

Legislature returns to single-use plastics, with ag part of the solution

The Assembly Natural Resources Committee heard two days of testimony recently on the many problems facing California and the planet when it comes to packaging made up of single-use plastics. The material, often used in food packaging, is challenging to recycle and remains in the environment for years. A shakeup in the global recycling market has added to the problem, compounding the costs for getting rid of the waste.

“Some local solid waste programs have received significant quantities of agricultural [mulch] film that’s used in production,” said John Kennedy, a policy advocate for Rural County Representatives of California, in one hearing. “Unfortunately, there aren’t many markets for those materials.”

Kennedy added that landfills are facing similar problems with plastic irrigation lines, especially from illegal cannabis grows seized in federal forests throughout Northern California. Instead of phasing out the plastic film and irrigation lines, the state should seize this opportunity, he said, and throw a lifeline to recycling programs already addressing this waste.



Natural Resources Chair Laura Friedman, D-Glendale

“There are a few manufacturers that are trying to take the materials in and use them to produce new reusable shopping bags or new agricultural film,” said Kennedy. **“Those are activities we should support and expand.... Without markets, the material goes into the landfill, where it can actually be really difficult to manage.”**

Plastic film—including items like pallet wrapping, grocery bags and trash bags—makes up three out of the four most prevalent types of plastic found in California’s landfills, according to a

committee analysis. Less than 15% of the total plastic generated in the state is recyclable. This adds pressure to CalRecycle, which must divert 75% of the solid waste from landfills, and to local governments, which have a mandate of 50%.

“There has been a massive shift in the economic calculus of recycling programs in recent years,” said Rita Kampalath, a director at the Los Angeles County Sustainability Office.

She pointed to a recent study finding that while recycling generated \$4 million for San Diego in 2017, the city received just \$600,000 in 2019.

The increase in single-use plastic materials has led to an environmental toll as well. At the current pace of production, oceans will contain more plastic than fish in 30 years, according to the World Economic Forum.

“Recycling plastic into new products is helpful, but not a solution,” the committee report notes. “Recycling is generally only feasible for some of the more common, and least toxic, forms of plastic, like the kind used for beverage containers.”

Natural Resources Chair Laura Friedman of Glendale acknowledged the challenge in finding a consensus on bills aiming to curb the use of plastic or mandate more recycled content in packaging products.

“The industry usually responds by coming back and saying, ‘Well, if we do this, it's going to make our products so much more expensive and that's going to hurt low-income people because they won't be able to afford to purchase these products anymore,’” she said.

Yet the food and agricultural industries are already spearheading efforts to drive this change and help to develop more robust markets for recycled content. Fresh berry producers, for example, have embarked on an ambitious initiative to rethink clamshell packaging.

In a separate hearing on recycling markets, Rick Tomlinson, president of the California Strawberry Commission, explained how the berry industry responded to global policy changes that began in 2017 by reconsidering the whole recycling stream.

In February the commission, in partnership with several major fresh berry producers, pledged to adopt 100% recycle-ready clamshell packaging by 2025 and incorporate more recycled content within that packaging. Tomlinson cautioned, however, the announcement was followed by a rocky start. Price gouging bumped up costs for this type of material by 50%, though prices eventually smoothed out as a broad range of suppliers emerged and the economies of scale took over.

In testing fiber replacements like cardboard, the coalition found that moisture in the berries weakened the clamshells and led to whole trays collapsing. They worried that sacrificing other benefits could set them back decades. For 20 years, plastic has helped to improve food safety, extend the shelf life for fruit and dramatically reduce shipping weight, cutting energy costs for transportation. Manufacturers have been able to include more recycled material over time as well, further reducing costs.



Clamshell packaging

“We've really benefited from the recycling going on in the state of California,” said Tomlinson. “That clamshell has typically contained the most amount of California recycled content of any food package in the United States.”

The coalition coordinated with thousands of farms across several states and addressed packaging needs that varied across strawberries, blueberries and raspberries.

