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State considers exempting small farmers from costly water fees

For nearly two decades, California has levied water fees and compliance costs for farms and ranches that have minor impacts on water quality or even improve it at times. State agencies are now pursuing a different approach and have begun a yearlong process that promises to reduce requirements or add exemptions for some fee payers in the Central Valley.

In 2003, the State Water Resources Control Board launched the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program, charging its nine regional water boards to enforce surface water quality on farms and ranches. In 2012, the state added requirements to address nitrates in groundwater. **The fees have risen each year, along with the compliance costs for farmers and ranchers.**

The agencies have experimented with reduced monitoring and discounts for “low-risk” commodities in the Northern Sacramento Valley region. The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board is now looking at how to apply those lessons, through engagement with farmers and researchers, to the rest of the Central Valley.



UC Davis Professor Ken Tate

According to Nevada County Supervisor Richard Anderson, growers in the foothills and upper elevations of the county have limited seasons, minimum fertilizer use and no annual tillage. Many are also on leased land.

“Yet these growers remain subject to the same high costs and regulatory requirements as higher threat geographical areas,” he said in a letter to the Central Valley Board

On top of the fixed per-acre fee, the State Water Board is also requiring farmers statewide to develop nitrogen management plans with annual reports. Adding to regulatory costs, the recently approved CV-SALTS plan for salt and nitrate management will not distinguish between high- and low-risk areas either. Beyond agriculture, the Central Valley Board must also balance trade-offs for safe drinking water in the valley’s economically disadvantaged communities.

To lower costs from the Irrigated Lands program, the Central Valley Board is considering ways to reduce staff workload. This could include developing new regulations specific to those commodities, which the board has already enacted for growers under the California Rice Commission. Other options include reduced monitoring requirements or a total exemption for low-risk commodities. Staff will present their recommendation to the board for approval in summer 2020. The initial effort is focusing on irrigated pastures within upper watersheds, with the hope of expanding to more groups later.

During an Oct. 11 informational hearing, farmers from the upper elevations of the Sacramento Valley urged the board to opt for an exemption.

"The irrigated pasture that I have qualified for Social Security many decades ago," said Ned Coe, a Modoc County supervisor and rancher. "It is much older than I am and has not been disturbed and will not be disturbed anytime in the foreseeable future."

Coe said applying nitrogen just "greens it up," without any economic benefit to him.



Ed Sills with his wife at their farm

In the upper watersheds of the San Joaquin Valley, the gravity-fed irrigation systems were designed in 1875, according to UC Davis Professor Ken Tate. A rangeland extension specialist, Tate has worked with these ranchers for decades on water quality issues.

His research has found low pesticide use, often for spot treatment on noxious weeds. The ranches sit at elevations as high as 10,000 feet above sea level, with frigid winters being the best control of pests. Yet it leaves a short growing season and four to six months of grazing. Tate also found no nitrogen impacts on groundwater. He said three pastures were actually filtering E. coli out from upstream contamination. Ranchers also have the economic incentive to improve their pastures and not overgraze.

UC Davis has developed tools to help streamline reporting for nitrogen management and Tate said this could help with Irrigated Lands as well. Yet many of these farming communities are plagued by poor internet access.

Tina Saitone, a UC Davis agricultural economist and extension specialist, said the state board fee of 95 cents per acre is often doubled or tripled by the time it reaches the rancher. Water coalitions add costs for the monitoring, reporting and compliance and then subwatersheds charge for the on-the-ground tasks like coordinating samples, sending them to labs and collecting fees. **Saitone compared it to shopping at the grocery store: Paying more for an apple doesn't mean the farmer gets all the money.**

Charging on a per-acre basis penalizes those with more land but not more cattle, she said. Irrigated pastures are charged at twelve times the rate of almond farmers as a percentage of net returns, she found.

"When you're living on very thin margins, that can make or break your operation," she said.

Ed Sills, an organic farmer in the Nevada County region, said his subwatershed applied for the reduced monitoring option but decided not to pursue it because the cost would be the same.

