

California schools import peaches despite “Buy American” policies

Modesto is at the heart of peach country for the nation. Yet children sitting down for lunch in the Central Valley city’s public schools are likely being served cheaper peach products imported from countries where production costs are low and regulatory oversight is weaker.

This is despite a number of recent actions on the state and federal level to close loopholes and better enforce the Buy American provision of the federal Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act of 1998.

In early November, Rich Hudgins, who is president of the California Canning Peach Association, was sent a photo from a Modesto school lunch of a Dole brand peaches packaged in Thailand and grown in Greece, one of the California industry’s closest competitors alongside China.



An imported peach cup found in a Modesto area school.

“Of all the cities that you would expect this to occur in, Modesto would be the last,” he said in an interview. “I suspect the procurement folks thought since it was a U.S. company and brand, and California is a big peach producing state, then of course it’s domestic.”

Del Monte Foods employs 1,500 workers in its Modesto plant and Seneca Foods employed about 300 in the city before closing its plant in 2018.

While one incident of imported peaches may seem like a minor event, to Hudgins it’s the latest front in a four-year policy battle. Finding foreign peaches in school lunches, Hudgins had spearheaded an effort in 2015 that led Sacramento City Unified Schools to immediately retreat from its contracts for imported Chinese fruit. This helped Hudgins draw state legislators into the discussion.

In 2016, Senator Cathleen Galgiani, D-Stockton, requested a Department of Education audit to determine which schools were in compliance with the Buy American provision. The audit found none of the school districts reviewed had adequate policies for meeting the requirements. They had also purchased foreign-sourced foods and did not have any documentation to justify the purchases. The audit notes that California receives nearly \$2 billion a year through the federal breakfast and lunch programs.

This spurred Senator Richard Pan, D-Sacramento, to propose Senate Bill 730, requiring the department to monitor and support schools in complying with the Buy American provision. California passed the bill in 2017, as Congress was also taking up the initiative. Part of the argument then was that “spending taxpayer dollars to import products from nations not complying with equivalent emissions standards” violated the state’s efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



Rich Hudgins, president of the California Canning Peach Association

Democratic Rep. John Garamendi had introduced the American Food for American Schools Act with Republican Rep. Doug LaMalfa. The bill would have required school lunch providers to apply for a waiver when purchasing foreign products, but it failed to pass. The congressmen reintroduced the bill in February 2019, adding a provision that parents would be notified when students are served “foreign-produced foods paid for by taxpayers.”

Hudgins found food industry partners across the country facing the same issue. Labor unions, fearing workers were losing jobs due to unfair competition, joined the fight.

“We learned that over half the states in the country had schools that had gotten bids from distributors that resulted in imported products being served in the school feeding program,” he said.

More than 80% of the apple juice served in schools was of Chinese origin, they discovered. Yet it was fish sticks that levied the most substantial policy change. The coalition, now incorporating dozens of trade groups, found up to 70% of the sticks served in schools came from fish caught on Russian vessels and processed in China. They also found grass-fed beef coming in from Brazil. Dozens of trade groups lobbied Congress.

The problem stems from two exemptions included in the Buy American provision. The National School Lunch Act was signed in 1946 and had clear language to supply children with food that was 100% domestically grown, which supported farmers returning to work after the war. The Buy American provision of 1988 then delivered implementation guidance on the act to USDA. Now foods, like bananas, not produced domestically, would be excluded from the regulation. A second exclusion applied to any products with a significant price differential, which Hudgins said was likely to prevent suppliers from gouging the taxpayer.

“As a practical matter today, it gives the opportunity for any school interested in buying solely on price to purchase the cheaper foreign product,” he said.

While the exclusions still exist, the coalition was able to insert new requirements into the 2018 Farm Bill. Section 4207 directed USDA to enforce full compliance with the act within 180 days and added that fish must be harvested within the U.S. or by a U.S. ship, a win for the Alaskan

halibut industry. In June, USDA reported to Congress it had clarified its standards on the exemptions and expanded its outreach and training for school food providers, while later issuing additional guidance to providers.

In a statement, a spokesperson for Modesto City Schools told *Agri-Pulse* a USDA audit completed in May found no violations of the Buy American provision within its schools. The district's bidding process requires companies to submit Buy American certification statements, she said. Yet the peach cup was found by a parent in a school within the Sylvan School District, within a neighborhood in northern Modesto. The district was unable to comment in time for publication.

Hudgins said the photo is another indication how this remains a work in progress. The Farm Bill requirements do not provide a solution to fixing the problem. Reauthorization of child nutrition programs is still on the horizon, He continues to meet with congressional lawmakers in hopes of inserting language into the program.

“We're continuing to try to go back to the original congressional intent,” he said. “Let’s recognize the competitive landscape in 2019 is a lot different than it was in 1988.”

The trend today has not been good for the peach industry. About 30% of the nation’s supply is sourced from abroad. Meanwhile, canneries have not renewed contracts with about 30 growers following the 2019 season. Many have already been transitioning from labor-intensive stone fruits to more mechanized commodities like tree nuts. This season, California growers delivered about 260,000 tons of cling peaches to processors, down from 460,000 a decade ago. Foreign imports are up 10% this year. Hudgins sees the Buy American provision as one opportunity to slow the tide.