Eventually the industry settled on a recyclable plastic material known as thermoform clean wash flake, and

companies made the first purchases this year. Even the standard paper label has been replaced with one that can be recycled.

“We still have a long way to go,” said Tomlinson. “We're talking about a very small amount, but it is starting.”

The coalition is now working across the supply chain to encourage consumers to recycle the new packaging and curbside programs to collect this waste, supplying packaging manufacturers with more thermoform.

It's really wonderful to see an industry group really going out of their way to try to be a good steward for their product,” said Friedman in response. “I will certainly feel good buying my strawberries.”

In August, Friedman also felt good about Senate Bill 54, a measure that would have mandated industries to reduce the amount of single-use packaging in products by at least 75% by 2030.

“We've all seen the heartbreaking photos of dead sea animals,” she said, while carrying the bill for a final vote on the Assembly floor. “We know that this is a product that is eternal, that doesn't biodegrade, that is literally killing parts of our planet.”

Industry have paid for none of the disposal and pollution cleanup but was accommodated at every turn for the bill, she argued.

Democrats struggled to gather enough votes on that final day of session, coming up just three shy of passing.

Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez of San Diego, author of an identical bill that also failed to pass two years in a row, shared her exhaustion from the endeavor.

“I've been whipsawed on amendments since the day we introduced this,” she said. “I'm tired of making the case.”

Gonzalez was frustrated that after amending the bill to exempt some farmers, agricultural groups remained opposed.

“We just haven't been able to get to a place where we're comfortable enough with this policy,” Matthew Allen, who directs legislative affairs for the Western Growers Association, told *Agri-Pulse* in August. He explained that the bills, for example, did not exempt the transportation of products to the packing shed or processing plant.

Several lawmakers argued that the bill would never be perfect, but the issue was too urgent to wait.

Crop insurance helps wine industry deal with smoke taint

The early start and long duration of the 2020 wildfire season in California caused significant smoke taint to wine grapes. That's a damage that can be protected with crop insurance, but the grape growers need a lab test to confirm it.



“Previously, 2018, we had 2,400 acres of smoke taint in California and we're thinking we may have over 30,000 acres (this year),” said Martin Barbre, administrator of USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA), which oversees the federal crop insurance program. He said a backlog at testing labs added to the challenges this year. But overall, he estimated two-thirds of California's wine grape acres are enrolled in the federal crop insurance program, and adds that some big operations may have self-insurance.

Barbre said the program is maturing and policies now offer 85% coverage.

“I feel like we will see that coverage grow, and coverage levels grow,” he said. “We're hearing more of, ‘What can you do to improve our coverages and help us use crop insurance as our main risk management tool?’”

That's been the goal of the past two farm bills, and Barbre says the 2018 law required RMA to put specialty crop advisors in each of its 10 offices across the country to work with farmers and commodity groups to consider and evaluate additional crops that could benefit from insurance. Currently around 120 specialty crops are included.

As Tara Smith, executive vice president of the DC-based firm Michael Torrey Associates, pointed out, major commodity crops like corn, soybeans and wheat also have access to Farm Service Agency programs in the farm bill, but for the most part specialty crops do not.

“There have been some ad hoc disaster programs that have covered wine grapes, but that assistance is really uncertain, it doesn't tend to show up in a timely manner,” she said, “whereas crop insurance, of course, provides certainty and timeliness in payment.”

Other specialty crops where farmers are increasingly buying insurance include apples, cherries, almonds and pistachios. Whole Farm Revenue Protection accounts for a significant amount of the specialty crops in insurance programs, according to RMA data that Smith and her colleagues collated. She said specialty crop farmers seem to be growing more comfortable with the concept of insurance, though it varies by person and growing conditions.

“Some of it has to do with risk. Some crops are being grown under irrigation, maybe they feel like their crop risk is relatively minor so maybe they don’t feel like it’s necessary to buy a policy,” said Smith. “Wine grapes are obviously a very high-value crop that require expensive inputs and so having that protection is important to those farmers.”