“Many of our small growers in the foothill areas quit farming,” he said. “It wasn’t worth it to them to pay the fees and do the reporting.”

Sills added that fallowing previously irrigated land like this not only creates a problem with noxious weeds but adds a wildfire hazard. Many of those attending the meeting had no power at home at the time, a result of Pacific Gas and Electric cutting power in more than half the counties in the state to avoid sparking fires.

Nicole Bell, who manages the Kern Watershed Coalition Authority, said the experiences of Sills and other Northern California farmers apply to the rest of the Central Valley. She added this order will cost her coalition at least \$100,000 per year to monitor just 2,500 acres of low-threat crops along the upper Kern River. Without an intervention from the board, those fees will be passed on to members.

Patrick Pulupa, who heads the board, agreed with the idea of “going into lower gear for some of these commodity groups” with built-in incentives. Instead of putting “the whole weight of the board” behind enforcing regulations on a half-acre of land, he said the program should focus on the more intensive agricultural areas, like almond orchards.

Yet Pulupa said the costs for staff time are not always easy to factor when it comes to small operations and their unique challenges. He also said the San Joaquin Valley has a lot of spread ownership, when one person owns multiple small parcels.

In a statement to the board, Brian Dahle, a Republican state senator and farmer in Lassen County, called it “refreshing to see the agency take this approach” and urged the board to adopt a waiver or at least “the lightest possible regulatory touch.”

“The owners won’t stay in agriculture if we regulate them off the land,” he warned.

New biological opinions have ag optimistic, critics declaring corruption

Agricultural groups are applauding the new biological opinions issued by federal wildlife agencies Tuesday, but the more flexible approach to water management for the Central Valley and State Water Projects called for in the agency reviews has angered environmental interests.

Democratic members of Congress from the Central Valley stopped short of endorsing the biological opinions, saying they wanted to see the state's analysis first. Republican lawmakers supported the opinions.

Referring to the past opinions as an unsuccessful “calendar approach” for making ecosystem decisions, **the agencies are now leaning on real-time monitoring of fish populations to calculate flows to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and ensure fish are not trapped at the pumps**. The new plan also adds \$1.5 billion to conservation and habitat restoration projects

Mike Wade, director of the California Farm Water Coalition, saw this approach as a more efficient way to optimize water for farmers, urban users and environmental purposes

“We are anxious to put these new policies into practice and expect to see a positive response for water users and the environment in the years to come,” he said.

California Farm Bureau Federation President Jamie Johansson said the new approach would be “dedicating enough water at the right time” to maximize benefits for fish and people. Johansson said the new plan builds on lessons learned from the previous opinions while addressing the many pressures on California water.



The endangered delta smelt fish

“Narrow solutions based only on water flow mandates have failed to restore fisheries, at great loss of water for people,” he said. **“Californians face a challenging water future as we seesaw between extreme drought and flood, incorporate new restrictions on groundwater and work to accommodate a growing population while enhancing the environment and sustaining agricultural production.”**

Tom Nassif, president and CEO of the Western Growers Association, went further, saying the previous opinions “caused serious and lasting economic and social damage to hundreds of communities.” Nassif believes the new opinions will complement the efforts of the Newsom administration in negotiating the voluntary agreements.

“Those who immediately condemn these revisions because they may help farm communities or cities are attempting to distract from the failure of the current regulatory regime,” he said.



Barry Thom, NOAA

Before the opinions were released, Doug Obegi, a director for the National Resources Defense Council, said on Monday they will “significantly weaken and/or eliminate existing federal protections” for endangered fish.

Tim Stroshane, policy analyst for Restore the Delta, said he was still reviewing the opinions Tuesday but what he did read had “the smell of manipulated science — an Orwellian finding that fish don’t need water.”

Fish and Wildlife Regional Director Paul Souza was quick to address this in a press briefing.

“Before people make judgments, I encourage them to read the document to see the changes that have occurred to the proposed action over time,” he said. “They have been significant.”