“In today’s environment, with an administration that is heavily focused on buying American....if we can’t get it now, we’ll never get it,” he added.

Seven questions for Don Cameron, president of the State Ag Board

Don Cameron had no farming experience 40 years ago. Appointed by Governor Jerry Brown, Cameron serves as president the State Board of Food and Agriculture, advising CDFA on policies and providing Sacramento with a voice for California farmers.

Cameron oversees operations at Terranova Ranch, a 6,000-acre farm near Fresno with a mix of 25 commodities in both conventional and organic. He was an early adopter of on-farm groundwater recharge for both the ranch and his own 900-acre farm, partnering with the nonprofit group Sustainable Conservation.



As a biology major, Cameron actually hoped for a career in wildlife management and took a job with UC cooperation extension in the meantime. He then worked as a pest control advisor before joining Terranova.

Today Cameron is often invited to deliver talks on agricultural policy and sustainability across the state, testifying twice to Congress as well.

He spoke with *Agri-Pulse* recently on the top concerns he hears from farmers, as well as on the growth of sustainable ag and the decline of the industry's influence at the capitol.

1. How has sustainable ag policy in California evolved over time?

The state has realized farmers are part of the solution to cleaning up our environment. It put money into on-farm sustainability programs to show growers they can farm while being profitable and also very sustainable.

We know farmland can sequester carbon. We don't just have to have field after field of production. But we can incorporate other parts of sustainability into our farm to make it really a richer place to be. We're looking at farming as part of the solution to greenhouse gases, to carbon, to pollinator habitat.

There's just so much we can do together, rather than fighting each other all the time. The farmers have seen that, and the environmental groups have seen that, too. When we produce crops, we also produce an ecosystem on the farm that can be beneficial to others.

2. How do the farmers you engage with feel about sustainability programs?



Don Cameron speaking at a forum on groundwater recharge.

You get a wide range of farmers and a lot of viewpoints. When we start talking about groundwater recharge, it was kind of lukewarm back in 2010. But once SGMA was passed in 2014, all of a sudden people started thinking about groundwater and how to continue to farm in the future.

Everybody realized groundwater recharge could be a very good solution to help with sustainability for the aquifers.

We've seen farmers embrace the SWEEP program (State Water Efficiency Enhancement Program). It's oversubscribed,

whenever it is funded.

With the Healthy Soils initiative, it's been a little slower. It incentivizes growers and gives them a chance to try different techniques on the farm that are going to be beneficial. The grower can talk firsthand to the researchers and see the benefits in their own area. You're going to see that become more prominent as we look forward.

3. What stood out from the board's listening sessions with farmers over the summer?

We heard a lot about the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), which we anticipated. That's the issue facing growers definitely in the San Joaquin Valley but also in areas along the coastal Salinas Valley and the Paso Robles area near San Louis Obispo.

We saw a tremendous amount of interest in how growers are going to make corrections and where the funding is going to come from to build the infrastructure we need.

4. **Have you seen local politics heating up over SGMA issues?**

There are definitely water-rich areas and water-poor areas.

I chair our local Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) and we are in a critically overdrafted basin. It was difficult because we had a coordination agreement we had to get through and had to get our (Groundwater Sustainability Plan) wrapped up. Our GSA was one of the first in the state to complete the plan and approve our draft.

We do see that there are local issues that long-term are going to hopefully be resolved. We need to work as a basin. There is more cooperation as we're getting closer to implementation.

You're talking about huge portions of the San Joaquin Valley taken out of production with idling. Our goal should be to keep as much land in production as possible. It not only affects the farmer; it affects the rural community.

The buy-in is important. As far as contentious issues, they always will be there when you talk about water.

5. **What's your view on the Legislature?**

Going back in time, agriculture had a stronger voice in Sacramento, and that's faded.

You have so many in the State Assembly and Senate coming from the largest cities. We need to bring them on to the farm and show them what our issues are.

We know we're not going to win every battle.

The overtime issue was contentious. I've got to go explain to my workers why they're getting paid less. We just can't pay the overtime and in the long run, it hurts the workers.

My guys aren't happy with it and other farmers tell me the same thing. I understand the social justice side of the of the issue that everybody should be on the same level. Unfortunately, agriculture is driven by a limited period for harvest for securing your crop. It's also becoming harder and harder to get the labor we need.

6. **What differences are you seeing between the two governors?**

Brown tended to not be as engaged as Governor Newsom is, who has made a serious effort to bring the San Joaquin Valley into the conversation.

We see much better cooperation between Natural Resources, CalEPA and CDFG. The leadership at the top has focused on the agency's working together.

I know we're never going to reduce the regulatory issues we have in California. But maybe they can make them flow better and make the agencies a little more responsive to the demands we have in California agriculture.

The State Water Board has streamlined some of the temporary permitting for flood water recharge. That's a real plus. That started with the governor listening to what we needed. Any delays are expensive and any way we can cut through some of the red tape and do some interagency work is going to be helpful in the long run.

7. **What are your plans for your final year as board president?**

We are going to visit the Salton Sea and get updated on their situation. We need to be involved and understand the intricacies of the area.

