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Newsom to decide on water “Blueprint” for San Joaquin Valley

Before Gov. Gavin Newsom announced his water task force in April, a growing coalition was already surveying the many water challenges for the southern San Joaquin Valley.

Ground subsidence along the Friant-Kern Canal.

Spurring the effort was a February report by the Public Policy Institute of California detailing the valley’s dire situation and the potential for up to a million acres of fallowing. The coalition – and its San Joaquin Valley “Blueprint” – has grown to include more than 50 stakeholder organizations from the valley. Now the group has submitted its formal recommendations to the administration to include in the governor’s forthcoming Water Resilience Portfolio, with the hope that he embraces the Blueprint’s findings. The administration has said it plans to publish a draft report this month.

The premise of the Blueprint is the valley has an annual water deficit of as much as 2.5 million acre-feet that it must reconcile to be compliant with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) by 2040. Dozens of groundwater sustainability plans for the valley are due in January. The boundaries for the basins and subbasins present new obstacles, as they cross county lines, impact federal projects and draw in clusters of disadvantaged communities.

The Blueprint takes a broader, cross-valley perspective at the eight counties within the southern San Joaquin Valley, with the goal to “develop a plan of action to sustain and improve the communities, habitats, working landscapes and jobs of the San Joaquin Valley.” Its “summary of asks” sent to the administration includes repairs for five canals, several new facilities for storage and conveyance, valley-wide management strategies and expedited policy and regulatory changes, a total investment exceeding billions of dollars. The asks would protect what Friant

Water Authority CEO Jason Phillips calls the **"the most productive area in the world in terms of farmland," where five out of seven jobs are related to agriculture.**

"The water supply gap is enormous," he told *Agri-Pulse*. "That's a situation that just has to be rectified. In one way or another, we're going to find balance."

Along with Friant, the coalition includes the state's most influential agricultural groups, numerous water agencies and cooperatives like Land O'Lakes. It has gained the support of California Senator Dianne Feinstein and engagement from California State University, Fresno. The school's California Water Institute published a comprehensive report this month based on stakeholder engagement and expanding on the Blueprint's core recommendations.

Jason Phillips, CEO, Friant Water Authority (Photo: FWA)

In a statement of support, California Citrus Mutual called the Blueprint "exactly the kind of regional partnership that is necessary to address our major water challenges in the face of SGMA."

The coalition has also held a number of informational meetings with the Newsom administration. Phillips called it a big step for any government to officially acknowledge and recognize the severity of the problem.

"I don't think anybody in government wants to see entire economies severely damaged," he said, adding that the governor's actions over the next couple of months will provide "an honest look at where we stand," depending on whether the Blueprint is embraced or rejected.

If no federal, state or local governments take up the cause, Phillips said the effort at least raises awareness, which could translate to philanthropic giving as well.

The Blueprint partners have also commissioned UC Berkeley researchers to produce a socio-economic study on the potential SGMA impacts to the valley's communities and industries. Phillips is hopeful this can be completed by the end of the year, but concedes it is an ambitious timeline for such a study.

"It'll be a sobering reminder of how dire the situation is," he said. "But it will help us make our case for sure."

Many of the Blueprint's requests to the Newsom administration are not new. Over the past 25 years, California voters have approved more than $27 billion from nine state water bonds. Yet water conveyance, storage and drinking water systems in the valley continue to degrade under droughts, subsidence and floods.

Prop 3 in 2018 would have provided another $8.9 billion for infrastructure and environmental initiatives across the state, but it failed to gain the votes. Then Senate Bill 559 more specifically targeted $400 million for fixing the Friant-Kern Canal, gaining broad support across the Legislature before dying in committee in August, after policymakers argued the federal government and agriculture should pay for the fix. Testifying on behalf of the bill in March, Phillips said this canal problem alone “threatens about 350,000 acres of highly productive farmland.”

Policy analysts are skeptical that voters will again pass large water bonds. A poll by the Public Policy Institute of California in September found that just 2% of likely voters thought water and drought are the most important issues facing California – compared to 16% for homelessness. Yet 57% said they would vote in favor of a bond measure for water infrastructure, though a specific dollar amount was not mentioned. A bond would also face steep competition with other major causes. On Monday, Newsom signed a bill that placed a $15-billion education construction bond on the ballot for 2020.

