

A 20-year push for valley water storage ends, as Temperance Flat calls it quits

The proposed Temperance Flat Reservoir Project has likely seen its final blow after more than two decades of hard-fought efforts. With tepid interest from water contractors, the project is unlikely to meet a critical deadline for drafting an operating plan.

The project authority attributed the loss to a cascading series of impending water crises over the years that have detracted local water contractors from investing in the reservoir. The effort has been crippled by state agencies as well, along with a price tag that did not pencil out well for farmers. The backers have faced fierce opposition from environmental groups.

“Temperance Flat may have a future, but it obviously doesn't have it right now,” said Daniel Curtin of the California Water Commission during a meeting last week. “The time wasn't right for it.”

While the deadline has not been reached yet, the Temperance Flat Authority's Aaron Fukuda wanted to give the commission early notice so they could make plans to return the funds already invested in the project. He hoped the money would instead go to other water infrastructure projects to benefit the Central Valley. This would more than double the amount invested in adapting to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, he added.



Friant Dam, which is downstream from the proposed site of Temperance Flat

In what was seen then as a major setback to the project, the Water Commission had granted \$171 million to the authority in 2018 through the Proposition 1 water bond. The authority had requested \$1 billion—the commission provided nearly that much for the proposed Sites Reservoir Project in Northern California.

“That raised a lot of concerns, obviously among the potential investors, of where is the rest of the money going to come from,” said Bill Swanson, an engineer with the design firm Stantec, which has been consulting on the project.

In a July confirmation hearing to reappoint Carol Baker to the Water Commission, Senate Republican Leader Shannon Grove of Bakersfield urged a “no” vote, arguing Baker was to blame for the decision on Prop. 1 funding. Citing a low environmental feasibility score from commission staff, Baker abstained rather than be the swing vote.

“It costs a lot of farmers in the Central Valley water to be able to feed your constituents,” said Grove during the floor debate, adding that Baker’s confirmation “is not good for anybody.”

Ron Stork, an environmental advocate with Friends of the River, argued last week that the State Water Resources Control Board already considers the river fully appropriated.



Bill Swanson, vice president for water resources planning and management at Stantec

Doug Obegi, a policy advocate for the Natural Resources Defense Council, told the commission that **Temperance Flat “threatened the viability” of the San Joaquin River Restoration Settlement that was ironed out between the environmental group, the Friant Water Authority and federal agencies.** He said capturing more water from the river, even excess flood flows, would have damaged threatened fish populations downstream.

The settlement agreement was also cited as one of the crises that impacted the fate of the project and consumed the time and money of the more than 30 irrigation districts that would benefit from the reservoir. After the parties reached a compromise, the valley and the entire

state fell into an extreme drought and attention pivoted to the development and implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act in 2014. The drought exacerbated the drinking water crisis as well, along with other water quality issues in the valley, like salinity and nitrate contamination.

Research by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) has found that infrastructure dollars would go much further by improving the operations of existing dams and the water grid to maximize groundwater storage. At \$1.3 billion, Temperance Flat would have cost farmers \$565 per acre-foot of water, which PPIC found to be too costly. While the \$2 billion from Prop. 1 helped advance Temperance Flat and Sites Reservoirs—along with expansions for Pacheco and Los Vaqueros—it was only a small share of the total funding needed, according to PPIC.

Combined with raising Shasta Dam, those investments would boost the state’s reservoir storage by about 9%. But annual water deliveries would only increase by 1%.

“Improving operations of existing dams and the water grid to maximize groundwater storage is key for managing the hotter droughts and larger floods that climate change is expected to bring,” note the PPIC researchers.

The proponents of Temperance Flat sold the idea to local agencies as a mechanism for buying water storage accounts. The districts would have allocations proportional to their investment in the reservoir, which would carry over from year to year.

The Temperance Flat Authority worked in collaboration with the Department of Water Resources and the Bureau of Reclamation on environmental reviews and feasibility studies. Without an operating plan, however, Reclamation cannot continue with the feasibility report, according to Swanson. The authority is also not likely to gain either funding commitments for 75% of the cost or a California environmental review before the January 2022 deadline.

“The statute itself, which was a masterpiece of political work, was at the same time very typical of political work,” said Curtis. “It was a mishmash of a lot of conflicting interests. It was almost destined for Temperance Flat to run into a brick wall here.”

Air Board hopes to ban all ag burning, despite incentives drying up

The Air Resources Board (CARB) last Thursday recognized agriculture’s role in significantly reducing emissions in the San Joaquin Valley. Yet several board members signaled they would like to enact a complete ban on agricultural burning when the issue returns to the board in February.

“If we’re committed to an (environmental justice) approach,” said board member John Balmes, “then we really have to be serious about banning open-air ag burning.”

He reasoned that those most exposed to the smoke are communities of color and low socioeconomic status.

The board heard updates on how the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has been implementing measures to reduce engine emissions of low oxides of nitrogen (NOx) as well as fine particulate matter, known as PM2.5, as part of a federally approved state implementation plan.

Along with reducing ag burning, the comprehensive plan is upgrading tractors and other ag equipment to lower-emission models, requiring cleaner diesel trucks, converting refrigeration units on truck trailers to electric, and increasing enforcement in key high-emission areas. The plan also targets construction and mining equipment, locomotives and railyards, airport shuttle buses and residential wood burning.

Going forward, the district is also considering credits for conservation management practices, low-dust nut harvesters and alternatives for ag burning. The district has helped to deploy almost 30 low-dust harvesters and, through a new federal grant, is planning for several more. Dust



At a press conference before electric cars, Chair Nichols speaks on the administration’s ban on gas-powered cars and diesel trucks.

accounts for 5% of PM2.5 in the valley. Prohibitions on ag burning, meanwhile, have reduced the practice by 80%.

CARB staff estimated that the current measures will achieve the majority of reductions for NOx and PM2.5.

Board member Hector De La Torre, who represented Los Angeles in the Assembly until 2010, urged CARB to “ratchet up” incentives for swapping out diesel engines for electric on both farms and trucks.