Another topic I hope to push this coming year is rural broadband internet, not just for farms but for the rural community. We're in desperate need of assistance out here. We're a hundred miles from Silicon Valley, and we have internet speeds that don't even get one megabyte per second. You're in the Stone Age with rural internet. The solutions aren't good or easy or inexpensive. I'd like to push to see if we can get some change at a higher level.

USDA pursues 'sustainable intensification' as climate fix

Senior political leaders at USDA, which has been accused of downplaying the department's own climate research under the Trump administration, insist that helping farmers address climate change is a priority for the department, asserting that sustainably increasing food production to feed a growing global population is a matter of “world security.”



USDA Deputy Secretary Steve Censky

In the keynote address at last week's fourth annual Sustainable Agriculture Summit in Indianapolis, Deputy Agriculture Secretary Steve Censky repeatedly used the terms “climate” and “climate change.” He said USDA had a significant role to play in developing metrics to measure the impact of farmers and conservation practices on climate change and in carrying out and funding the research that will be needed to reduce emissions and help farmers adapt.

“Farmers, along with our livestock producers and others in the value chain will need to practice sustainable intensification, increasing yields, increasing production, while at the same time ... conserving our natural resources and protecting the environment and enhancing sustainability,” he said.

He went on, **“Food security is not only a national security issue, it is indeed a world security issue.”**

He also said USDA “recognizes we play a key role in helping farmers adapt to a changing climate. And we play a key role in helping farmers to become more resilient and implement climate smarter agriculture practices.”

He told reporters after the speech that USDA-funded conservation and extension programs will be critical to getting farmers to adopt new practices and technologies.

It's not clear whether or to what extent USDA might shift or increase climate-related research spending, but Censky's speech represented an unusually blunt assessment of the importance of climate change to agriculture and follows criticism of the department for reducing press releases about the department's internal research.

In September, the ranking member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, and other Senate Democrats released a list of more than 1,400 climate change studies authored by USDA researchers but largely unpublicized. "The studies show climate change is affecting agricultural productivity, disrupting how food is grown, and increasing risks to rural communities," the report said.

Also this year, a leading USDA researcher on climate change, Lewis Ziska, left the department, citing in part a dispute with managers over a 2018 paper he co-authored predicting that higher carbon dioxide levels would result in lower levels of micronutrients in rice.

Censky is "steering USDA towards a place where science-based decisions can be made there," said Bruce Knight, a former undersecretary for USDA's conservation programs in the George W. Bush administration.

Knight now operates a consulting firm and is helping develop the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium, a national effort to develop a nationwide credit trading system for farm practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve water quality.

The Indianapolis summit where Censky spoke drew a record attendance of more than 600 people, including representatives of a variety of food and agriculture companies representing various segments of the supply chain.



Bruce Knight

Knight said there has been a groundswell of corporate interest in voluntary methods of reducing greenhouse gas emissions since President Donald Trump announced he was pulling the United States out of the Paris climate agreement.

Both Censky and Scott Hutchins, USDA's deputy undersecretary for research, education and economics, have addressed the climate issue before the Senate Agriculture Committee. Hutchins told Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, in 2018 that he accepted a "large body of work" showing human activity was accelerating climate change.

After Censky's speech last Thursday, *Agri-Pulse* submitted a series of questions about USDA's research plans to Hutchins. Responding in an email, Hutchins said the core focus on USDA's internal research and funding of outside research "is on finding data-driven solutions around soil health, regenerative agriculture, invasive species, food animal biosecurity, digital agriculture, automation and artificial intelligence." **He said USDA research program managers are now "assessing how to ensure we have no gaps in our research and how to accelerate for faster and meaningful results."**

He said improving “sustainability metrics, data, and reporting for our research in this area. It’s a priority for our entire mission area for the coming fiscal year and years to come.”

Bill Hohenstein, who directs USDA’s Office of Energy and Environmental Policy, said the department is **currently working to update a computer modeling tool that provides estimates of how much various farming and conservation practices will have on emissions of the three greenhouse gases connected to agriculture, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane.**

The tool, known by the acronym COMET, was developed by USDA’s Natural Resource Conservation Service in partnership with Colorado State University. The tool has been made available to Stonyfield Farm Inc. and other companies that are working with suppliers to reduce their carbon footprints.

But the tool is out of date when it comes to the development of enhanced efficiency fertilizers, said Hohenstein, a career employee at USDA who once served as the U.S. representative to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.



Bill Hohenstein, USDA

“Those practices have a lot of promise to reduce nitrous oxide emissions and increase production,” he said. Applying nitrogen fertilizer to fields releases nitrous oxide, a potent greenhouse gas.

USDA has a critical role to play in terms of the basic research that is needed to reliably estimate and track the impact of farming practices and technology on carbon emissions and water quality, said Debbie Reed, executive director of the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium, which aims to enroll millions of acres of farm and rangeland in a credit trading program. The Foundation for Food and Agriculture

Research (FFAR) recently announced a \$10.3 million award to build out the research arm of the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium.

“It would be great if we had more soil carbon information and better soil carbon information across the country,” she said. In many instances, the existing data is outdated and doesn’t reflect the actual variations in soil types.