Phillips is aware of the steep hurdles ahead and that no one solution – and likely no one administration – can alone close the water gap.

“It's going to require cooperation and working with leaders at all levels – state, federal and local levels – to try to implement solutions to these problems,” he said.

Eight questions for the Dairyman of the Year

Steven Maddox is passionate about his cows, and it shows. In early October, he was crowned the 2019 Dairyman of the Year by the World Dairy Expo, in recognition of his commitment to the industry and his leadership in several trade organizations.

Maddox runs a large and diverse family dairy operation in Burrell, Calif. RuAnn and Maddox Dairy includes 3,900 cows, 4,000 head of heifers and 1,200 head of breeding bulls, as well as 1,600 acres of almonds and 3,000 acres of winegrapes.


(Photo courtesy Ruann and Maddox Dairy)

“If you love cows, you're my friend,” he told *Agri-Pulse* at the expo, an event he described as feeling “like a family reunion.”

1. **Looking at the dairy industry right now, what are some of the challenges you face in California?**

Well, I also have almonds and wine grapes on my farm. But all the nuts and fruits in California aren’t on my trees and vines. Unfortunately, many of them are activists that are attacking us on a variety of levels, whether it's animal welfare, whether its environmental issues and all that.

In California, you're getting close to four generations not having any relationship to a farm.

2. Tell us about bringing folks out to your farm?

We try to get them out to the farm or bring the farm to them. Our dairy council in California has a wagon with a cow and a calf on it that they take out to the schools to give people a taste of what it's like.

Most people don't understand how in-depth and businesslike we are, how much testing we do with the soils, how scientific we really handle our businesses. They're still thinking we're standing out in the yard with a pitchfork.

3. What are your thoughts on the Dairy Margin Coverage?

I signed up for it. Looking back, because the whole farm bill was so delayed, it was almost a guaranteed payoff this year.

Full disclosure, I was one of the people originally from the Holstein Association that pushed the Margin Protection Program that was developed by two economists (Mark Stevenson of Penn State University and Charles Nicholson of the University of Wisconsin, Madison). We were able to have National Milk (Producers Federation) pick up and carry the ball over the goal line.

The difficulty was that the growth management plan, which was a temporary on-and-off production control that kind of tempered the overproduction, didn't survive (Former House Speaker John) Boehner. He also torqued the formulas.

The bad thing and good thing about government programs is they never go away. What we were able to do with this Farm Bill was to correct it and make it more user friendly and more applicable. It's really geared for the small farms. With the economies of scale, larger farms shouldn't need it. The strength and the heart and soul of our dairy industry is our small farmers.

4. What do you say to folks who didn't sign up?

The Margin Protection Program was so bad, the government realized that they actually reimbursed your premiums. It's not too often the government admits that they made a mistake.

(Dairy producers) can do what they want. Here's a chance for recouping some of the monies that they put in a program that was flawed.

There's strength in numbers. We need to have enough liquidity in this and enough participation to be able to keep it ongoing. Yes, if there's a shortfall, we need to still correct it. But it's just like crop insurance, you need to go forward.

The large farms have got to realize that the strength of the industry is in the small guys. We have to keep our rural communities alive and the small businesses in the rural communities. We don't need to bypass them. That really adds more variance of our suppliers and our support staff for the industry.

Once they're gone, we're beholden to people who may not even be in our state or country.

5. **How do you view the US-Mexico-Canada-Agreement (USMCA)?**

You've got to realize that the number one butterfat market in the world is the United States. But just like our cheese, we have a waste stream market. We need to sell our powders. Our skim milk powder and our nonfat dry milk powder are actually converted to skim milk product. That's what the world market wants.

China has a large need for dried whey to feed their baby pigs. Right now, they're trying to rebuild their pig population, because over half of the pigs were killed in this little disease issue, which is helping us export some pork that way.

But 30% of our exports from the United States on dairy products goes to Mexico**.** We didn't lose that too much, because we shared the additional tariff with the Mexican buyers to alleviate that.

