresh orange exports increased 8% to date. South Korea remained the top market for U.S. fresh oranges, followed by Canada and Hong Kong.

Orange juice sales spiked. Retail sales of orange juice in the United States reached the highest level in five years as a result of increased purchases during the months of February through May 2020 (fig. 6). This increase in retail sales is attributed to consumer health concerns heightened by COVID-19, and the common perception that orange juice has immune-enhancing properties. Orange juice sales peaked at 44.02 million gallons during the four-week period ending on April 11th and have since remained above 2017-2019 levels. As of May 2020, this spike in retail sales had no obvious effect on equivalent on-tree-prices, which were down by 7% from the same period last season (November through May).

Orange juice sales reach highest level in 5 years



Source: Florida Department of Citrus, Orange Juice Sales, Economic and Market Research Report, various Issues 2015-20.

U.S. lemon crop in 2019/20 largest in decades: U.S. growers produced 1.1 million tons of lemons in 2019/20 the largest lemon crop in 39 years. More than two-thirds of lemons (760,000 tons) went to the fresh market, a 3 percent increase in quantity over 2018/19. Higher yields in both California and Arizona were likely due to favorable weather. Perhaps in response to the larger crop, fresh lemon imports to the U.S. this season (August through July 2019/20) were down by 22.4 million pounds (7 percent) from last season. Mexico, Chile, and Argentina remain the main suppliers of lemons to the U.S. market, and together they supply 96% of lemon imports into the United States. Additionally, U.S. fresh lemon exports this season lagged 3% behind 2018/19, continuing what is now a five-year trend in declining lemon exports. Lower export

volumes alongside higher domestic production increased the total supply of fresh market lemons in the United States, with per capita consumption increasing by 2% in 2019/20. A greater supply of fresh lemons in the U.S. this season resulted in lower grower prices, as the average equivalent-on-tree price per box fell from \$24.91 in 2018/19 to \$20.55 (17%) in 2019/20.

News Briefs:

Study: Certified organic acres to increase next year. A new study released by Mercaris, an organic commodities trading platform, suggests more land and farming operations are converting to organic production. The [Mercaris Commodity Outlook](#) is projecting U.S. harvested organic field crop area will surpass 3.4 million acres, or 19,888 operations, next year, which would be up 4% year over year, according to their data. Their 2020/2021 yield outlook for U.S. organic crops is expected to also improve despite poor planting and harvest conditions in 2019/2020. “2020 appears to be a clear reflection of this, as many crops are projected to see harvested acres reach record levels this year,” said Ryan Koory, Director of Economics for Mercaris. The group also foresees an increase in organic livestock production, especially in the turkey sector. “We estimate the daily rate of organic turkey slaughter jumped 147% over the past year, from 5,600 head per day over August 2019, to 13,800 head per day over August 2020,” Koory said. He noted maintaining August's slaughter rate is proof of significantly expanding total organic turkey slaughter into 2020/21. Mercaris expects U.S. consumer markets for organic protein will expand next year, but it will depend on the strength of the U.S. economy and consumer demand moving forward. The firm also found organic corn used for livestock feed is projected to increase 6% year over year due to increased feed demand for organic poultry. Mercaris expects organic soybean crush to rise 13% in 2020/21 as livestock feed demand expands and organic soybean meal imports drop.

Pendley removal as acting director leaves BLM decisions vulnerable. Bureau of Land Management decisions made since July 29, 2019, are now vulnerable following a federal judge's decision that acting BLM director William Perry Pendley was not serving in his position legally. “Pendley has served and continues to serve unlawfully as the Acting BLM Director,” Chief U.S. District Judge Brian Morris of Montana said in his Sept. 25 [ruling](#), putting Pendley's illegal tenure at 424 days. “His ascent to Acting BLM Director did not follow any of the permissible paths set forth by the U.S. Constitution or the [Federal Vacancies Reform Act]. Pendley has not been nominated by the President and has not been confirmed by the Senate to serve as BLM Director.” The Interior Department said the decision “fundamentally misinterprets the law and unreasonably attempts to upend decades of practice spanning multiple presidential administrations from both parties.” DOI said it would appeal. Morris directed the parties to file briefs by Oct. 5 on which decisions by Pendley, including Resource Management Plans in Montana and elsewhere, should be set aside. In the [complaint](#) filed by Montana Gov. Steve Bullock, the state said BLM “has developed a pattern and practice in the last three years of actions and omissions that threaten sagebrush habitat that was previously identified by [BLM] as a conservation priority,” threatening the “long-term viability of the sage grouse” and creating “a significant risk that the sage grouse will be listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act.”