Incentives dollars have played a critical role since CARB approved the plan in January 2019. Yet funding for incentives has dropped since then and faces a dire outlook given low revenues from the state’s cap-and-trade program and competition with wildfire and safe drinking water programs.

The district is currently evaluating ag burning in the region and in December will consider a full phase out, with a report and recommendations submitted to the board for approval in February.

Board members as well as environmental advocates focused on this date as an opportunity to enact a long-sought ban.

The district is expected to ask CARB to reauthorize a five-year extension to allow a minimal amount of agricultural waste burning on designated burn days.

“That’s way too long,” said Balmes. “We should stop it now.”

John Eisenhut, who serves as the board’s agriculture member and grows almonds in Merced County, agreed that 17 years has been long enough for the industry to transition away from open burning.

“The industry has known about it for that period of time. There’s no basis for delay,” he said. “It’s time to move forward.”

As a state senator based in Bakersfield and advocating for farmworker rights, board member Dean Florez introduced the legislation in 2003 that established prohibitions on ag burning. After negotiating with then-assemblymember Leland Yee of San Francisco, Florez allowed for some burning to continue when alternatives were not economically feasible.

“Is it ever going to be economically feasible to compete against a one-cent match?” he said at the board meeting. “Because that’s what it takes to light these things up.”

While encouraged to hear that “agriculturalists” have been trying to end the practice, Florez called open burning “the most visible sign of the past” and said CARB should set a standard and “tell industry to get to it.”

Tom Franz, an almond farmer and environmental advocate with the Central Valley Air Quality Coalition, pointed to a few of the alternatives the industry has been establishing, such as whole orchard recycling, chipping the material into mulch for composting and relying on the few remaining biomass plants.



CARB Agriculture Member John Eisenhut

“We have to raise the fine or fee for open burning to at least \$1,000 an acre,” he said, “so that the cost of lighting a match is not cheaper than all of the alternatives.”

Board Chair Mary Nichols said she was **“overwhelmed by the just unrelenting unhappiness coming from the community representatives” in spite of the many efforts underway to reduce emissions.**

Nichols shared that the governor’s Office of Planning and Research is leading a multi-agency task force looking at ways the state can be “entrepreneurial” when it comes to dealing with agricultural waste as well as debris removed from forests for fire prevention.

The administration hopes to contract with companies offering more “economically sensible” alternatives for the waste than burning it at biomass plants to generate electricity.

“We could be helping to provide the financial tools to make it into a viable industry,” Nichols said, without offering any further details about the ongoing discussions. “This is not being ignored. It's being seriously addressed.”

Del Monte Fresh tests e-commerce program with same day delivery

Del Monte Fresh Produce has been testing a new platform designed to quickly deliver fresh produce to customers within a 40-square mile area. The web site, launched earlier this month in the Dallas area, delivers over 200 different types of fruits and vegetables on the same day – if the order is placed before 11 am.

“The overwhelming feedback has been nothing short of amazing in terms of the quality of the product and the fact that we deliver the same day in most cases,” said Mauro De Andrade, Senior Manager, E-Commerce, Fresh Del Monte. “I think we can really, really make a difference in terms of freshness.”

He said they have reduced the time from harvest on the farm to delivery to the customer by 50%, compared to most other food delivery services.

For now, the firm is using its own delivery trucks and drivers, but they are talking to a third party company to help with delivery once they expand their footprint in the Dallas area.



Mauro de Andre

De Andre said people are already demonstrating a lot of interest in the services and they plan to expand north and south of their current core radius in Dallas before looking at other metro areas in Texas like Houston.

He declined to discuss any of the investments required to establish an e-commerce and delivery service focused only on fruits and vegetables, but said, “We really want to become a customer driven company so we're not saving any money. We’re trying to make it an unforgettable and seamless experience to our consumer.”

One product that consumers can’t order online yet in the Dallas area is Del Monte’s long-awaited Pinkglow Pineapple. The bioengineered fruit looks like a normal pineapple on the

outside, but the interior is pink. After some favorable publicity, including being showcased on the Jimmy Kimmel show recently, De Andre said distributors are sold out.

“Just when people feel like there isn't any more innovation possible in produce, we would prove them wrong,” he emphasized. However, he offered that the Pinkglow pineapple will be coming “very, very soon” to the e-commerce platform. “People in Dallas should stay tuned because we're going to have it sooner than everybody expects.”

Farm states, rural House districts loom large in battle for Congress

The battle over control of the Senate could pivot on several Republican farm-state seats and Democrats' hopes to expand their House majority could be shaped by whether they can hold onto rural districts they carried in 2018 and pick off some GOP incumbents.

Another key story in the Nov. 3 election is the challenge that House Agriculture Chairman Collin Peterson, D-Minn., faces in a district that President Donald Trump carried by 31 points in 2016. Peterson is one of the five most endangered House Democrats this year along with two other House Ag Committee members, Xochitl Torres Small of New Mexico and Anthony Brindisi of New York, according to the Cook Political Report.

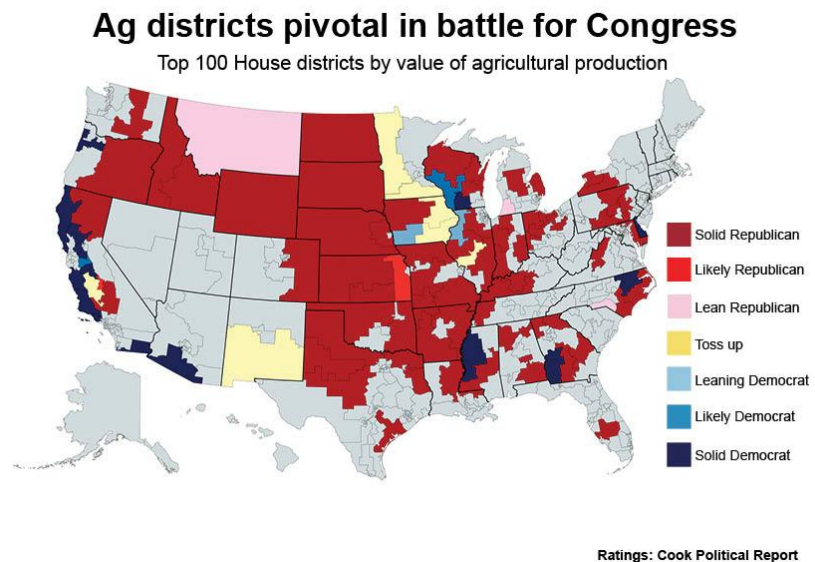
Some major rating services expect Democrats to win control of the Senate, which Republicans now hold 53-47, but the results are likely to hinge on a handful of states, and the outcome may not be known until Jan. 5, the date for Georgia's runoff election.