We've really pushed to exporting to the countries around China. China likes to have a diversity of products. With the E.U. getting rid of their quotas, they had a lot of products that their government was buying, and they're still dumping those out into the Far East.

With the Ukrainian embargo, normally a lot of the lower-quality excess products went into Russia. And now it's not. That product is now finding a way into our markets in the Far East. But that's rapidly fixing itself.

6. **Do you have any words for Congress as they debate the USMCA?**

Quit playing games.

It's a slam dunk. It's so much better than the old NAFTA deal. But everybody's trying to make their little mark and it's so partisan. In Washington, D.C., right now, it's disappointing. One of the least-partisan committees for years has been the Ag Committee. Now even that's getting partisan.

7. **On the environmental front, has that been a challenge for you?**

We have a large land base, obviously, with what I've got and we're able to spread the effluent. We do our soil testing, our water testing, effluent testing. On our corn and our alfalfa, we're able to grow those crops without any commercially purchased fertilizer. But that's me just being more efficient on that end.

The excessive reporting of air quality and water quality is a little tedious. We have three different Air Boards we have to report to in California. We have two Water Boards we have to issue with. Now our state's trying to control our groundwater. We're the only one of the western 13 states that the state doesn't control the groundwater. We're trying to be better stewards of that, with water banking and the like.

The key to being sustainable is that number one is profitability on the farm. Number two is providing for the next generation. Coming of age during the 70s, I remember the first Earth Day. We all want to leave the world a better place. The original environmentalists were dairy farmers, because we had to spread the cow manure somewhere.

Yes, there's an expense. But there's ways, if you do it properly, that it'll basically follow the bottom line and be a positive.

8. **Are you optimistic about the dairy industry for the next five years?**

We're down to 37,000 dairy farmers across United States. With my registered cattle, those are all customers indirectly. Every dairy farmer who goes out of business is heartbreaking and I feel for it. Some of it is generational, with the next generations not coming in.

We're going to have a smaller base of dairy farmers. We still need that diversity of opinions. Of course, as they say, if you have two dairymen, you have three opinions.

It's going to get more challenging. We're getting some pushback against the environmental activists right now, because they're finding out we have many dairies that are very close to being carbon neutral, if we can figure out the transportation. Dairies are accounting for 4% (of global greenhouse gas emissions), while transportation is five or six times that. The potential is there.

Genetically, we're going to get better performing cattle, hopefully that are more resistant to diseases and health issues. We need to reduce our antibiotic treatments and some hormones we're using. That's the direction we're going.

Dairy Management, Inc., our national dairy promotion board, has a 2030 plan. We're trying to project out 10 years so that we can preload our research and emphasis, to take advantage of market changes and be ready to be very proactive on directing industry and keeping our competitiveness, our forward thinking and our profitability in the industry.

Report: Crop insurance fails organic farms due to policy limits

A five-year, USDA-funded study says organic producers can't get the crop insurance coverage they need either because it's unavailable for their particular crops or won't cover their losses adequately because of the conservation practices they follow.

The 132-page report recommends USDA promote the insurance program more widely while also making a number of changes to rules for both single-crop policies and for the Whole Farm Revenue Protection program, which the study found to be the best option for many organic producers.

New educational efforts also are needed to promote the program to specific commodities and markets, including mid-to large-scale producers, the report says.

To help small and diversified farmers, the study recommends USDA try offering an inexpensive catastrophic coverage option as a pilot program.

The study, conducted by the National Center for Appropriate Technology in Butte, Mont., also suggests organic farmers are no more risky than conventional growers despite higher loss ratios on conventional policies.

"Contrary to a common stereotype, organic growers are just as interested in crop insurance as any others," the study says. "Their main problem is not a lack of interest or education, but rather the cost, usefulness and reliability of the products and services available to them."

The study was funded through USDA's National Institute for Food and Agriculture. The Risk Management Agency would be responsible for making any administrative changes to crop insurance.

The report says that organic grain and legume farmers use organic insurance widely, but that participation drops off significantly for fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops because of limited availability.