Crop insurance is designed to be more flexible than farm bill commodity programs, she said. It takes experience to ascertain where changes would be most beneficial to growers, though, and proposed new products must demonstrate to RMA that they are actuarially sound.

Ongoing conversations with farmers could help modify existing insurance products or lead to the creation of new ones. With the increasing frequency and severity of wildfire damage to grapes, Smith said there’s a greater understanding of what farmers need. For example, total crop devastation is relatively easy to assess. But the contract cancellation that can happen because of smoke taint might happen at several points in the winemaking process. She said RMA has provided more guidance to make the process go smoothly.

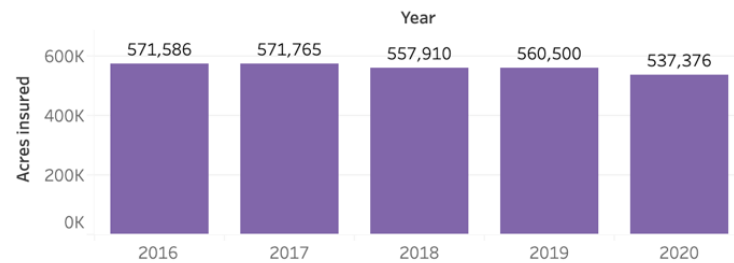
“A couple of years of experience goes a long way,” she said. “It’s unfortunate that we have a couple of years of experience under our belt with smoke taint.”

Ag groups playing no favorites in secretary sweepstakes

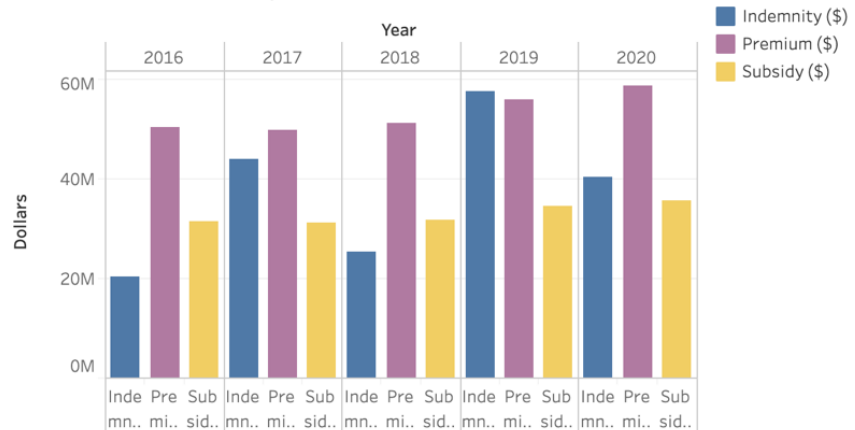
Farm groups are pledging to work with whomever President-elect Joe Biden picks for agriculture secretary and are steering clear of announcing a favorite for the position. That’s not the case with several other interest groups.

Wine grapes and crop insurance

Acres insured



Cost of indemnities, premiums and subsidies



data: USDA; graphic: Amy Mayer

So far, most of the public speculation has centered on a pair of longtime Capitol Hill farm hands: Former North Dakota Sen. Heidi Heitkamp and Ohio Rep. Marcia Fudge. Debate over the two has turned into a proxy battle for the direction of the Department of Agriculture under the Biden administration.

And farm policy insiders haven't been able to squeeze much out of the Biden transition team.

“They do a lot of listening; they don't do much sharing about what they are looking for,” one source told *Agri-Pulse* of his conversations with the transition team. “As you would expect with any transition team, they hold their cards very, very close.”



Rep. Marcia Fudge (left) and former Sen. Heidi Heitkamp (right)

In recent weeks, ag lobbyists told *Agri-Pulse* of their generally good relationships with both Heitkamp and Fudge and said they were also generally happy with some of the other people said to be in the running – former Obama administration veterans like USDA Deputy Secretaries Kathleen Merrigan and Krysta Harden and Michael Scuse, who served as deputy in an acting role, former Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack's Chief of Staff and current California Ag Secretary Karen Ross, even Vilsack himself – and none went as far as to endorse a favorite.