Republicans are heavily favored to pick up one Democratic seat — polls show Democratic incumbent Doug Jones badly trailing Republican Tommy Tuberville. That means that

Democrats will likely need to win four seats to get the 50 they would need to control the Senate if Joe Biden wins the White House. Kamala Harris, as vice president, would break ties in a 50-50 Senate.

If President Donald Trump wins reelection, Democrats would need to pick up five seats to get the 51 they would need to control the Senate.

If Biden wins the White House, winning Democratic control of the Senate while maintaining the party's hold on the House will be critical to his ability to advance the party's agenda on a range of issues, including health care and climate policy, and could make it easier to reverse some regulatory actions taken by the Trump administration.



Polls currently indicate Democrats are likely to win GOP Senate seats in Arizona, Colorado and Maine, which would bring the Democratic total to 49, hence the importance of remaining races in states such as Iowa, Montana, Georgia and North Carolina.

“Republicans are trying to defend many, many seats and there are a lot of challenges,” said Randy Russell, a top agricultural lobbyist and veteran of the Reagan administration.

Both of Georgia’s GOP senators are up for election this year: David Perdue, cousin of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, and Kelly Loeffler, a member of the Agriculture Committee who was appointed to her seat in January to replace the retired Johnny Isakson.

Under Georgia law, a runoff election candidate is required unless one candidate gets at least 50% of the vote. Loeffler’s race is virtually certain to end in a runoff because there are 20 candidates, including GOP Rep. Doug Collins, who is battling her for conservative support. Atlanta pastor Raphael Warnock has consolidated the Democratic base and is virtually certain to make the runoff.

Perdue also could wind up in a runoff if he can’t get 50% of the vote against Democratic challenger Jon Ossoff.

Two other senators from major agriculture states, Iowa’s Joni Ernst and Montana’s Steve Daines, are in tight reelection races.



House Ag Committee Chair Collin Peterson, D-Minn.

Heidi Heitkamp, a former North Dakota senator who co-founded the One Country Project, a group aimed at helping Democrats appeal to rural voters, says she thinks Democrats will reduce GOP margins in rural areas this year because of Biden’s appeal to rural voters. That could help not only Biden but also Democratic Senate and House candidates, including Ernst’s challenger, Theresa Greenfield.

Trump “has to perform as well, if not better than what he did in ’16, and that’s not happening. At best, he’s at break-even. At the worst case scenario, he’s losing 5 to 7% of his (2016) margin,” she said.

She said Republicans would be in far more trouble had Trump not authorized billions in coronavirus relief payments and trade assistance. **“Had that not happened I think you would have seen a huge swing in rural America,” she said.**

She said in states such as Montana, Daines’ challenger, Gov. Steve Bullock, is popular enough with voters that he will likely outperform Biden in the state.

The Cook Political Report and another rating service, Inside Elections, consider the Iowa and Montana races as toss-ups. Larry Sabato’s Crystal Ball and the group FiveThirtyEight rate Greenfield as the favorite in Iowa but consider Daines more likely to hold his seat in Montana. Sabato and Inside Elections rate the GOP incumbents as favorites in Georgia, while Cook considers both races toss-ups.

Recent polls by Emerson College and New York Times/Siena College had Ernst up by four points and one point, respectively. In Montana, a New York Times/Siena poll showed Daines up by three points.

Another race farm groups are watching closely is the battle between GOP Rep. Roger Marshall, a House Ag Committee member, and Democrat Barbara Bollier for the Kansas seat from which Senate Ag Chairman Pat Roberts is retiring. A recent New York Times poll showed Marshall narrowly leading in the race by 46% to 42%.

As in many other states, including Iowa and Montana, the Democratic candidate has an enormous advantage in fundraising. As of Oct. 14, Bollier had raised \$24.3 million, compared to just \$5.9 million for Marshall.

In the House, races for seven of the top 100 agricultural districts, in terms of annual production, are rated as toss-ups by the Cook Political Report. Five of the seats are held by Democrats, including Peterson in Minnesota's 7th District and three freshman Reps.: TJ Cox in California-21; Abby Finkenauer in Iowa's 1st District; and Xochitl Torres Small in New Mexico-2.

The fifth ag district in play is Iowa's 2nd District where incumbent Dave Loebsack is retiring. Two Republican incumbents are in tight races, and both of them are House Ag members: first-term Rep. Jim Hagedorn in Minnesota's 1st District and Rodney Davis in Illinois-13.



Rep. Roger Marshall, R-Kan.

Republicans have long targeted Peterson as one of the easiest House Democrats to pick off, given Trump's popularity in the district. Russell, who has stayed in touch with Peterson, noted Republicans are trying to carry Minnesota for Trump by pushing up the GOP turnout in the 7th District. That would help Peterson's challenger, former Lt. Gov. Michelle Fischbach. **"It's going to be neck and neck. It's going to go right down to the wire," said Russell.**

Heitkamp said she thinks Peterson will win, in part because voters won't want to lose his voice on the Ag Committee.

She also argues that older voters are more likely to vote a split ticket.