According to a survey conducted as part of the study, 54% of organic grain and legume farmers say they buy crop insurance every year, and 78% had bought coverage at least occasionally in the past. By comparison, fewer than 30% of the specialty crop growers surveyed said they had ever bought insurance.

The study's 19 recommendations include a proposal to say that any producer who complies with an organic system plan is by definition using good farming practices. Another recommendation says that any practices approved by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service for farm bill conservation programs should be considered good farming practices.

Doug Crabtree, an organic farmer in Montana, said single-crop policies are often not worth the cost because of the practices, including cover crops, crop rotations and intercropping, that he uses under USDA conservation program contracts. **"The yield will be rated so low or the cost so high that it's not practical," he said in an interview**.

Doug Crabtree

He now covers everything but wheat under a WFRP policy but it doesn't provide as much protection as a conventional policy.

"You can't have one hand either mandating that you do various things, or at least paying you through conservation contracts to do those things, and then have another hand of the government saying you can't do those things or you're going to lose insurance or pay a higher rate to have it," Crabtree said.

The study recommends that RMA focus on expanding use of the WFRP to help specialty crop producers in particular.

"WFRP offers the best hope for organic farms that are growing horticultural crops to gain better access to crop insurance. The problems with creating single-crop policies for the full range of horticultural crops are intractable, and become even harder for organic crops because of the small number of organic farms growing many of these crops," the study says.

The study cites cabbage as an example of a crop that's hard to insure. Although it can be grown everywhere, insurance is available in just 13 states, including only one county each in North Carolina and Texas.

The study urges RMA to reduce the paperwork requirements for WFRP — many agents complained to researchers about the paperwork — and to lower the burden of proof on growers when estimating insurable revenue.

RMA also should count indemnities as historic farm revenue for claims adjustment purposes, allow lower-than-average years to be replaced or adjusted when determining a farm's average historic revenue, and eliminate a 35% limit on expansion on revenue above a farm's five-year average, the study said.

The report tries to make the case that organic farming is riskier than conventional production. Although organic crops have consistently higher loss ratios than conventional crops on single-crop policies, there is no significant difference in loss ratios between organic and nonorganic farms insured under WFRP, the study said.

WFRP is a better indicator of the revenue risk of organic farms in part because it captures the effects of crop revenue, a major risk-reduction strategy used by organic farms, the report says.

In a statement, the Organic Trade Association said it would support several recommendations in the report, including proposals to deem NRCS conservation program practices as good farming practices for insurance purposes. OTA also supports expanding single-crop policies to more counties and eliminating a cap on contracted prices.

"Organic farmers need USDA to continue making improvements in the farm safety net to achieve appropriate risk management tools for organic farms," the group said.

Ferd Hoefner, senior strategic adviser for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, said his group continues to push RMA to recognize NRCS conservation practices as good farming practices. That should be easier for RMA to do now that it and NRCS are under the same Farm Production and Conservation mission area at USDA, he said.

Ferd Hoefner, NSAC

"FPAC has meaning, then it should not be tolerable to continue to have two of its agencies sending conflicting messages, with farmers left holding the bag," Hoefner added.

NSAC also is urging RMA to reduce the paperwork burden with WFRP policies and to reinstate some funding for education programs.

Tara Smith, vice president of federal affairs for the Crop Insurance and Reinsurance Bureau, said the industry **"appreciates the research to improve and expand the crop insurance program, and we share the goal of ensuring that actuarially sound policies are available for all types of farmers across the United States.** As we look for opportunities to improve the program, we welcome collaborative efforts to help prevent cuts to the program, to maintain the integrity of the program and to preserve crop insurance participation amongst all types of farmers."

The Risk Management Agency didn't respond immediately to a request for comment.

USDA's local, fresh foods programs creeping forward

USDA's Fiscal Year 2019 cash is starting to finally emerge for an array of 2018 farm bill initiatives and ongoing programs aimed at expanding consumer access to fresh produce, improving diets, and boosting farmers markets and local food systems in other ways.