Barry Thom, regional administrator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, also addressed reports that the administration had removed the research team when unfavorable findings were about to be released in June. Thom said staff were pushing hard to meet the strict deadline set out by the president and acknowledged there was a transition in some staff to ensure the agency had “the right people moving forward” to complete the report. The underlining analysis remained the same, he said.

Critics have also called the opinions “a big win for a wealthy group of farmers” and for Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, who is facing an ethics investigation over his lobbying work with the opinions on behalf of the Westlands Water District shortly before taking office.

House Natural Resources Chair Raúl M. Grijalva, D-Ariz., called it corruption and “political ham-handedness.”

“The Committee intends to fully exercise its constitutional oversight duties and investigate whether the law was followed,” he warned.

Souza said he, Thom and Ernest Conant, the regional director for the Bureau of Reclamation, are “career professionals” and there is no connection to Bernhardt’s lobbying. Souza and Thom also began their positions under the Obama administration.

Others were more cautious in their responses. Noting the need to update the opinions, Central Valley Democratic Reps. Jim Costa, John Garamendi, Josh Harder and TJ Cox penned a response with Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., that said they would study the biological opinions “to ensure they incorporate the adaptive management and real-time monitoring needed to properly manage the Central Valley Project for the benefit all Californians.”

“We look forward to the State of California’s thoughtful analysis of the biological opinions,” their statement continued.



Interior Secretary David Bernhardt

The Newsom administration has been quick to admonish changes to environmental rule changes from the Trump administration, with five legal filings announced Tuesday from the attorney general’s office. Newsom’s upcoming Water Resilience Portfolio will also be influenced by the new biological opinions.

The governor told reporters Tuesday his administration is reviewing the document and will determine if litigation, or another approach, is the best response.

Concern swells as USMCA talks linger

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi still isn’t ready to hold a vote on the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, but the pace of talks between Democrats and the White House is picking up speed as both sides aim for ratification before the end of the year.

House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal, the Massachusetts Democrat charged with spearheading negotiations with U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer to produce a pact that can pass the House, **assured *Agri-Pulse* this week that talks are intensifying and progress is being made, but time is running out in 2019.**



House Ways and Means Chair Richard Neal (Photo: Joy Philippi)

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley, an ardent supporter of the new USMCA, told reporters Tuesday he's getting worried there just won't be enough time.

“I think it’s fair to say that the clock is ticking,” said Grassley, who stressed that he’s concerned USMCA will take a back seat to elections in 2020. **“Time’s running out and I’m going to urge Democrats in the House to move quickly ... Until now, I haven’t been inclined to do that, but I’m getting worried.”**

Neal's small USMCA working group of Democratic lawmakers and their aides meet almost daily. They convened with Lighthizer for three days in a row last week and planned to sit down with him again Wednesday.

There are several issues the two sides have yet to resolve, but Democratic demands for new enforcement mechanisms to ensure Mexico continues to reform its labor standards in the coming years is the largest remaining schism.

When asked after the latest Lighthizer meeting if he believed an agreement in principle could be reached before Thanksgiving, Neal stressed to reporters that there was “still a ways to go.”

Much could depend on the outcome of this week’s meeting with Lighthizer. The Democratic working group is waiting on an official response from Lighthizer in writing on a long list of demands for alterations to USMCA.

The Democrats need those responses to move on and close out some significant issues, said **Rep. Jimmy Gomez, D-Calif., who expressed concern that Lighthizer would hold back as part of a negotiating strategy.**

Neal, Gomez, Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore., and others on the working group are negotiating on two separate fronts. While negotiating with the White House, members have been shuttling back and forth to Mexico City to get assurances the government there is living up to its USMCA promises.



Senate Finance Committee Chair Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa

And that’s yielded some of the biggest successes for the lawmakers. A key development in the effort to build Democratic support for USMCA is the letter from Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador that was hand-delivered to Neal last week by Mexican Undersecretary for North America Jesús Seade.

That letter is essentially a promise from Obrador that Mexican labor reform will be a well-funded priority, even as the government there is slashing overall spending for 2020.