Fischbach has argued that the Democrats' environmental agenda would be "detrimental to farmers" because of proposals to move toward electric vehicles. **But Peterson argues that he has a stronger record than most Republicans when it comes to regulatory issues. "Farmers know that," he told *Agri-Pulse* in September, citing his resistance to permanent conservation easements.**

Here's a look at other close races:

California-21 (No. 4 in ag sales: Former GOP Rep. David Valadao, who is trying to win back the Central Valley seat he lost in 2018, comes from a dairy family and his involvement in the business has become an issue in the race. Cox, the incumbent, alleged Valadao was responsible for the dairy going bankrupt and a worker losing his arm in an accident. Valadao said this happened while he was serving in Congress and had recused himself from the farm's day-to-day operations. Valadao has been touting his support for a water infrastructure bill that has benefited

the region. Cox has a couple of water infrastructure bills that have passed the House but not moved since. An [American Viewpoint poll](#) in September had Valadao up by 11 points.

Minnesota-1 (No. 10 in ag sales): The race is a rematch from 2018, when Hagedorn defeated Dan Feehan after Tim Walz retired from the southern Minnesota seat and was elected as the state's governor. A KSTP/Survey USA poll conducted earlier this month had Feehan up 47% to 45%. Feehan has mostly made his campaign about health care, but on the ag front, has criticized Hagedorn for supporting President Donald Trump's trade policies. "I will always oppose tariffs that unfairly hurt our farmers," Feehan said on his campaign website. However, Hagedorn told the [Mankato Free Press](#) that Feehan will be just another left "extremist" who will advance the Democrats' climate agenda.

Iowa-1 (No. 12 in ag sales): Finkenauer knocked off GOP incumbent Rod Blum in 2018 and is being challenged this year by Ashley Hinson, a state legislator and former TV anchor. A [recent Monmouth poll](#) had Finkenauer up 52% to 44% among registered voters. [During a September debate](#), Finkenauer and Hinson differed on what should be in the next economic stimulus bill. Hinson emphasized that it should be targeted and said Congress should be "cognizant of the fact that we don't have an endless pot of money here to work from." Finkenauer said she thought the original HEROES Act, which the Democratic-controlled House passed in March, went too far; the bill would have cost more than \$3 trillion. But she called for providing hazard pay to essential workers and said that funding for state and local governments should be a priority.

Iowa-2 (No. 18 in ag sales): An Oct. 22 [Monmouth poll](#) has Democrat Rita Hart leading Republican Mariannette Miller-Meeks 49% to 43% among registered voters in the southeast Iowa district. Health care and COVID-19 have dominated topics on the campaign. But some farmers are questioning Hart's support for their industry after she told the Iowa Farmers Union she would consider legislation proposed by Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., to tighten regulation of animal feeding operations, according to The (Cedar Rapids) Gazette in July. Hart, who grows corn and soybeans with her husband, said she "agreed with the principles of Booker's legislation to reform CAFOs but wanted to learn more." Miller-Meeks supports Trump's trade policy on China and has the backing of 114 farm leaders, including Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig.

Illinois-13: (No. 55 in ag sales): Davis is in a rematch with Betsy Londrigan, who lost to him by fewer than 2,000 votes in 2018. The district is heavily agricultural but also includes the university towns of Champaign and Urbana.

Londrigan has been talking a lot about health care, promising to expand coverage and hitting Davis for his opposition to the Affordable Care Act. Davis has touted his support for agriculture. "I'm the 13th most bipartisan member of Congress. I said I would write a farm bill; I wrote two," he said [during a recent debate](#). Davis, first elected in 2012, served on House Ag during development of both the 2014 and 2018 farm bills.

New Mexico-2 (No. 69 in ag sales): The race is a rematch between Torres Small and Republican Yvette Herrell, who lost the race 51% to 49% in 2018. Trump won the district, which covers the southern half of the state, by 10 points in 2016. Torres Small joined the House Ag Committee in February when Rep. Jeff Van Drew switched parties.

Torres Small is trying to distance herself from Joe Biden's climate policy and his promise during the Oct. 22 debate to transition the U.S. economy away from oil. She tweeted that she disagreed

with Biden: “Energy is part of the backbone of New Mexico’s economy. We need to work together to promote responsible energy production and stop climate change, not demonize a single industry.”

Biden's cabinet possibilities would include deep roster of ag lawmakers

With Joe Biden consistently leading President Donald Trump in the polls, speculation is growing in Washington about who could get key Cabinet and staff positions, including jobs that could have a far-reaching impact on U.S. agriculture and trade policy.

Biden's advisers are keeping information about his transition plans close to the vest, but *Agri-Pulse* reached out to sources and took a look at reporting from other outlets to get an idea of who’s being discussed in connection with some of those high-profile openings.



Former Sen. Heidi Heitkamp (Photo: Joy Philippi)

"My sense is that the transition is trying to be as hermetically sealed as possible in the final days so as not to distract from the main event on Tuesday," said one Obama administration veteran close to the campaign, when asked about Biden’s transition plans for USDA.

Ferd Hoefner, senior strategic adviser at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition said of the Biden team, “They are being very good about keeping things close to the vest.”

Former Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack, who has been advising Biden, said he had “no idea who might be in line” when asked whether he could share any thoughts on the next leader of the nearly-100,000 person Department of Agriculture.

“Anyone providing you names would be purely speculating,” he added, noting he is not a part of the transition team and doesn’t know what discussions have taken place, if any.

Former North Dakota Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, however, says Vilsack himself will play a “major role” in determining who gets key agriculture positions and in advancing a rural policy agenda. “He is a very, very trusted adviser” to Biden, she tells *Agri-Pulse*.

Asked if she would be interested in USDA, she said she is “myopically focused on Nov. 3.” On there being little said publicly about the transition, she says, “I’m sure there are some people throwing some sharp elbows ... but at the end of the day everyone is so heavily focused on just getting out the vote and winning the election.”

A Biden-Harris transition team spokesperson said the team “is not making any personnel decisions pre-election.”

Biden has publicly stated his intention to assemble a cabinet diverse in both ideology and background, so any cabinet choices would likely have to meet a range of criteria and would be subject to scrutiny and vulnerable to criticism from different constituencies within the Democratic.

Given Biden’s diversity pledge, factors such as gender, race and even age come into play. “The big question is payback for the black and youth and women vote that gets him into the White House,” said Pat Parenteau, an environmental law professor at Vermont Law School, former EPA regional counsel and commissioner of the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation.