NRCS rolls out \$25M in conservation grants. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service announced Tuesday that it will distribute \$25 million in grants created in the 2018 farm bill to 14 projects across the country. The grants are awarded through the On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials program, which NRCS says is a component of the Conservation Innovation

Grants program. The grant awardees will “work with NRCS and farmers and ranchers to implement innovative practices and systems on their lands that have not yet been widely adopted by producers,” an NRCS [release](#) noted. “On-Farm Trials help producers improve the health of their operations while at the same time helping NRCS build data to show the benefit of innovative conservation systems and practices applied on the land,” said NRCS Acting Chief Kevin Norton. Among the 14 projects receiving funding are six Soil Health Demonstration Trials, which NRCS says “focus on the adoption and evaluation of soil health management systems and practices.” Many of the awardees include land grant colleges including North Carolina State University, which will use funding to add new row crop farms “to an existing network of producers in an online co-learning environment.” Several nongovernmental organizations also received funding for projects like the American Farmland Trust effort to “stimulate the adoption of various soil health practices by involving farms in a coast-to-coast Soil Health Demonstration project demonstrating regionally appropriate soil health strategies across three regions covering seven states and six cropping systems.”

Buy a license plate and support ag education. The California Department of Food and Agriculture is accepting proposals for the 2020 California Agriculture Special Interest License Plate (CalAgPlate) grant program. The CalAgPlate program has funded more than \$1.4 million in youth educational activities since the program's inception. Each year, this program provides an estimated \$250,000 in grant funding to promote agricultural education and leadership activities for students at the K-12, post-secondary, and adult education levels. Proceeds generated through the sales of specialized, agriculture-themed license plates through the California Department of Motor Vehicles have made this opportunity available. Funding is available on a competitive basis for eligible agricultural education programs as well as government agencies and non-profit organizations that administer agricultural education programs. Proposals must be submitted electronically by Thursday, October 22, 2020, at 5 pm PST. Prospective applicants are encouraged to visit the program website, <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/egov/calagplate/> for full details or contact CDFA 's Office of Grants Administration at (916) 657-3231 grants@cdfa.ca.gov for additional information.

Farm Hands West: Castro named chancellor of the California State University system

Joseph Castro was named the new chancellor of the California State University system. When he takes the helm in January, Castro will be the first-ever California native and Mexican American to lead the 23-campus university. Castro, currently serving as president of Fresno State, will replace Chancellor **Timothy White**, following his retirement. White has held the post since 2012. Castro has led Fresno State since 2013 and previously held various leadership positions in the University of California system, including as vice chancellor of student academic affairs and professor of family and community medicine at the University of California, San Francisco.



Joseph Castro is currently president of Fresno State

The California Agriculture Leadership Foundation (CALF) has hired **Dwight Ferguson** as its new CEO and **Abby Taylor-Silva** as the executive vice president. The announcement comes after the retirement of **Barry Bedwell**, who has been with the organization for four years. Ferguson joins CALF from Naturipe Farms where he worked for 10 years, most recently as



Dwight Ferguson

president and CEO. Taylor-Silva most recently was vice president of policy and communications for the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California. Before that, she was executive director of Ag Against Hunger and a communications specialist for the California Strawberry Commission.

Growers Express has promoted **Kirk Wagner** to chief operating officer. Wagner joined the staff of Growers Express in 2011 as general counsel. Before joining Growers Express, Wagner was an attorney at law firms in Las Vegas, Houston and Monterey.

The Southeast Produce Council has announced its 2020-21 officers. **Harold Paivarinta** of Red Sun Farms was elected to chairman of the board of directors, **Raina Nelson** of Renaissance Food Group as vice chairman, **Tim Graas** of Associated Wholesale Grocers as secretary and **Mike Roberts** of Harp's Food Stores as treasurer. **Mark Shuman** of Shuman Farms and **Jeff Tant** of Performance Food Group are also two new members joining the board.

Elizabeth Arevalo is now a senior policy adviser to Rep. **Ted Lieu**, D-Calif. She previously was a legislative assistant. She handles the portfolio for commerce, energy, environmental protection, transportation and public works.

Callie McAdams is now a senior economist in the Office of the Chief Economist at USDA. She comes to USDA from Capitol Hill, where she served the last five years as the deputy chief economist for the House Ag Committee. Before that she worked for Informa Economics as a senior consultant conducting market and policy research and analysis in the fields of agriculture, transportation, and renewable energy.

USDA's Risk Management Agency has added four new members to the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) board of directors. **Nicole Berg**, **Kenneth Selzer**, **Scott Silveus** and **Pat Swanson** will serve four-year terms starting in November 2020. Berg holds and has held numerous leadership positions. She currently serves as vice president of the National Association of Wheat Growers and as a board member of the Community First Bank. Selzer is an insurance executive and former Kansas Insurance Commissioner who currently serves as an executive managing director at a worldwide reinsurance broker. For 30 years, Silveus has been a crop insurance agent with Silveus Insurance Group in Indiana. Swanson farms with her husband Don and his family in Iowa as a partner of Swanson Farm Partnership, a soybean, corn and cow-calf farming operation.