Mexico is now budgeted to spend the equivalent of \$69 million next year on initiatives such as setting up new labor courts and implementing recently-passed labor laws.

Idle car factories that dot the Midwest like the abandoned General Motors facility in Lordstown, Ohio, are a constant reminder to Democrats that the current North American Free Trade Agreement is often blamed for the migration of jobs to Mexico. **For USMCA to get the support of Democrats, the pact must do what NAFTA did not — ensure that Mexico does not continue to offer a cheaper alternative for U.S. companies to build their cars.**

It's a point repeatedly stressed to Obrador by lawmakers and one of the primary messages that Neal and other Democrats stressed during a visit to Mexico City earlier this month, which prompted the letter from Obrador.

“When (NAFTA) entered into force, Mexico opted to keep wages low and to weaken unions,” Obrador wrote. **“The labor reforms that are underway today ... will put Mexico at the forefront of labor rights in Latin America and will guarantee union democracy and the rights of union members as has not been done in more than three decades.”**

Although Obrador lays out plans to fund the labor reforms for four years — until every union contract is rewritten with the help of government agencies — there's still no guarantee Mexico will continue to allocate money in its budget beyond 2020.

And that's when the enforcement mechanism the Democrats are demanding comes into play.

“It's supposed to make sure that (Mexico) is motivated to enforce their own laws instead of using procedures in the agreement,” Gomez told *Agri-Pulse*. “That's the concept ... We're just not there yet.”

Nevertheless, Gomez stressed that the USMCA is already far better than the current NAFTA.

“I would say it would be like comparing a Ford from 1994 to a Ford today,” he said. “I know they're the same brand, but they're completely different cars.”



Rep. Jimmy Gomez, D-Calif.

Neal put it like this: “What we have already done is better than what NAFTA represents at the moment. That is not in dispute. The question is, can we move it along even more and I think we can.”

While Neal and the working group are not yet be satisfied, plenty of House Democrats and Republicans are.

“It's there,” said Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Texas, who told *Agri-Pulse* that there are already enough votes in the House — counting both Democrats and Republicans — to approve USMCA if the vote were held now. “I think it gets the majority of the Democrats where they need to get to. It's going to be done.”

In that, Cuellar is in agreement with President Donald Trump.

“If it is voted on, it will pass,” Trump said Monday. “It's up to Nancy Pelosi to put it up (for a vote). If she puts it up, it's going to pass.”

But Trump also expressed doubt and added invective, reflecting the increasingly tense atmosphere as Democrats move ahead with an impeachment investigation.

“I call them the do-nothing Democrats,” Trump said. “They’ve done nothing.”

But Gomez said the impeachment fervor is not stopping the USMCA talks.

“Trump, in my opinion, is just a bunch of noise,” said Gomez. **“From the way I look at it, we have to look at each individual issue on its own merits ...** We are fixing the problems in NAFTA that have existed for 20-something years. Is that a deal we should take? My opinion is that if we do that, we should take it.”

Farm economy dependent on federal aid, low interest

The Trump administration’s trade assistance package and other government payments are keeping the farm economy afloat, while historically low interest rates are helping maintain agricultural land values, according to bankers and economists.

And they say that while many farmers are starting to eat into their working capital to stay in operation, the farm economy is nowhere near the crisis of the 1980s when growers were far more heavily leveraged.

Net farm income is projected to rise to \$88 billion in 2019, up \$4 billion from 2018, according to USDA, but the increase underscores the importance of federal aid.

But \$33 billion of out of the \$88 billion in farm earnings will come in the form of federal support payments, including checks for crop insurance indemnities, disaster aid, farm program payments, and the Trump administration’s Market Facilitation Program, which was created to compensate farmers for the impact of recent trade wars.



John Newton, AFBF

Federal farm support in 2019 is projected to increase by 53% while income from crops and livestock is down 14% from 2018, American Farm Bureau Federation Chief Economist John Newton said during a Farm Foundation forum in Washington Tuesday.