Joe Maxwell, head of Family Farm Action Alliance, echoes Parenteau, saying the Biden camp needs to consider USDA’s “historic discrimination” against black farmers in choosing a new ag secretary. His group opposes Heitkamp but says Representatives Marcia Fudge of Ohio and Chellie Pingree of Maine both fit their criteria, which include attacking the increasing consolidation in U.S. agriculture, especially in the meat sector.

Maxwell also said his group appreciates being able to share its views with the transition team, led by former U.S. Sen. Ted Kaufman, and including United Farm Workers President Teresa Romero.

Heitkamp’s name certainly comes up a lot in discussions about a new agriculture secretary. After losing her bid for reelection after one term in 2018, she founded the One Country Project in 2017 and leads it with former Indiana Democratic Sen. Joe Donnelly. The group “is reengaging with rural Americans, serving as a clearinghouse of research and information ... and working to ensure leaders regain trust by fighting for these communities.”

Heitkamp also was North Dakota’s attorney general from 1992 to 2000 and state tax commissioner from 1986 to 1992. She endorsed Biden in March.

Another name that comes up frequently is **Krysta Harden**, who served as Vilsack’s deputy from 2013-2016, but also was his chief of staff and assistant secretary for congressional relations. Harden is currently executive vice president of global environmental strategy for Dairy Management Inc., which manages the national dairy checkoff, as well as chief operating officer of the U.S. Dairy Export Council, where Vilsack is the CEO.

Before taking her current post, Harden spent three years as senior vice president, external affairs, and chief sustainability officer for Corteva Agriscience, the Agriculture Division of DowDuPont. During the same period, she was DuPont’s vice president of public policy and chief sustainability officer. She also was CEO of the National Association of Conservation Districts from 2004-2009.

Chellie Pingree also has been mentioned. The Maine congressional representative and House Agriculture Committee member has advocated “for reforming federal policy to better support the diverse range of American agriculture — including sustainable, organic, and locally focused farming — as well as to reduce food waste,” according to her congressional website. She’s also not averse to reaching across the aisle, as she did recently by introducing a bill with Nebraska Republican Jeff Fortenberry to expand options for small meat and poultry processors.

Kathleen Merrigan, an Obama administration veteran as deputy secretary at USDA, is currently a professor with Arizona State University and executive director of its Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems. As deputy secretary, she “created and led the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative to support local food systems; was a key architect of first lady Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move! campaign, and made history as the first woman to chair the

Ministerial Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations,” according to her online [biography](#).



Rep. Marcia Fudge, D-Ohio

Rep. **Marcia Fudge** of Ohio, now in her sixth term in Congress, chairs House Ag's nutrition and oversight subcommittee and has been a fierce critic of the Trump administration's attempts to tighten eligibility requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. She also has said the administration's highly touted Farmers to Families Food Box program left some states underserved. "This program was meant to help people, but not only am I afraid that isn't happening fast enough, I worry USDA isn't taking the operation of this program seriously enough to ensure it can happen at all,"

she [said](#) following a July hearing on the program. If approved as ag secretary, Fudge would be the first African American woman in that role.

Rep. **Cheri Bustos** of Illinois, now in her fourth term in Congress, "is the only member of elected Democratic House Leadership from the Midwest," her [website](#) notes. She has criticized the Trump administration's trade policy and sought COVID relief aid for biofuel producers, as a member of the House's biofuels caucus. She is a rarity in Congress: a former award-winning journalist. She represents a district Trump barely won in 2016. Republicans have targeted her race this year.

Michael Scuse is now secretary of the Delaware Department of Agriculture and also is a veteran of the ag department as undersecretary of agriculture for farm and foreign agricultural services. He also was acting deputy secretary and acting secretary of agriculture for a short period of time in the closing days of the Obama administration after Vilsack departed.

Other names mentioned for USDA include **Nikki Fried**, Florida's commissioner of agriculture, Rep. **Sanford Bishop** of Georgia, chairman of the Agriculture Committee's subcommittee on agriculture, rural development, FDA and related agencies, and **Karen Ross**, Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture for nine years, who also is a former chief of staff to Tom Vilsack at USDA.

Environmental Protection Agency

A name that gets mentioned a lot is **Mary Nichols**, head of the California Air Resources Board. Nichols has pioneered the state's Low Carbon Fuel Standard, which "incorporates market instruments [but] relies primarily on performance-based regulatory actions" to achieve its goals. Her criticism of the Renewable Fuel Standard was concerning enough to RFS advocates that just a conversation between Nichols and the Hillary Clinton campaign in 2016 led the Clinton campaign to "immediately reject any assertions that the candidate wants to repeal the RFS," Politico [reported](#) four years ago. Significantly, Nichols also served as EPA assistant administrator of air and radiation during the Clinton Administration.

Heather McTeer Toney, [senior director](#) at Moms Clean Air Force and a regional administrator at EPA during the Obama administration, is another candidate to head EPA. Like Nichols, she has EPA experience, a definite plus for a job where you need to "hit the ground running," as

former administrator Carol Browner told E&E News. Another plus: Biden has made environmental justice a key priority, and Toney is African American. She was the first woman and first African American to serve as mayor of Greenville, Miss.

Jay Inslee, governor of Washington, who ran for president on essentially one issue — climate change — is another potential candidate and would, like Nichols, be a natural fit given Biden’s ambitious climate goals. Inslee has faced opposition from the ag community in his state to a proposal for a low-carbon fuel standard.

On the trade front, *Agri-Pulse* also is hearing talk of Wisconsin Rep. Ron Kind, a member of the House Ways and Means subcommittee on trade, and Darci Vetter, a former chief ag negotiator in the U.S. Trade Representative's office during the Obama administration. Vetter also is being mentioned as a possible ag secretary or undersecretary for trade at the USDA.

FCC establishes 5G fund with \$1B going toward precision ag

The Federal Communications Commission established a \$9 billion 5G fund Tuesday to improve mobile wireless access in rural America, with up to \$1 billion set aside to improve precision agriculture technology.