Facility risk management rule divides aggies, enviros

Ag and environmental organizations are split in their assessment of new EPA regulations requiring production and retail establishments handling certain hazardous chemicals — such as anhydrous ammonia — to prepare risk management plans.

Agricultural groups are pleased with the new Risk Management Program rule, which eliminates some key requirements included in an earlier rule issued by the Obama administration in 2017. That rule was prompted by a 2013 ammonium nitrate explosion and fire at the West Fertilizer Company in West, Texas.

Among the changes: EPA decided not to mandate the production of third-party audits following accidents including RMP-covered chemicals, but said the agency can still require them “under appropriate circumstances.”

Nor will companies need to prepare Safer Technologies and Alternatives Analyses. The analyses were “not practical to implement or necessary given that the evidence does not demonstrate reduction in accidents,” EPA said in a fact sheet on the rule, adding that the elimination of those analyses accounts for \$70 million of the \$88 million total in regulatory cost savings compared with the original RMP rule.

At the level of the retail dealer, conducting an STAA analysis “didn’t make a lot of sense,” said Kathy Mathers, a spokesperson for The Fertilizer Institute. And at the production level, “there are no feasible large-scale alternatives to the use of natural gas” to produce nitrogen fertilizers.



Richard Gupton, ARA

EPA also will not be requiring a “root cause analysis” after an RMP-reportable accident or “near miss.” The agency said it was scrapping that requirement in order to be consistent with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s Process Safety Management standard. In addition, “many facilities may already use root cause analysis for incident investigations,” EPA said in a fact sheet on the rule.

The Agricultural Retailers Association also weighed in with support for the new rule. “Our industry has a pretty strong safety record,” said Richard Gupton, ARA’s senior vice president of public policy and counsel.

Regarding the dropping of the root-cause analysis requirement, he said. “There’s nothing prohibiting the agencies” from looking into how accidents occurred.

Gupton also pointed out, as ARA and TFI have done repeatedly, that the 2013 explosion and fire was caused by ammonium nitrate, a chemical not covered under the RMP, and not anhydrous ammonia, which is covered.

The anhydrous ammonia tanks at the site “worked as intended,” Gupton said. A U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board report released in 2016 said the two 12,000-gallon vessels, which were about 30% full, “did not catastrophically fail on the night of the incident,” which the CSB said was “a near-miss of potentially significant consequence.”

In its rule, EPA said accidental releases have been declining at facilities nationwide and with that, the amount of property damage. “The overall decrease in property damage and fatalities from RMP accidents supports the conclusion that, similar to declining accident rates, the severity of accidents at RMP facilities is also declining,” EPA said.

But environmental groups who fought for implementation of the 2017 rule, disputed whether accidents are in fact declining, and said “about 12,300 industrial facilities nationwide use, store, or manage highly hazardous chemicals” covered by the RMP rule.

“Nearly 180 million Americans live in the worst-case scenario zones for a chemical disaster,” the 13 groups, including the Union of Concerned Scientists, said. “At least one in three children go to a school near a hazardous chemical facility.”

Earthjustice lawyer Emma Cheuse said, citing EPA’s own analysis, chemical accidents cause approximately \$274.7 million per year in damages — and that does not include non-monetized damages.



Emma Cheuse, Earthjustice

“We have documented, preventable explosions happening every day,” Cheuse said. The \$88 million in savings is a “small amount of money to save when considering the harm that can occur.”

The agency’s own National Environmental Justice Advisory Council, a federal advisory committee, wrote to EPA in May “strongly” urging it not to rescind the 2017 rule. “EPA found that this rule would protect the most vulnerable communities, workers, and first-responders from disastrous chemical releases, fires, and explosions,” the group told EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler in May.

Richard Moore, co-founder and co-coordinator of Les Jardines Institute in Albuquerque, N.M., and chair of the NEJAC, told *Agri-Pulse* when it comes to chemical accidents, “it’s already been said the most vulnerable communities are going to be the most heavily impacted.”

He also said the issue would be taken up at the next NEJAC meeting in Florida at the end of February.

The Fertilizer Institute’s Mathers said many fertilizer dealers have had their facilities certified as compliant with local, state and federal laws under an industry-led initiative called Responsible Ag. Of approximately 6,000 retailers nationwide, 1,300 have been certified and more than 3,000 audits conducted.

“They are essentially certifying that they are up to date with all regulations,” she said. In California, she said the program has incorporated state-specific requirements into its checklist.

FDA issues strong new warnings on CBD, won’t recognize as GRAS

CBD products are marketed almost everywhere these days, and hemp farmers are counting on this new, emerging market to bolster their revenues. However, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is stepping up its warnings on CBD in dietary supplements and food products. On Monday, the agency issued warning letters to 15 companies for illegally selling products containing cannabidiol (CBD) in ways that violate the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FD&C Act). Five of the 15 firms are located in California.

The FDA also published a revised Consumer Update detailing safety concerns about CBD products more broadly and noted that the product is not generally recognized as safe (GRAS) for use in food products. “Based on the lack of scientific information supporting the safety of CBD in food, the FDA is also indicating today that it cannot conclude that CBD is

generally recognized as safe among qualified experts for its use in human or animal food,” the agency noted in a release.