If farmers had no federal support other than crop insurance, net income this year would be closer to \$69 billion and rank in the bottom 50% all time, he said.

Another round of MFP payments will be needed in 2020 if the trade war with China continues, said Byron Enix, president and CEO of American AgCredit, which serves much of California as well as producers in Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas and Oklahoma. MFP payments are "vital" to producers, he said. "It's not a long-term solution, but for a short-term problem it has helped immensely," Enix said.

He and other Farm Credit System leaders have been briefing congressional staff and farm groups this week on the farm economy.

Farmers are dipping into their working capital to stay afloat. **USDA estimates farmers' working capital will slip to \$56.9 billion this year, down from \$70 billion in 2018 and a peak of \$165 billion in 2012.**

Working capital, which serves as a cushion in downturns, “has come down quite dramatically,” said Jeff Swanhorst, CEO of AgriBank of St. Paul, a regional funding bank that serves associations across the Corn Belt west to Wyoming and down to Arkansas.

“If that farmer is not generating adequate cash flow in his farm operation from net income that shortfall is going to come out of working capital,” Swanhorst said.

The current debt-to-asset ratio in U.S. agriculture of 13.5% is far below what it was in the 1980s. That shows U.S. agriculture in a “very strong position” overall, but that “is not evenly dispersed,” Swanhorst said.

Farmers' credit can vary widely by sector.

American AgCredit reports credit ratings for dairy farms in the states it serves have declined significantly over the last several years.

In three out of the last four years, dairy income has been at or below breakeven levels. Many operations will need years of profitability to restore necessary liquidity and lost equity, the bank says.

The sector is expected to be profitable for the next 12 to 18 months, but “we do not think that will return everything that’s been lost over the last three years,” said Enix.

Seth Meyer, a former USDA economist who is now associate director of the University of Missouri’s Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute, said 2020 looks to be harder for farmers.

“When you look out in terms of commodity prices, global demand and carryout stocks, the kind of competition we invited when commodity prices were higher, we do have a challenging environment going forward,” Meyer told *Agri-Pulse*.

Meyer said the period of farm income between 2010 to 2014 was historically unusual but that there is always the possibility of another event that could drive up commodity prices.



Seth Meyer, FAPRI

“You never know where that demand spark is lurking,” Meyer said. “We talked today about China being the demand spark over the last ten years on a global scale ... there’s always the possibility.”

In the meantime, some landowners may pull some acreage out of production.

Due to the tough farm economy, AgriBank’s Swanhorst said he expected there to be “heavy interest” in the Conservation Reserve Program when the general sign-up begins in December.

The 2018 farm bill raised the acreage on CRP from the current cap of 24 million acres to 27 million acres by 2023.

CEOs worry regulators won’t allow critical climate fixes

Leaders of the three largest seed and chemical companies say it’s technologically possible to reduce farming’s environmental footprint while feeding a growing global population, but they worry policymakers and regulators will stand in the way.

“I’m completely convinced that we have all of the technology and innovation, either with us today, and are coming soon, so we can feed 10 billion people, probably on less land than we even have today,” said Liam Condon, president of Bayer’s crop science division.

“The big issue is will this innovation be allowed,” he continued.

Condon said there were three critical types of technology for increasing food production and reducing agriculture's environmental impact: gene editing for seeds; synthetic biology to enable microbes to help plants fix their own nitrogen, reducing the need for fertilizer; and digital tools to increase the use of precision agriculture.

Condon was speaking on a panel with fellow agribusiness executives, including CEOs of Corteva Agriscience and Syngenta, at the annual World Food Prize symposium in Des Moines, Iowa.

The United Nations projects the global population will grow from 7.7 billion in 2019 to 8.5 billion in 2030 and 9.7 billion in 2050.

Another panelist, Chris Nelson, president and CEO of Kemin Industries, a global food ingredient manufacturer based in Des Moines, expressed concern that regulatory barriers would prevent farmers from increasing production sufficiently on a global basis.