According to the FCC, the 5G fund will distribute the money over the next 10 years through multi-round reverse auctions that will take place in two phases.

Phase I will provide \$8 billion to areas lacking unsubsidized 4G LTE or 5G mobile broadband. About \$680 million will be specifically set aside for bidders offering to serve Tribal lands.

FCC Chairman Ajit Pai and Commissioners Mike O’Reilly and Brendan Carr voted in favor of adopting the order.

Even though the commission won’t immediately conduct the phase one auction for the 5G fund, Pai said it is important those rules are established today.

“First, they provide certainty for stakeholders and provide a clear path to the 5G phase one auction,” he said during the meeting. **“Second, we adopt broad public interest obligations that will require carriers currently receiving frozen legacy support, to begin spending that support to deploy 5G capable networks in their service areas beginning next year.”**

Phase II will award at least \$1 billion, including any unawarded funds in Phase I, to providers who “specifically target the deployment of technologically innovative 5G networks that facilitate precision agriculture.”

Commissioners Geoffrey Starks and Jessica Rosenworcel voted to move forward, but not without expressing concerns.

“We also set aside funds for precision agriculture projects. What data supports the amount selected? How soon will this effort work in concert with the initial phase of 5G support that we commit to today and what facts actually support that budget?” Rosenworcel asked at the meeting.



FCC Chairman Ajit Pai

She argued answers are less than clear because so many of the choices the FCC has made are not grounded in data. While she supports the decision to commit to a wireless future, she said more humility would serve the commission well.

“The framework we have is sound but the details would benefit from more data-gathering before we proceed, so I think this effort needs some work if we want to make sure wireless communities ... truly sees the benefit of 5G wireless,” she said.

In a statement, NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association CEO Shirley Bloomfield said rural consumers and those traveling through rural America will benefit from 5G service.

“(It) promises not only higher speeds but can help empower precision agriculture services for farms and ranches and increased efficiencies for ranching, oil and gas production and sustainable energy production for solar farms, wind farms, and hydraulics,” she said.

Bloomfield also said NTCA looks forward to working with the FCC on creating accurate maps to identify areas eligible for support and the transition of support for small, rural legacy providers.

Commissioners adopted “option B” in the order, which refers to an option in the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking the commission adopted April 23. Pai said this means the phase one auction will begin after FCC develops precise granular broadband maps through its Digital Opportunity Data Collection proceeding.

But Pai said in order to start the data collection, the commission needs money from Congress, which he said FCC flagged as a concern almost 500 days ago.

"We are legally prohibited by Congress because of the Broadband Data Act from relying on the only source of funding we had to conduct this operation," he told reporters. The Broadband Data Act requires FCC to use "newly-created maps" when making new awards of broadband funding. "In particular, I believe it was \$65 million just for startup costs in the first year alone, which Congress has not given us," Pai said.

FCC said networks must provide 5G mobile broadband at speeds of a least 35/3 Mbps. Requirements also mandate interim deployment milestones beginning at year three and a final deployment milestone at the end of year six.

Pai said the commission should look to the future in that rural areas have an even footing with their urban counterparts for access to 5G.

“These networks will bring rural Americans the benefits like increased access to healthcare, education, and precision agriculture that are promised by the improved speed, latency, and security of 5G,” Pai noted.

The Federal Communications Commission also unanimously voted Tuesday to amend its rules governing unlicensed wireless services provided over spectrum in the television broadcasting bands also known as TV white spaces.

According to FCC, the amended rules will allow for the usage of spectrum to deliver broadband services in rural areas and underserved communities.

The Commission notes it also protects broadcast television stations and other licensed services from interference.

Connect Americans Now, a coalition of over 275 organizations and companies from agriculture to healthcare, pushed for FCC to update TVWS rules.

“CAN has been a longtime advocate for updated TVWS rules that will unleash the full potential of this technology as a critical tool to help eliminate the broadband gap,” CAN Executive Director Richard Cullen said in a statement.

FCC also cleared Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking look into whether or not to modifying its rules to permit the use of terrain-based models to determine available TV channels for white space devices.

US dairy capitalizing on rise in Southeast Asia demand

The U.S. Dairy Export Council is investing big in Southeast Asia as demand for everything from whey to lactose is rising fast and providing new overseas profits for U.S. farmers who are increasingly dependent on exports.

The U.S. shipped 395,055 metric tons of dairy products to the region in the first eight months of the year, a 45% increase from the same time frame a year ago, and that’s just a continuation of the rise over the past several years, according to data collected by the U.S. Dairy Export Council.

The U.S. exported \$928 million worth of dairy products to Southeast Asia in 2019, nearly quadruple the \$242 million of sales to the region just two years earlier. That, together with the potential for even more growth in a swiftly urbanizing population in Vietnam, Singapore, the Philippines and other nearby countries is why USDEC is building up its resources there, USDEC President and CEO Tom Vilsack told *Agri-Pulse* in an interview.

“This is a place of improving economies and rising middle classes and hundreds of millions of new consumers, which creates opportunity for more protein consumption,” Vilsack said. “In the last couple years, we made the decision to put some roots down in Southeast Asia, which shows we are here for the long haul — we’re here for a permanent place in the market.”

And that's why USDEC has established its first new overseas facility in 25 years in Singapore. The U.S. Center for Dairy Excellence, paid for by national, state and regional checkoff funds, was opened up on Sept. 21 to act as a hub for marketing and sales and education in Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia.



U.S. Center for Dairy Excellence (Photo: USDEC)

“We’ve added more people,” Vilsack said. “We’ve added more promotions. We’ve added more partnerships and now we have launched the Center for Dairy Excellence. ... It’s allowing us to showcase the U.S. dairy industry and tell the story of its ability, safety and ample supply by bringing people into this facility to utilize our test kitchen and our sensory panel system so that we can show the versatility of various cheeses and ingredients from U.S. dairy.”

Singapore wasn't just chosen as a hub because it's easy to get to from most locations in the region, but also because it's an industrial hub that U.S. whey and other commodities can flow through to reach buyers in several countries.