The 2018 farm bill doubled money, for example, for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program GusNIP (formerly called the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program), for example, to about $50 million a year ($250 million through 2023), and USDA aimed $41 million of GusNIP's FY 2019 dollars at nutritional "incentives at the point of purchase."

Fiscal 2019, of course, ended last week. But USDA public affairs staff advises awards have been virtually completed and will be announced within days for grants under GusNIP and other nutrition assistance programs administered by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

GusNIP awards will include a new farm bill initiative that sponsors fresh produce prescriptions, implemented in coordination with health care providers to improve low income citizens' health by improving diets.

However, GusNIP cash dispersals, grant oversight and FY 2020 awards could all be impaired on the heels of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue's relocation of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), which administers GusNIP, to Kansas City. The relocation is proceeding along with an acute loss of NIFA staff.

In Albany, Calif., Ben Feldman, chief executive of the Farmers Market Coalition (FMC) says his members across the country "are experiencing delay on the GusNIP program … as I understand as a result of the relocation of NIFA."

NIFA's staffing depletion is "something we're definitely concerned about," says Wes King, a senior policy analyst tracking such programs for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. "We're also thinking about fiscal year '20. How are they (NIFA) going to write the RFA (request for applications) for the program," he asks, "and get that cleared and published in a timely manner without staff?"

Wes King, NSAC

King is also concerned about a big new part of GusNIP: $38 million authorized through 2023 (including $8.5 million initially planned for FY 2019) "to create these training and technical assistance and evaluation centers, (which are) meant to be big, big grants. **It's a brand new piece to the program; never been done before. That's a lot of money to be putting out the door with no oversight, no staff at NIFA to be engaging around the implementation."**

Feldman shares that fear. FMC is in a group expecting to get one of those new GusNIP grants: "a training and technical assistance proposal that we received word on and has been approved, but we are hearing that there is a funding delay." USDA officials suggest a likely three-to-four-month holdup into this winter, he says.

Yet another GusNIP grant applicant isn't seeing problems with NIFA performance so far. Noah Fulmer is national partnerships director for the Fair Food Network (FFN), which coordinates a fresh-produce bonuses program called Double Up Food Bucks(distributed to Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program recipients) in Michigan, and helps facilitate Double Up in 27 states. FFN hopes for a green light this week on both its FY 2019 GusNIP matching grant for Double Up, as well as a new GusNIP technical and evaluation center in which it's collaborating, and, **Fulmer says, "we haven't necessarily experienced an issue directly" owning to the NIFA relocation.**

"We all know there is a big transition happening; we've all read and heard about it," he says. "It's very important that NIFA have that stability," but he thinks NIFA staff has been "extraordinarily professional and have really gone above and beyond," in dealing with FFN.

Noah Fulmer, FFN

Meanwhile, FY 2019 Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) grants still don't have an expected awards date. An Agricultural Marketing Service public affairs spokesman says the farm bill "made FMLFPP a no-year appropriation program, which allows AMS to select the awardees outside of the fiscal year cycle," and the agency is still evaluating FY 2019 applications.

The farm bill merged a sister program, the Local Food Promotion Program, into FMLFPP, and then ordered a minimum of $50 million per year be spent for FMPP and another USDA program, Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG), combined.

King points out that while the farm bill mandated $50 million for the two programs, it also trimmed FMPP spending from $28.8 million under the 2024 farm bill to $23 million a year.

Also, FY 2019 Value-Added Producer Grants seem recently missing in action. Administered by USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service, they help fund farmers, cooperatives and other producer groups in developing and marketing new value-added farm products.

Congress allowed up to $32.5 million for VAPG in FY 2019, but USDA has yet to post a FY 2019 request for applications.

Further, "no timetable has been set" to do so, says Jay Fletcher, public affairs communications officer for USDA Rural Development. Asked why last year's RFA remains unposted, Fletcher says, "I can't tell you that."

What's more, VAPG funding may plunge in FY 2020, says King, of NSAC. Mandatory funding of $17.5 million can be expected, he says, but Senate appropriators zeroed out additional dollars (though the House spending bill would, so far, match total FY 2019 allowances for VAPG).