“The problem is our political and regulatory institutions,” he said. The industry **“can no longer sit by and only develop the technology.”**

The Department of Agriculture has been struggling for years with how to streamline its regulatory process for biotech plants in order to accelerate the commercialization of gene-edited crop traits.

Biotech companies say the Trump administration's latest proposal to overhaul USDA's regulations would still slow the commercialization of many gene-edited products. But groups representing grain traders, food processors and restaurant chains have told USDA the changes would go too far and could lead to trade disruptions and undermine consumer confidence.

Syngenta CEO Erik Fyrwald said seed companies must help farmers adapt to climate change, noting recent droughts as well as severe weather events. “And we have to do that with technology, and we have to do that with agronomic advice and digital tools,” he said.

“But we need science-based regulatory processes around the world so we can keep bringing better and better technology to help farmers deal with climate change.”

He also said agricultural technology companies need to work together globally with farmers as well as food companies and consumers to increase yields and reduce waste with the goal to “be able to feed the world with less land.” That, in turn, will discourage deforestation, a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, and encourage planting of new forests, he said.



Erik Fyrwald, Syngenta

Syngenta on Tuesday announced the company would invest \$2 billion over the next five years to help farmers deal with threats posed by climate change. The company's goal is to take to market at least two technological breakthroughs a year. Syngenta also pledged to halve the carbon intensity of its operations by 2030 to meet targets set by the Paris climate agreement.

Scientists say agriculture could play a major role in addressing climate challenges. A plan for addressing climate change published in [the journal Nature Climate Change](#) says land use and agriculture could become carbon neutral by 2040 and a net carbon sink by 2050 through changes in how crops and livestock are produced and by reducing deforestation and planting new forests. **Increasing carbon sequestration on croplands could offset the entire greenhouse gas emissions of India.** Restoring forests, drained peatlands and coastal mangroves in tropical countries would offset the equivalent of China's emissions, the study said.

Corteva CEO Jim Collins echoed the concern about regulatory barriers to biotechnology, but he also suggested that consumers need to be sold on its benefits.

Corteva and other companies want to “learn from some of the mistakes we made in the past around GMOs and GM technology,” he said, suggesting that one of the selling points of biotechnology is how gene editing crops could help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Corteva is developing a gene-edited variety of rice that can be dry-seeded, reducing methane emissions from rice paddies. The methane, one of the most potent greenhouse gases, is produced by bacteria in waterlogged fields.



Corteva's Jim Collins (left) and Bayer's Liam Condon (right) address the World Food Prize symposium.

Collins announced a \$500,000 “Climate Positive Challenge” fund that Corteva will use to make payments for experimental practices that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The first grants

will be made in 2020. Farmers who get the money will have to be willing to serve as “missionaries” to talk about their results to other farmers.

Collins said in an interview that Corteva is looking for farmers — he described them as “heroes” - to reward for early adoption of climate-friendly practices. It’s not clear yet how the farmer’s practices will be evaluated, but Corteva will probably use some outside consultants to review the growers’ results.

Corteva will be soliciting farmers outside the United States as well but hasn’t decided on how many grants will be made or how large they will be. The company wants to first see how much demand there is for the money and evaluate the applications, he said.

News Briefs:

Central Valley unemployment improves. The latest report from the state’s employment department shows California’s unemployment rate hit a record low again in September at 4%. Despite the improvement, Tulare County remained nearly double the state average. In July, it was at 10% and then fell to 7.6% in September. Kern was 6%, while Madera, Merced and Fresno were around 5%. Kings County, however, was just 3.2%. The head of the Governor’s Business Office, Lenny Mendonca, said, “It is encouraging to see all-time record low unemployment and record-high job expansion with the largest gains going to counties in inland Southern California.” Despite his concerns over the declining labor force growth, Beacon Economics Director Robert Kleinhenz said, “With yearly job gains in nearly every one of the state’s major industries, including those most affected by trade conflicts, this is a reassuring report, especially at a time when there are concerns that the economy is cooling.”