“There also is no food additive regulation which authorizes the use of CBD as an ingredient in human food or animal food, and the agency is not aware of any other exemption from the food additive definition that would apply to CBD,” FDA said. **“CBD is therefore an unapproved food additive, and its use in human or animal food violates the FD&C Act for reasons that are independent of its status as a drug ingredient.”** But FDA also pointed out that it “continues to explore potential pathways” for CBD products to be lawfully marketed.

“As we work quickly to further clarify our regulatory approach for products containing cannabis and cannabis-derived compounds like CBD, we’ll continue to monitor the marketplace and take action as needed against companies that violate the law in ways that raise a variety of public health concerns,” FDA Principal Deputy Commissioner Amy Abernethy said. “In line with our mission to protect the public, foster innovation, and promote consumer confidence, this overarching approach regarding CBD is the same as the FDA would take for any other substance that we regulate.

“We remain concerned that some people wrongly think that the myriad of CBD products on the market, many of which are illegal, have been evaluated by the FDA and determined to be safe, or that trying CBD ‘can’t hurt.’”

Abernethy noted that, aside from one prescription drug approved to treat two pediatric epilepsy disorders, these products have not been approved by the FDA.



FDA Principal Deputy Commissioner Amy Abernethy

“We want to be clear that a number of questions remain regarding CBD’s safety — including reports of products containing contaminants, such as pesticides and heavy metals — and there are real risks that need to be considered,” Abernethy said. “We recognize the significant public interest in CBD and we must work together with stakeholders and industry to fill in the knowledge gaps about the science, safety and quality of many of these products.”

“The specific content of these warnings provides valuable lessons to companies as to how the FDA may continue to enforce and regulate CBD, especially as it relates to children, social media, and animal products and feed residue,” noted the law firm Faegre Baker Daniels in an [alert](#).

“The breadth and scope of issues described in the warning letters confirms that the FDA has its sight on dietary supplements and food that contain CBD, even as the agency continues to use enforcement discretion for many products,” the law firm said. “These enforcement actions suggest that all companies, not just CBD-focused companies, should understand that enforcement discretion is not a shield for illegal or ignorant practices resulting in drug claims, inappropriate use of social media and, most importantly, failure to confirm product safety.”

Veteran GOP members vying for House Ag leadership

Three Republicans are vying to snag their party's top spot on the House Agriculture Committee to replace the retiring Mike Conaway of Texas, who is set to reach the limit of how long he can serve in the position under GOP rules.

Two of the three, Rick Crawford of Arkansas and Austin Scott of Georgia, represent southern states, which have long had an outsized influence among committee Republicans. The third candidate, Glenn "GT" Thompson of Pennsylvania, is working hard to demonstrate that it's time to have someone from the Keystone state at the helm of the committee.

The decision will ultimately be made a year from now by the House GOP steering committee, which is made up of Republican leaders and a regional representation of House GOP members.

When it comes to fundraising and reaching out to commodity groups, "the person working that race harder than anyone, hands down right now is GT Thompson," one ag lobbyist told *Agri-Pulse*. "He's doing all the things necessary to move into that position, but the other two candidates are also starting to make inroads and trying to start to build some support."

Another veteran ag lobbyist, Mary Kay Thatcher, senior government affairs lead for Syngenta, told *Agri-Pulse* whoever wins the position must have a balanced understanding of all the commodities as well as nutrition policy.

"Think about it, the farm bill is 76% nutrition programs as far as money is concerned ... unlike what probably the Senate and House Ag Committee was like 30 years ago, where really farm policy was their big thing by far. That's no longer the case."

Almost a year after passing the 2018 farm bill and halfway through House Democrats reclaiming the chamber's majority for the 116th Congress, House Ag Committee member Roger Marshall, R-Kan., said the committee has been quiet about the race.

"I think a lot of us are mourning (Conaway) leaving. We're more focused on a getting the majority back than worrying about who is going to be the next committee chairman," Marshall told *Agri-Pulse*.

Here's a glimpse of how each of the three view the opportunity and some of their key issues.

Rep. Rick Crawford, R-Ark.

This former Army explosive technician and ag broadcaster from Jonesboro, Ark., wanted to have a seat on the House Agriculture Committee since he got to Congress in 2010.

"I came here specifically to be a voice in ag policy and advocate for farmers," Crawford told *Agri-Pulse*.

If selected to lead the committee's Republicans, Crawford said he would prioritize legislation for jurisdictional authority to develop disaster savings accounts for farmers, an approach to disaster assistance similar to health savings accounts.

He would like to reform the H-2A visa program by switching the program oversight from the Department of Labor to USDA. Crawford also wants to develop risk management tools for commodities beyond traditional row crops.

But Crawford faces an obvious hurdle. He's from the same state as Sen. John Boozman, R-Ark., who is in line to lead the Senate Agriculture Committee's Republicans in 2021 after Chairman Pat Roberts, R-Kan., retires. No state has led both Ag committees since 1947-1949, when Kansas Republican Rep. Clifford Hope and GOP Sen. Arther Capper chaired the House and Senate panels.