“Essentially, Singapore is the food hub of Southeast Asia, so it makes sense to locate the Center for Dairy Excellence,” Vilsack said.

And what he's talking about is tariffs and non-tariff barriers. It's a lot easier for a U.S. supplier to export to Singapore and then have that product shipped to Indonesia than it would be to just ship straight to Indonesia.

Vietnam recently cut tariffs on U.S. dairy and that helps, Vilsack said, but what would help even more is a free trade agreement — such as what the Obama administration negotiated in the Trans-Pacific Partnership. That Pacific Rim pact that included Vietnam came to realization, but without the U.S because President Donald Trump pulled out of the deal during his first month in office.

But New Zealand, a dairy competitor, is in the TPP and does have an advantage over the U.S. because the two countries have stronger trade ties. Still, U.S. dairy exports to Vietnam are on the rise. The U.S. sold \$139 million worth of dairy products to Vietnamese buyers in the first eight months of the year, a 36% increase from the same time frame in 2019, according to USDA data. The increase is even more substantial with the Philippines, which purchased \$280 million worth of U.S. dairy products from January through August. That's a 61% increase from the \$174 million in Philippine imports in the first eight months of last year.

“Southeast Asia is important to U.S. dairy farmers because it provides a growing outlet for their milk. Today, the milk from 1 out of 7 tankers leaving American farms ends up in products and ingredients sold beyond our borders,” according to USDEC. “About one day’s worth of monthly production of U.S. milk currently goes to Southeast Asia.”

Mexico still imports the most dairy from the U.S. by value, and that's primarily because the country buys a lot of value-added cheese. But the volume of U.S. exports to Southeast Asia is outpacing Mexico, primarily because as Vietnam and other countries urbanize, their populations

want breakfast bars, protein shakes and other convenient food sources that all contain dairy products.

“When you have a younger, urbanized population, which is what you have in Southeast Asia, these are people who aren’t going to sit down for a full breakfast,” Vilsack said. “They’ll take a bar and consume it on the way to work. They’ll have a protein shake for lunch. All of those products contain dairy ingredients.”

That doesn’t mean USDEC is not looking to increase cheese sales to Southeast Asia. It is, and the group considers the Center for Dairy Excellence as key to getting that done.

“We’re working with outlets like Costco and other major retailers in many of these countries to essentially showcase U.S. cheese,” Vilsack said.



Tom Vilsack, USDEC

USDEC is counting on the center — which will also be used as a culinary institute to teach up-and-coming chefs to cook with U.S. cheese — to help push demand in the region for U.S. dairy by another \$100 million over the next five years.

News Briefs:

Farm Credit rolls out HBCU internship program. Students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities will be eligible for a new internship stipend program being created by the Farm Credit Council. On Tuesday, the group announced the Launching Leaders program, which will offer a \$3,500 stipend — offered in addition to other wages that might be received through the internship — to HBCU students or recent graduates who intern with a Farm Credit institution across the country. Farm Credit Council President and CEO Todd Van Hoose pointed out in a statement that internships “often come with a whole range of financial burdens like travel, rent and a professional wardrobe. The Launching Leaders program will help offset those costs for HBCU students. HBCU students interested in financial services, IT, marketing and more will find great career opportunities at Farm Credit.” Farm Credit will also host a job fair specifically for HBCU students Thursday. The move comes as ag companies reassess their diversity efforts following racial tumult earlier this year. The National Farmers Union in September announced a memorandum of understanding with the Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS) that included a pledge to “motivate and prepare young adults of all racial ethnic groups to pursue careers in agriculture, food, fiber and natural resources systems.” The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture also issued an MOU with MANRRS. Florida A&M University recently launched a collegiate Farm Bureau chapter, joining North Carolina A&T in the ranks of HBCUs with such an affiliation.

EPA releases interim decisions on paraquat, pyrethroids. The Environmental Protection Agency is seeking comments on a proposed interim registration review decision for the herbicide paraquat that includes new safety requirements. Among them: A prohibition on aerial application except for cotton desiccation as well as on pressurized handgun and backpack sprayer application methods, a limit on the maximum rate for alfalfa to one pound of active ingredient per acre, and a requirement that cabs be enclosed if the area treated in a 24-hour

period is more than 80 acres. The agency will accept comments on the proposal through Dec. 22. EPA also has released [interim registration review decisions](#) for 13 pyrethroids that include exceptions to requirements for expanded 25-foot vegetative filter strips (VFS's) when applying the insecticides near water. Responding to concerns raised by the industry and USDA, the agency said application areas of 10 acres or less would qualify for 15-foot strips instead of proposed 25-foot strips, and western irrigated agriculture would be exempt if a sediment control basin is present. [Responding](#) to comments on last year's ecological risk mitigation proposal, the agency said small-scale operations "may be disproportionately impacted by an expanded 25-foot VFS requirement."

Chipotle to include sustainability measurements on digital orders. Mexican fast-casual chain Chipotle has launched a new feature on its digital ordering platforms to give customers a "sustainability impact tracker" of their meals. The tracker will use key metrics to create a "Real Foodprint" score that compares "Chipotle's ingredients and sourcing standards to an industry average, and the metrics provide a snapshot of computed environmental savings across categories," the company said in a [release](#). Caitlin Leibert, Chipotle's head of sustainability, said the new tool demonstrates "the impact of our sourcing practices through data computed based on the ingredients in our guests' orders." The tool also "holds us accountable to improve our practices and source more sustainably over time." The chain, which has more than 2,700 locations worldwide, has long marketed based on the ingredients it uses in the production of its burritos, tacos, and other menu items, frequently boasting about their interpretation of superior sourcing and products. The five metrics — less carbon in the atmosphere, gallons of water saved, improved soil health, organic land supported, and antibiotics avoided — are scored for all 53 of Chipotle's ingredients. The company says the tracker will display "the difference between average data for each ingredient based on Chipotle's sourcing standards and conventional, industry average standards." Earlier this month, a similar effort was announced that would [flag "climate-friendly" dishes](#) on restaurant menus that are produced in line with the goals necessary to meet the Paris Climate Accords. Panera Bread is the first company that used "Cool Food Meals" badges on its digital menus.