Report: CDFA budget cut by a quarter. The 2019-2020 budget of \$558 million for the Department of Food and Agriculture is down by \$175 million, or 24%, from the 2018 fiscal year, according to a report released last week by the Legislative Analyst’s Office. The difference comes largely from a \$142 million decrease from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) and \$23 million that had come from Proposition 68 funding, which is now depleted. The governor’s May revision of the budget proposed a \$73 million cut in funding from the GGRF. The final budget was more aggressive, zeroing out programs like water efficiency grants. The cap-and-trade money was used for several first-time expenditures as well, including \$100 million for safe and affordable drinking water, \$35 million for workforce development “for a low-carbon economy,” and \$10 million for local wildfire prevention. Notably, the General Fund includes first-time costs of \$17 million for fish screens to prevent invasive bass from spreading between two lakes. Yet the GGRF also provided \$9.3 million for research into better predicting atmospheric rivers and \$2 million for nutria eradication in the Central Valley.

Harden: Consumer environmental concerns aren’t going away. Krysta Harden, an Obama administration USDA official and veteran ag lobbyist, says consumer concerns over the environmental impact of dairy production are not going away any time soon. Harden, who joined Dairy Management Inc. in April as the group’s executive vice president of global environmental strategy, said producers recognize the consumer interest in their industry. “They feel the pressure, they feel this is not a trend, it’s not going away. There’s very strong interest from the consuming public about the environment,” she said. “(Consumers) recognize dairy may be good for them nutritiously, but is it good for their community, is it good for the planet?” Harden pointed to reductions in the average carbon footprint of a gallon of milk — a drop of about 60% in the last 70 years — and the dairy industry’s pledge to reduce its carbon footprint by 25% by

2020. She said the industry is still gathering data on its efforts and plans to release a report at an upcoming event in November with figures up to 2017. As for the issue of consumer perception, Harden said she wants to see dairy farmers — some of whom say they love the dairy industry but “just want to milk cows” — play a more central role in addressing environmental concerns. “Somehow or another, we’ve got to empower more of them to feel comfortable, to help them have the time ... to have conversations outside their peer group and community,” she said.

Survey: Money needed for food safety compliance. A new Cornell University/National Farmers Union survey says more than 50% of local U.S. produce growers say they need more adequate financial resources to implement food safety practices. “First and foremost, they want to keep American consumers healthy by protecting them from foodborne illnesses,” National Farmers Union President Roger Johnson said. He noted farmers also want access to markets to sell their products, which means complying with food safety regulations. There is no universal definition for the term “local,” so the study considered anyone who sold their product within 275 miles from their operation as local. Nearly 70% of people surveyed said they had not received or did not know if they had received a third-party food safety audit and 40% said food safety training was not applicable to their operations. Some 90% of producers surveyed are exempt from the 2011 Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (PSR), and the Preventative Control for Human Foods Rule (PCHFR). But some local farms reported growing and handling a wide diversity of raw agricultural commodities covered by the FSMA PSR. Over 1,000 food producers, processors, farmers, and aggregators participated in the survey, which launched in 2017. Some 599 participants met the survey’s definition of local food processors. Almost one-third of local food producer survey participants identified as food processors with 81.5% of this group identifying as farmers.

Farm Hands...

The Farm Credit Administration board has selected **Roger Paulsen** to serve as FCA’s chief examiner and director of the agency’s Office of Examination. Paulsen succeeds **Robert Coleman**, who was named FCA’s chief operating officer in August. Paulsen has been an FCA employee for more than 36 years and served as deputy chief examiner and deputy director of the Office of Examination from 2013 to 2019.

Jeff Moyer has been named the new CEO of the Rodale Institute. He joined Rodale in 1976 as a farm laborer before becoming a manager in 1982. He later was a farm director for 15 years, supervising research and operations. He was later named executive director of the Institute in 2015.

Renee Munasifi has left the American Soybean Association where she served as the director of government affairs and regulatory policy. She has moved to Nutrien, where she now serves as the director of government/industry affairs handling the trade portfolio.