The Department of Agriculture has announced the appointment of five new members to the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). Joining the board is **Amy Bruch**, a sixth-generation farmer and president of Cyclone Farms, an organic family farm in Nebraska. Bruch brings 20 years of experience in agriculture, previously interning at USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service, working as a systems engineer at General Mills, and consulting

internationally. She holds a BS in Agriculture and Biosystems Engineering from Iowa State University. **Logan Petrey**, a fourth-generation farmer from South Georgia, works as the southeast organic ranch manager of 2,000 acres for Grimmway Farms locations in Georgia and Florida. Before joining Grimmway, she worked as an agronomist and organic farm manager with Generation Farms; and as a field technician for Robinson Fresh, where she worked with farms along the East Coast and in the Midwest. **Dr. Carolyn Dimitri** is an applied economist and is currently a member of the faculty at New York University. Dimitri has worked for more than a decade at the Economic Research Service, where she authored numerous reports on many aspects of the organic sector. Dimitri currently serves as an executive board member for the Organic Farming Research Foundation, as a scientific adviser to the Organic Center. Bringing more than 40 years of experience as an educator, researcher, and farmer, **Brian Caldwell** served as a founding member of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York. Caldwell has operated an organic farm in West Danby, N.Y., since 1978. He has worked for Cornell University, first as the vegetable and fruit specialist for Cornell Cooperative Extension, and then as a field manager and researcher for the Cornell Organic Cropping Systems project. Joining the board is also **Kyla Smith**, the certification director for Pennsylvania Certified Organic, a USDA-accredited certifying agent. Smith has worked for PCO for 17 years in various roles such as: organic inspector, materials specialist, and reviewer. She has also held leadership positions for six years as the chair and vice chair of the Accredited Certifiers Association board of directors.

The Soil Health Institute has established a Scientific Advisory Committee to help guide SHI's scientific research on soil health and provide recommendations to SHI on its mission to enhance the vitality and productivity of soils. **Cristine Morgan**, SHI's chief scientific officer, will serve as the committee chair. The members of the board are as follows: **Francisco Arriaga, Andrea Basche, Julie Howe, Stephen Machado, Kate Scow, and Wes Wood.**

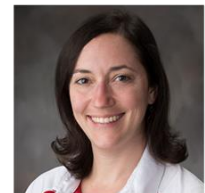
Alissa Smith has been tapped to lead the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) as the new executive director. Smith was previously working in the associate executive director role. She succeeds **Jay Jackman**, who has served in the executive director role since 1996. A Kentucky native, Smith has been on staff with NAAE since 2006. Before that, she taught agriculture education for five and a half years at Jessamine County Schools in Nicholasville, Ky.

Pilgrim's Pride Corporation has officially selected **Fabio Sandri** to serve as the president and CEO of the company. He joined Pilgrim's as chief financial officer in June 2011 and has been serving as president and CEO since June. Sandri is the former CFO of Estacio Participações, a private postsecondary educational institution in Brazil. Sandri succeeds **Jayson Penn**, who is no longer with the company.

Scientific Advisory Committee



Francisco Arriaga,
Ph.D.



Andrea Basche,
Ph.D.



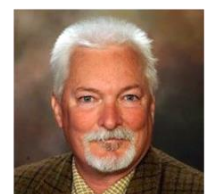
Julie Howe,
Ph.D.



Stephen Machado,
Ph.D.



Kate Scow,
Ph.D.



C. Wesley (Wes)
Wood, Ph.D.

Soil Health Institute's Scientific Advisory Committee

Announcing his retirement on his 60th work anniversary with WGN 720-AM, **Orion Samuelson**, 86, will leave the Nexstar Media Group news/talk station on Dec. 31. The Hall of Fame broadcaster plans on spending his retirement traveling with his wife, Gloria. Born on a dairy



Orion Samuelson

farm near LaCrosse, Wis., Samuelson got his start on radio stations in Sparta, Appleton and Green Bay. At age 26, Samuelson got the call to join WGN, where he began as farm director in 1960. Samuelson was President of the National Association of Farm Broadcasters in 1965 and was inducted into its Hall of Fame in 1999. Other honors include: National Radio Hall of Fame, 2003; American Farm Bureau's Distinguished Service Award, 1998; 4-H Alumni Award; and Oscar Norsk Høstfest Scandinavian-American Hall of Fame.

After a courageous battle with cancer, **Adriaan Cornelis Weststrate** passed away. He was 66. Born the youngest of seven children in the Netherlands, Weststrate started a successful banking career in 1983 with ABN Bank in the Netherlands, relocating to Singapore, Brazil, and the United States. In 1993, Weststrate joined Rabobank as the regional manager for the Eastern Region, opening the Atlanta office in 1995. Since 1998, Weststrate led the development of Rabobank's poultry business in the U.S. He became the global poultry sector head in 2010 and the global co-head for the Animal Protein Sector for the Americas in 2011. In 2015, he was appointed vice chairman of global corporate clients. He retired in June 2020 after a 27-year career with Rabobank. Weststrate was an avid runner, running in numerous marathons. According to his obituary, he had a passion for cars, art, espresso coffee, and the color orange.

Best regards,

**Sara Wyant
Editor**

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