Farm Hands West: Hudnutt tapped to be CEO of American AgCredit

Curt Hudnutt has been tapped as the new president and chief executive officer of American AgCredit. He succeeds Byron Enix who has been with the Farm Credit System for 37 years, the past seven of which he served as president and CEO. Hudnutt previously served as head of rural banking for North America at Rabo Agrifinance.

Roland Fumasi will lead Rabobank's RaboResearch Food & Agribusiness team in North America. Fumasi joined Rabobank as an analyst in 2014, and in 2017 was appointed manager of the Fresno, Calif., RaboResearch team. He most recently served as a senior fresh produce and tree nut analyst. Before joining Rabobank, Fumasi worked with Utility Fleet Sales Ltd., as the vice president of marketing and finance.



Curt Hudnutt



Roland Fumasi

FMC Corporation announced that **Dr. Karen Totland**, vice president, Procurement, Sustainability and Global Facilities, has been appointed to the newly created role of vice president and chief sustainability officer. **Thaisa Hugeneuyer**, director of Business Process Transformation, has been elected vice president, Procurement and Global Facilities. Totland and Hugeneuyer will report to Mark Douglas, president and CEO, effective January 1, 2021.

Index Fresh has promoted **John Dmytriw** to vice president of business development. Dmytriw joined the avocado company in 2008, and most recently was senior business specialist.

Jesse Lopez has been hired as commodity account manager for Ocean Mist Farms. Lopez most recently was a senior account manager and director of business development with Tanimura & Antle for 15 years.

Tony Alameda has been elected to serve as the new chair of the Grower-Shipper Association. A second-generation farmer, Alameda is principal at Top Flavor Farms. Alameda is also a co-founder of Sabor Farms. **Tom Nunes V** of The Nunes Company will serve as vice chairman and **Victor Ramirez** of NorCal Harvesting will serve as secretary/treasurer. Alameda takes over the role of chair from Jason Smith of Smith Family Wines.

The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council and the North American Blueberry Council has hired **Jennifer Spark** as vice president of marketing and communications and **Adam Winland** as financial controller. Sparks was at the Society of American Florists for 21 years, 17 as vice president of marketing. Winland has 14 years of financial management experience and will oversee the councils' day-to-day accounting and provide strategic financial direction.

Earl's Organic has promoted **Carson Evers** to buyer and **Jonathan Kitchens** to purchasing manager. Evers has been with Earl's Organics since 2015 in quality assurance/inventory control. Kitchens previously was a fruit buyer.

Franz De Klotz has joined the sales staff at Peter Rabbit Farms. For the past 20 years, De Klotz has worked for Richard Bagdasarian, Inc. starting and overseeing the vegetable division, Pasha Marketing. He served as the vice president of marketing for both companies. De Klotz also is a director of Western Growers for the Coachella Valley.

Fall Creek Farm & Nursery Inc., appointed **Oscar Verges** to a co-CEO position, sharing duties with **Cort Brazelton**. Verges joined the nursery company in 2016 and was named president and chief operating officer in 2018. **Amelie Brazelton Aust** has been named executive vice chairwoman of the company's board of directors. Aust was formerly co-CEO with Brazelton, her most recent position was interim director of product development and communication.

The Produce Marketing Association selected six new industry leaders to sit on its board of directors. The new members are as follows: **Alan Aguirre Ibarra**, CEO of Grupo Alta and Divine Flavor LLC; **Amelie Aust**, Co-CEO and second-generation owner at Fall Creek; **Nikki Cossio**, founder and CEO of Measure to Improve; **Amy Gates**, former president of Frontera Produce of Edinburg, Texas; Daniel Mathieson, chief executive of Zespri; and **Jim Richter**, president and CEO of Amerifresh in Scottsdale, Ariz. The PMA Board will be led by chair **Dwight Ferguson**, president and CEO of Naturipe Farms.

Trevor Suslow has decided to step down from his full-time duties as vice president of produce safety at the Produce Marketing Association. He will remain engaged with PMA on a part-time basis and will also return to UC Davis as an emeritus extension research specialist. Suslow has been with the organization for the past two years. His last day of full-time employment at PMA will be Dec. 1., and a search will begin to identify Suslow's replacement in the coming weeks.

Megan Nelson has left the American Farm Bureau Federation where she worked as an economic analyst focused on rural and global development, infrastructure, and tax issues. She has taken a new job with Ardent Eagle Solutions as a trade research analyst/evaluator.....**Tyler Davis** has left the Arizona Farm Bureau where he worked as the government relations manager.

USDA has appointed 13 members, 13 alternate members, and one adviser to serve on The Cotton Board. The newly appointed members are: **Ben Guthrie**, La.; and **Thomas Hayes III**, Miss. The newly appointed alternate members are: **Matthew Cauzza**, Calif.; **Justin Cave**, Texas; and **Susanne St. Onge-Simpson**, Calif. Reappointed members are: **Pace Hindsley**, Ark.; **Dustin Mancebo**, Calif.; **David Dunlow**, N.C.; **Bryan Patterson**, Texas; **Debra Barrett**, Texas; **Sigi Valverde**, Texas; **Chuck Ward**, N.C.; **Scott Johnson**, Calif.; **Akiko Inui**, N.Y.; **Laurie Sutandar**, Texas; and **Debi Gregg**, Calif. Reappointed alternate members are: **Rafe Banks**, Ark.; **Rebecca Thom**, La.; **Patrick Johnson**, Miss.; **Kent Smith**, N.C.; **Michael Popp**, Texas; **Jon Jones**, Texas; **James McKinnon**, N.Y.; **Dean Draughn**, Md.; **Barbara Buhr**, Conn.; and **Stefanie Rotta**, Mich. **Jennifer Pisula**, Del., has been appointed to serve in an importer alternate position and **Willie Scott**, Ga., was appointed to an adviser position term.

Best regards,

Sara Wyant

Editor

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