It’s official: **Constance Cullman** is now settling into her role as the American Feed Industry Association’s president and CEO. Cullman has been on staff since July 29 and has been working with association’s past president, **Joel Newman**, in preparation for his retirement on Dec. 31.



Jeff Moyer

Dave Puglia has been selected to serve as the new president and CEO of Western Growers. Puglia will succeed **Tom Nassif**, who is retiring after 18 years on Feb. 1. Puglia joined Western Growers in 2005 and currently serves as executive vice president, overseeing four departments in addition to the organization's non-profit charitable foundation and its political action committees.

The Board of Directors of Ag-West Bio Inc. has appointed **Karen Churchill** as the organization's next president and CEO, effective Nov. 18. Most recently, she served as the director of research and market support with Cereals Canada. Before that, she served as a quality projects manager at Cargill Malt.

Jim Farrell of the Farmers National Company (FNC) will retire Dec. 31, and **David Englund** will succeed him as the new president and CEO of the organization. Farrell has been with FNC since 1986 and has served as president and CEO since 2004. Englund currently oversees the company's farm management sector and supervises hiring and training for the company's field operations. He will be succeeded by **Ken Schmitt**, who currently is an area vice president in Iowa. FNC Chief Financial Officer **Dave Knutson** officially retired in July and has been replaced by senior vice president of financial services **Julie Gerken**.

Michael Wilbur has joined the Wilbur-Ellis board of directors. Wilbur currently serves as president and CEO of Cavallo Ventures, Inc., the venture capital arm of Wilbur-Ellis, a leading international marketer and distributor of agricultural products, animal nutrition, and specialty chemicals and ingredients.

Danielle Sikes has left the National Pork Producers Council, where she served as director of congressional relations. She has moved to the Agricultural Retailers Association, where she is serving as director of public policy.



Tim Belstra and Constance Cullman

Today is **Josie McLaurin**'s first day at USA Rice. She will serve as the government affairs and PAC coordinator. She previously served as a staff assistant for Sen. **Mike Enzi**, R-Wyo., on the Senate Budget Committee and as an intern for USA Rice.

Dan Black is now the communications director for Rep. **Joe Kennedy**, D-Mass. He has been Kennedy's press secretary for the past three years.

Carlos Condarco has been promoted to communications director for Rep. **Donna Shalala**, D-Fla. He previously served as her press secretary.

Ben Tabor is now a policy analyst for Rep. **Diana DeGette**, D-Colo., on the Subcommittee for Oversight and Investigations of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. He previously served as a staff assistant on the committee.

Zach Helder has left the office of Rep. **Harley Rounda**, D-Calif., where he served as the communications director. **Matilda Bress** has taken over his responsibilities, serving as the press secretary and covering the agriculture, food and animal welfare portfolio.

Ali Aafedt has left Sen. **John Hoeven**'s office where she served as a legislative assistant covering the labor, telecommunications, trade, and small business portfolios. Hoeven's office has not yet hired a replacement. Aafedt has moved to the National Association of Manufacturers as the new trade facilitation policy director.

Tyler Hernandez has left the office of Sen. **Shelley Moore Capito**, R-W.V., where he served as communications director. No replacement has been hired to fill the position. Contact **Kelley Moore**, press secretary, for communication inquiries.

Oriana Piña has left the office of Rep. **Darren Soto**, D-Fla. Piña served as the communications director. **Clarissa Rojas** has replaced Piña as communications director. Rojas previously served as the press secretary for Rep. **Nanette Diaz Barragán**, D-Calif.

Tim Persico has left the office of Rep. **Sean Maloney**, D-N.Y., where he served as chief of staff. **Matt McNally** succeeds him as the new chief of staff. He previously served as the director of the New York City Office of Federal Affairs.

Natalie Kretschmar has left Capitol Hill where she served as the press secretary for Rep. **Bill Johnson**, R-Ohio. She now serves as an account executive for the District Communications Group.

Best Regards,

Sara Wyant

Editor

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