Rep. Rick Crawford, R-Ark.

Crawford dismissed the idea that it would be a problem for two lawmakers from the same state to lead both committees. He agreed Arkansas has a lot of rice, cotton, soybeans, and peanut production, but noted that it also has emerging specialty crops along with livestock and poultry operations.

“A diverse crop mix means you are considering a lot of different perspectives on how farm policy should look, and a single program crop view does not bode well. I don’t care what state you’re from,” Crawford said.

Asked what outreach he has done for the House Ag leadership race, he said he has always met with representatives of commodity groups outside of Arkansas and also is working to better understand dairy policy.

“We don’t have any dairy production in my district to speak of, but it is important to the country. One of the biggest dairy companies is in bankruptcy right now,” Crawford noted. He continues to pay attention to the dairy sector, noting a decline is threatening the viability of the industry.

Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga.

A native of Georgia, Rep. Scott is no stranger to agriculture, having worked on his grandparents’ farm during his teenage years. The former insurance broker is now in his fifth term in Congress and serves as ranking member of House Ag's Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy and Credit.

Scott feels his aggressiveness sets him apart, specifically when it comes to resolving problems and risk management.

“The key problem we have with agriculture right now is the risk is getting bigger ... and not smaller,” Scott said. “I think as we look forward, we have to go back to the drawing board and look at things like crop insurance.”

Scott would like to expand the crop insurance program to create an all-perils harvest contract to protect farmers against damage that happens shortly before harvest.

“Depending on the carrier, four weeks before harvest time, you would have to ability to purchase the coverage on the total value of the crop, which includes poundage and price,” Scott said.



Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga.

In 2018, many cotton growers in southern Georgia were unable to harvest potentially bumper crops of cotton before they were destroyed by Hurricane Michael. Since their insurance coverage was based on their production history, it didn't reflect the better-than-average yields that they would have had. Scott and other lawmakers subsequently worked to get the growers supplemental disaster payments, but he wants a permanent fix.

Scott's idea would allow farmers to get an indemnity on the appraised value of the crop that was damaged at harvest time, not the growers' actual production history, or APH.

“When we’re paying out producers based on average yields, and the farmer lost what would have been the best yields they would have had in 10 years, those numbers don’t work,” he said.

He also said the Agriculture chairman must understand other industries outside the crops grown in their own neck of the woods, citing dairy as an example.

“When I walk down the aisle at the grocery store, I am always buying milk and cheese. We have to make sure that industry is there so that grocery store aisle is full,” he said.

He said if he doesn’t understand a particular commodity's issues, he relies on other members to explain the needs of that sector.

As the chairman or ranking member, “it is your responsibility to make sure you are taking care of production agricultural policy throughout the U.S.,” he said.

Rep. Glenn “GT” Thompson R-Pa.

This descendant from a long line of dairy producers has sat 11 years on the House Agriculture Committee and serves as ranking member of the general farm commodities and risk management subcommittee. His vision as leader of the committee's Republicans is twofold: To have a robust rural America and to serve the next generation of family farms.

“We need to make sure that we provide the right kind of policies so folks can find opportunity in rural America,” Thompson said.

Thompson has been on the road and visiting with commodity groups he’s not all that familiar with, including the cotton, sugar beet, and sugar cane industries. This fall, he toured the USDA cotton classing facility in Memphis, Tenn., across the Mississippi River from Crawford's home state, and visited a cotton farm and gin as well as cotton warehouse facilities in western Tennessee. His policy priorities include developing new markets for agricultural products, improving the farm safety net and improving rural broadband connectivity.

He wants to expand marketing opportunities not just abroad but here at home. One of those ways is by expanding access to commodity purchases through The Emergency Food Assistance Program, or TEFAP. It is a federal program providing low-income Americans with emergency food assistance at no cost.

Thompson also hopes to continue to improve the Agricultural Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs as well as policies like the farm bill's Dairy Margin Coverage program to make them effective and affordable for producers. He wants to improve rural broadband by boosting wireless 5G connectivity for farmers.



Rep. Glenn Thompson, R-Pa.

“We should have as much reliability to get connectivity into our farms, homes, and rural communities (like) when we turn a switch and the lights come on,” Thompson said. He went on to say improvements in telehealth, telemedicine and rural broadband are critical for rural communities.

News Briefs:

USDA boosts export forecast, more fruit imports on the way. USDA raised its forecast for U.S. farm exports in fiscal 2020 to \$139 billion, up \$2 billion from the August estimate, and \$3.5 billion above the FY19 exports. U.S. agricultural imports in FY 2020 are forecast at \$132.0 billion, up \$3 billion from the August forecast, primarily due to expected increases in fresh fruits and grain products. Fresh fruit imports are raised \$1.7 billion to \$15 billion, largely due to increased deliveries of avocados, berries, and melons from Mexico. Forecast imports of horticultural products for FY 2020 rises by \$2.0 billion over the previous forecast to \$66.0 billion, which is still \$200 million less than actual horticultural imports in FY 2019. Forecast imports of processed fruits and malt beers increases by \$200 million due to increased demand. USDA economists say expectations of a deal with China on ag trade have helped boost the value of soybean, pork and cotton exports. USDA’s estimate for FY20 pork exports was raised \$400 million to \$6.7 billion, largely due to demand from China. The beef export forecast is reduced \$200 million, reflecting lower unit values but overall livestock, poultry, and dairy exports are forecast at \$31.9 billion, \$500 million higher than the August projection. Cotton exports are raised by \$300 million to \$6.1 billion from higher unit values. Exports of horticultural products are unchanged from the previous forecast at \$35.5 billion. Whole and processed tree nuts are unchanged at \$9.1 billion, with most shipments destined for Europe and Asia. Fresh fruits and vegetables are unchanged at \$7.1 billion on stable shipments to Canada and Mexico, the top two U.S. markets. To read the entire report, [click here](#).