“The names I have heard, we all know, we all have a relationship to one extent or another,” National Corn Growers Association CEO Jon Doggett said in an interview. “I'm pleased with the names we're hearing about for a lot of different positions in Washington.”

For Heitkamp, her term in the Senate and experience as a state attorney general and tax commissioner have given her a good deal of face time with many of the nation's farm groups and experience in dealing with the intricacies of the 2014 and 2018 farm bills. Sources reached by *Agri-Pulse* were pleased with their relationships with Heitkamp and her office during her time on Capitol Hill and said that could easily transition into a good relationship with her should she be chosen to lead USDA.

“She understands the cattle industry, she's been in the trenches on those issues, she has producers from her state that clearly have been keeping her informed over the years, so she's starting on third base as far as knowledge of the issues,” Ethan Lane, vice president of government affairs for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, told *Agri-Pulse*. “As far as we're concerned, that would be a fantastic choice.”

After an unsuccessful bid for a second term in the Senate, Heitkamp along with Joe Donnelly, an Indiana Democrat who also served a term in the Senate, formed the One Country Project, a bid to boost rural support for the Democratic party. She was a vocal spokesperson for the Biden campaign on rural issues, and the campaign was able to make some – but not much – progress in shoring up rural support for Biden. Heitkamp has also taken the lead on a Bipartisan Policy Center project that addresses a topic sure to be front of mind across many different aspects of the Biden administration: climate change.

But while Heitkamp’s detractors might not come from D.C.’s commodity groups, there is certainly opposition to her candidacy from progressives in the Democratic party. **They claim Heitkamp’s connections to conventional agricultural interests wouldn’t advance the party’s goals in areas of hunger and nutrition policy. What’s more, they believe Fudge would offer a stronger focus on USDA’s longstanding civil rights issues.**

Fudge, who chairs House Agriculture Committee's subcommittee on nutrition and oversight, has a reputation as a fierce fighter for nutrition programs, leaving some to wonder how she would approach USDA’s role in agriculture. Farm groups say she’s been active in learning to understand their issues.

“She’s more of an urban, suburban member of Congress, yet has done a lot of work with the Ohio Farm Bureau to get to know farming and livestock operations and have a better understanding of that process,” said Dale Moore, executive vice president of the American Farm Bureau Federation.



Dale Moore, Farm Bureau

To be sure, ag groups have stopped short of supporting – or endorsing – any one particular candidate (Lane had good things to say about NCBA’s relationship with Fudge, as Moore did about Farm Bureau’s relationship with Heitkamp). Some of that could be hedging bets and not starting a relationship with a new ag secretary having publicly supported someone else.

“We have to work with everybody, and we’ve got a good relationship with all of them,” Nick Giordano, vice president and counsel of government affairs for the National Pork Producers Council, told *Agri-Pulse*. “Change is inevitable. I’ve been through a lot of these changes in administration, and it’s OK.”



Rob Larew, NFU

Fudge and Heitkamp may be the public frontrunners at this point, but National Farmers Union President Rob Larew also points out a simple fact: No matter who gets the job, they’re going to be working for Biden and serving his agenda. Larew doesn't think much can be read into the nomination itself will provide much direction in terms of Biden's priorities.

“I wouldn’t read that much into it, quite frankly, unless along with the announcement comes messaging where it’s very clear about what they’re trying to do here,” Larew said. “Ultimately, all of this is going to be driven by the direction and priorities of the administration at the White House.

“I would certainly hope that regardless of who is in there, that they would be focused on the rural plan that Biden put forth,” he added.

But as one farm policy lobbyist puts it, there will be many factors that ultimately play into Biden’s decision, some of which have almost nothing do to with farm policy.

“They’re looking at the full complement of cabinet choices and all the calculations that they’re using on making sure that it’s the proper mix will also have bearing,” a source told *Agri-Pulse*, pointing to Biden’s pledge to produce a diverse cabinet.