News Briefs:

Power shutoffs are first big test for farmers and ranchers. In its latest update, Pacific Gas and Electric warned yesterday that up to 800,000 residents could lose power Wednesday morning. The extreme fire weather window is expected to last through Thursday afternoon, but the shutoffs could last for days after, as PG&E inspects its power lines. The span of affected areas includes 34 counties in the northern Sacramento Valley and surrounding foothills, as well as Napa Valley and portions of the Salinas Valley and northern San Joaquin Valley. The update adds portions of Marin, Humboldt, Trinity, Santa Barbara and Kern counties to list. In Sonoma County, more than 80% of the businesses, nearly 21,000 in total, could lose power, according to officials. Farmers and ranchers have now had four months to prepare backup generators for such a situation. PG&E surprised many when it shut off power to 22,000 customers in June in its first widespread "de-energizing" of power grids. In recent years, state fairgrounds have taken over as emergency evacuation centers for pets and domestic livestock and state agencies have been training fair managers for emergency planning. Beyond the red flag warning, the National Weather Service cautions that counties throughout the state will be experiencing dry, windy conditions and residents in rural areas should take wildfire precautions.

Break in Roundup trials could spur settlement talks. A trial in St. Louis involving a plaintiff who alleges exposure to Roundup caused her non-Hodgkin lymphoma has been delayed indefinitely, leading to speculation that Bayer and plaintiffs' lawyers need the time to work out a settlement. But at this point, it's just speculation. In a brief statement, Bayer did not address settlement negotiations, but said, "With the change in the trial schedule and no trial dates set through the rest of the year, the appeals of the three completed trials will be a significant focus of the litigation in the months ahead." Three trials in California — one in federal court and two in state court — resulted in jury awards to the plaintiffs totaling more than $2 billion, though they were reduced by judges in those cases to about $200 million. Well-known mediator Kenneth Feinberg was appointed earlier this year by U.S. District Judge Vincent Chhabria as a mediator in the litigation, now involving more than 18,000 plaintiffs nationwide. At Bayer's recent conference in Germany, Bayer crop science president Liam Condon told reporters the company "entered those discussions in good faith" but added a settlement "only makes sense if it's financially reasonable and if it's final. And of course, we need to make sure the product remains available for growers." Estimates of the amount of money needed to settle have ranged from the low billions to $20 billion, but in August, Feinberg called "fiction" a news report in August saying Bayer was willing to pay $8 billion.

CDFA supplies corner stores with fridges. The Department of Food and Agriculture has opened up the second round of funding for its Healthy Stores Refrigeration Grant Program. Housed in the Office of Farm to Fork, the pilot program focuses on California's food deserts, where grocery stores are distant and fresh produce is hard to come by. It supplies bodegas, small businesses, counties and nonprofits with energy-efficient refrigerators to fill with nutritional foods for sale. In July, CDFA awarded $2.8 million to 28 applicants. In the final round for the program, it is awarding $1.7 million. The 2018 budget also funded the California Nutrition Incentive Program, which grants nutrition credits for farmers markets to CalFresh recipients. As chair of the Budget Committee, Assemblymember Phil Ting, D-San Francisco, was the driving force behind the measures, because, he said, "All communities deserve access to healthy and nutritious food options."

PBS series features My Job Depends on Ag. A Central Valley movement that went viral on social media and spread further through bumper stickers is now highlighted in a PBS series. Each week, a half-hour episode of "American Grown: My Job Depends on Ag" explores "how agriculture touches us all," with stories that rarely make it to California's established media outlets. The first episode – streaming for free on PBS.org – delves into the urban-rural divide, explaining how a decal harnessed a shared frustration and brought together a fragmented ag community. Assemblymember Devon Mathis says in the documentary the movement has given the Legislature "an opportunity to push back on some of the things we're hearing" with emotions-based issues. Founder Steve Malanca phrases it as "waking up a sleeping giant."

Farm Hands West:

Kristin Peck has been tapped as the next CEO of Zoetis, succeeding **Jaun Ramón Alaix** on January 1. Peck currently serves as the executive vice president and group president of U.S. operations, business development, and strategy. She has been a part of the company's executive leadership team since the company's formation in 2012. Alaix has served as CEO since 2012.