Citrus greening detected in San Bernardino County. The California Department of Food and Agriculture issued a quarantine following the detection of the citrus disease Huanglongbing (HLB), or citrus greening, in a single citrus tree in an unincorporated area of San Bernardino County, near Montclair. This is the first time the plant disease has been detected in San Bernardino County. CDFA is working with the USDA and the San Bernardino County and Los Angeles County agricultural commissioners on this project. The 93-square mile quarantine area will link up with existing quarantines in Los Angeles and Orange Counties, creating a

contiguous 1,015-square-mile area. The new portion is bordered on the north by I-210; on the south by Chino Airport; on the west by Highway 57; and on the east by Ontario International Airport. HLB quarantine maps for San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties are available [online here](#). Quarantines are already in place for HLB in portions of Los Angeles, Orange and Riverside counties. The quarantine prohibits the movement of all citrus nursery stock or plant parts out of the quarantine area. Provisions exist to allow the movement of commercially cleaned and packed citrus fruit. Fruit that is not commercially cleaned and packed, including residential citrus, such as oranges, lemons, grapefruits, and kumquats, must not be moved from the property on which it is grown, although it may be processed and/or consumed on the premises.

FCC advances new national suicide prevention and mental health hotline. Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai wants the FCC to move forward with establishing 988 as the national emergency number for suicide, similar to how the 911 is used for other emergencies. “The suicide rate in the United States is at its highest level since World War II, and designating 988 as the suicide prevention and mental health hotline would be a major boost for our nation’s suicide prevention efforts,” said Chairman Pai at an event last week. The Chairman’s proposal — which will be voted on Dec. 12 — would designate 988 as the national 3-digit code. It would require that all phone companies transmit all calls to 988 to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which today provides suicide prevention assistance at 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) and through [online chats](#). The Lifeline is a national network of 163 crisis centers funded by the Department of Health and Human Services’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. In 2018, trained Lifeline counselors answered over 2.2 million calls and over 100,000 online chats. Although the Chairman’s initial outreach was aimed at veterans and other high-risk populations, “we know that many people in farm country are suffering, too,” notes Chandler Goule, CEO of the National Association of Wheat Growers. “I lost my older brother to suicide in 2012. It is by far the most difficult thing my family has endured. Had we as a nation had an emergency number like 988 maybe he would still be with us instead of the desperation he felt. Mental wellness is the root of most of the symptoms we see with addiction and depression. This is a huge step in the right direction and will be a huge resource for our family farmers, ranchers and veterinarians.” During 2000—2016, the suicide rate among the U.S. working age population (16—64 years) increased 34%, from 12.9 per 100,000 population to 17.3, according to the Centers for Disease Control. [Suicide rates in rural areas](#) appear to be growing, but the latest CDC date, which is based on 17 states from 2012-2015, places farmers as having the ninth-highest suicide rate among men.

FSIS: 172 US poultry facilities authorized for export to China. The Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety and Inspection Service announced 172 American poultry slaughter and processing facilities that can export their products to China, including Foster Farms in Turlock. China announced earlier this month that it would allow imports of U.S. poultry, ending a ban on American product that first started in January 2015 after an outbreak of highly-pathogenic avian influenza. The announcement came shortly after the U.S. announced it would allow for imports of Chinese chicken. The move represented a cooling in tense trade relations between the two countries, which were expected to sign a “phase one” trade deal earlier this month but have yet to put pen to paper. The facilities seeking to export products to China must first be approved by Chinese officials. According to the [USA Poultry & Egg Export Council](#), FSIS “is submitting a cold storage facilities list to China this weekend for approval, along with additional poultry plants.” USAPEEC estimates the Chinese market could be worth \$2 billion in “chicken, turkey, duck, and breeding stock exports.” To see the list of approved facilities, [click here](#).

Farm Hands West: CEA Food Safety Coalition taps Karlin

The CEA Food Safety Coalition has named **Marni Karlin** as the organization's first executive director. Karlin will work closely with coalition members, government agencies and industry experts to develop food safety standards for the CEA leafy greens industry. She previously served as vice president of government affairs and general counsel for the Organic Trade Association. Before working for the Organic Trade Association, Karlin served as counsel to Sen. Herb Kohl, D-Wis., on the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG) elected new board officers and directors. **Mike Testa** of Coastal Vineyard Care in Buellton, Calif., was elected chair of the board. He succeeds **Bill Berryhill** of BB Vineyards in Ceres, Calif., who served in the role for two years. Other directors elected as officers are **Tom Slater** of Slater Farms in Clarksburg, vice chair; **Davindar Mahil** of Creekside Farming in Madera, vice chair; **Jeff Bitter**, winegrape grower in Madera, secretary; and **Gregg Hibbits** of Mesa Vineyard Management in Templeton, treasurer.