Kristin Peck

The Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO) announced **Jim Greenwood** will step down as President and CEO. Greenwood will stay on after the 2020 election to help transition the new leader. In 2005, Greenwood became president and CEO after the retirement of founding President **Carl Feldbaum**. In Congress, Greenwood served as a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee overseeing health care policy.

The U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) has hired **Mike Spier** to serve as vice president of overseas operations, effective Oct. 15. Spier has served 19 years with USW before joining Columbia

Grain International, where he most recently served as head of CGI's international wheat trading desk in Portland, Ore. Spier will be based in the USW West Coast office in Portland.

Peter Bachmann has left the Department of Agriculture where he was serving as a senior adviser to the Secretary of Agriculture. He is headed back to USA Rice to serve as the vice president of international trade policy. Before coming to USDA, Bachmann worked at USA Rice for two years as the manager of government affairs.

Kevin Bailey has left the Senate Agriculture Nutrition and Forestry Committee where he served as a professional staff member for Sen. **Debbie Stabenow**, D-Mich. He will be joining the Glover Park Group's food and ag team as a director in government relations, effective Oct. 14. Over the past three years, Bailey has handled an array of issues on the Senate Ag Committee including rural development, energy and sustainability, telecommunications and rural broadband, appropriations/budget, immigration and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission. Prior to the joining the committee, Bailey served over six years at USDA and the White House Domestic Policy Council, where he managed the President's White House Rural Council and focused on agriculture, rural development, telecommunications and immigration issues.

Austin Hacker has been promoted to press secretary for the Republican staff of the House Committee on Natural Resources. He will also assume the duties of digital director. Hacker previously served as the committee staff assistant, clerk of the Subcommittee on Energy and Minerals, and deputy press secretary. Before coming to the Committee, Hacker served in the offices of former Majority Leader **Kevin McCarthy**, R-Calif., and Representatives **Jeff Denham**, R-Calif., and **Peter Roskam**, R-Ill.

Ally Kehoe is now the communications director for Rep. **Zoe Lofgren**, D-Calif. She previously was the communications director for Rep. **Donald Norcross**, D-N.J.

Carl Barrick has left the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee where he served as a professional staff member for Sen. **John Barrasso**, R-Wyo. He previously worked for the Subcommittee for Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development and Related Agencies for the House Appropriations Committee as a staff assistant.

Alex Ball has left the office of Rep. **Jason Crow**, D-Colo., where she served as the chief of staff. **Amy Soenksen** has replaced Ball as chief of staff. She previously served as Rep. **Ben Ray Luján**'s, D-N.M., outreach director.

Marília Rangel has left the International Poultry Council where she served as the Secretary General. She is moving to Brazil with Merck Animal Health to take on a new professional challenge.

West Pak Avocado Inc. has hired **Joe Nava** as its vice president of sales and business development. He most recently worked at Calavo Growers, as senior account manager for six years. Before that, he was at Mission Produce, as account manager for four years.

Michael Browne, vice president of fresh operations at Calavo Growers, announced plans to retire effective December 15. **Gary Gunther**, current director of fresh produce, will assume Browne's responsibilities. Before coming to the company in 2005, Gunther was the director of operations for Mission Produce.

The board of directors for the Milk Processor Education Program (MilkPEP) has selected **Yin Rani** as the new CEO. Rani brings nearly 25 years of integrated marketing experience to the fluid milk promotion program. She most recently was vice president and chief customer experience officer for the Campbell Soup Co.

Fair Food Network has appointed **Mark Nicholson** as the new policy director. Nicholson brings more than two decades of policy and legislative experience in addition to a background in specialty crop production. A New York native, Nicholson is a third-generation apple farmer and co-leads Red Jacket Orchards. He also brings more than two decades in national agriculture policy serving as chairman of the board of the U.S. Apple Association. Nicholson spent his early career at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agriculture Marketing Service and was a member of Ag Secretary **Tom Vilsack**'s Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee.

Annie Frost has left the National Grocer's Association where she served as the manager of marketing and communications. NGA is currently searching for her replacement.

Best regards,

Sara Wyant

Editor