The Hass Avocado Board elected new executive committee members. Serving as chairman is **Jorge Hernandez**, an importer from McAllen, Texas; serving as vice-chairman is **Salvador Dominguez**, a producer from Santa Paula, Calif.; elected to treasurer is **David Fausset**, importer from Port Hueneme, Calif.; and serving as secretary is **Ben Van Der Kar**, a producer from Carpinteria, Calif.

Pamela Fyock, CEO of the Tulare County Fair, has submitted her letter of resignation. She will continue working with the Tulare County Fair Foundation. The Tulare County Fair board is working closely with the California Division of Fairs & Expositions in the search for a new CEO next month.

Brock Taylor of Clovis, Calif., has been named to the Nuffield International Farming Scholars, USA Board of Directors. Taylor owns Brock Taylor Consulting, a crop consulting firm. Taylor serves on the Fresno State University Plant Science advisory board and the West Hills Community College Precision Farming advisory board. He has served on the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Fertilizer Research and Education board as well as the CDFA Fertilizer Ag advisory board.

Wholesome Wave has tapped **Joe Cahalan** as the interim executive director. Cahalan previously worked as a consultant for Newman's Own Foundation and was the CEO at Concern Worldwide. Cahalan was with Xerox Corp. for more than four decades, and was vice president of communications and social responsibility and president of the Xerox Foundation.

Heather Janik headed to the Food and Drug Administration to lead the media affairs team. She previously worked at Feeding America as director of thought leadership and media relations.



Heather Janik

Lillie Brady has been promoted to director of external and intergovernmental affairs at the Department of Agriculture. She fills the role after **Rob**

McGregor has left to become the senior adviser to the Undersecretary of Natural Resources and Environment, **Jim Hubbard**.

The U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance seated its 2020 board of directors and elected members to its executive committee. The executive committee is as follows: **Chip Bowling** will serve as chairman and represents the National Corn Growers Association; **Scott VanderWal** will serve as vice chairman and represents the American Farm Bureau Federation; **Anne Meis** was elected to serve as secretary and represents the Nebraksa Soybean Board; **Blair Van Zetten** was elected treasurer and represents the American Egg Board; **Brad Greenway** is the immediate past chair and represents the National Pork Board; **Pamela Strifler** is an at-large member and represents Bayer; and **Joe Koss** will also serve as an at-large member and represents the Culver Franchising System, LLC. The remaining 2020 USFRA board members include: **James Adams**, U.S. Poultry & Egg Association; **Doug Berven**, Poet; Phil Borgic, National Pork Producers Council; **Andy Fabin**, United Soybean Board; **Marilyn Hershey**, Dairy Management, Inc.; **Jim Martin**, Illinois Soybean Association; **Scott Phillips**, National Pork Board; and **Brody Stapel**, Edge Dairy Cooperative.

The National Biodiesel Board elected new members to serve on the governing board, including: **Kent Engelbrecht**, Archer Daniels Midland; **Chad Stone**, Renewable Energy Group; **Ryan Pederson**, North Dakota Soybean Council; **Harry Simpson**, Crimson Renewable Energy; **Paul Soanes**, RBF Port Neches, LLC; **Dave Walton**, Iowa Soybean Association; and **Tim Ostrem**, South Dakota Soybean Research and Promotion Council. The board also elected **Chad Stone** as chairman, **Mike Rath** as vice chairman, **Rob Shaffer** as 2nd vice chairman, **Ryan Pederson** as treasurer and **Troy Alberts** as secretary. **Troy Alberts**, **Rob Shaffer**, **Jeff Lynn**, **Tim Keaveney**, **Greg Anderson**, **Mike Rath**, **Robert Morton**, and **Tom Brooks** continue to serve on the board.

The Department of Agriculture announced the appointment of 40 members to serve on the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board. To see the appointments click [here](#).

Best Regards,

Sara Wyant

Editor

Copyright Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction or distribution in any form is prohibited without consent from Editor Sara Wyant, Agri-Pulse Communications Inc., 110 Waterside Lane, Camdenton, MO. 65020. Phone: [\(573\) 873-0800](tel:5738730800). Fax: [\(573\) 873-0801](tel:5738730801). Staff: Managing Editor Spencer Chase; Executive Editor Philip Brasher; Senior Trade Editor Bill Tomson; Associate Editor Steve Davies; Associate Editor Ben Nuelle; Associate Editor Hannah Pagel; Associate Editor Brad Hooker; Contributing Editor Jim Webster; Contributing Editor Ed Maixner; Director of Marketing: Allan R. Johnson; Administrative Assistant: Sandi Schmitt; Marketing Manager: Jason Lutz; Circulation Manager: Paige Dye; Marketing Consultant: Tom Davis. A one-year subscription (48 issues) is \$727.00. To subscribe, send an e-mail to: Sara@Agri-Pulse.com, or visit: www.Agri-Pulse.com.