New group aims to advance Black policy professionals in food and ag

Many politicians, as well as U.S. farm and food organizations, have talked about the need to recruit more diverse candidates but many say they are unable to source diverse talent. However, the members of a newly-formed organization—Black Professionals in Food and Agriculture (BPFA) — aim to prove that is not true. Their leaders contend that there is plenty of diversity in the agriculture industry; the bigger problem is a lack of inclusion.

A group of five, representing both the private and government sectors, launched a LinkedIn page announcing their plans over the weekend and their ranks have now expanded to over 100. The initial founders include Karis Gutter, lead, U.S. government and industry affairs, Corteva; Kellie Adesina, director of federal government affairs, Bayer; Jasmine Dickerson, staff director, subcommittee on nutrition, oversight and department operation for the House Agriculture Committee; Ashlee Johnson, director of corporate sustainability, FMC; and Eyang Garrison, deputy chief of staff for Rep. Marcia Fudge, D-Ohio.

“All too often the voices and input of Black policy makers, congressional staffers, and industry representatives are excluded in the development of policies and programs that serve America’s farmers, ranchers, and producers. We are committed to ensuring that those voices have a presence in the room and a seat at the table,” noted Dickerson when introducing the group on her LinkedIn page. The group also posted an opinion piece with advice for the new Biden administration that can be [found here](#).

Gutter told *Agri-Pulse* that, after years of being marginalized, “we felt the need to build a stronger community that includes not only professional development but policy formation.”



Karis Gutter speaks at a 2014 USDA event.

Some of their first calls were with the National Black Growers Council, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives and MANRRS (*Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences*) **to discuss ways to “develop, nurture, groom and grow that pipeline of policy professionals,”** Gutter said. In that regard, more details will be forthcoming.

For now, the group is focused on the “opportunity that’s right in front of us” as a result of the election, Gutter said, including about 250 political appointments opening at USDA. The group is focused on advocating for diverse staffing at every level at USDA, on Capitol Hill and within the broader industry. The group has received several inquiries from non-diverse industry members who are eager to work with them on programming and initiatives.

“Not only did we push out policy recommendations, we've pushed forward resumes of qualified, strong candidates who've served in administrations past, who served on Capitol Hill in key policy roles in agriculture and key roles in agribusiness” to President-elect Joe Biden’s transition team, he added.

Overall, the BPFA founders outlined five key objectives aimed at USDA.

- Diversity, inclusion, and equity in USDA political staffing;
- Diversity metrics for the Administration as it relates to political appointments at USDA;
- Diverse candidate slates and interview panels for all vacancies;
- Mandatory diversity and inclusion training; and
- Designation of a Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer who reports directly to the Secretary (or Deputy Secretary).

Gutter said that **“we very much want to be supportive of a USDA that’s a welcome space; a USDA that is diverse and values equity and inclusion.”** He previously worked at the agency in a variety of roles from 2009-2015.

Biden says he won’t immediately lift tariffs on China

President-elect Joe Biden said in an interview with the New York Times that he won't immediately remove the 25% tariffs on \$234 billion worth of Chinese goods, but instead will reassess the situation and work with allies to pressure China to stop intellectual property abuses.

That would mean the U.S.-China trade war, which continues to weigh down U.S. agricultural exports, will not end when Biden takes office in January.

“I’m not going to make any immediate moves, and the same applies to the tariffs,” Biden told Times columnist Thomas Friedman. “I’m not going to prejudice my options.”

China reacted to those U.S. tariffs – as well as the earlier U.S. tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum – by levying stiff retaliatory tariffs on almost all of U.S. agricultural exports, including almonds.



President Elect Joe Biden

China, after signing the “phase one” trade pact with the U.S. earlier this year, began exempting its importers to allow them to buy U.S. soybeans, corn, wheat, sorghum, beef, pork, cotton and other commodities.

“The best China strategy, I think, is one which gets every one of our — or at least what used to be our — allies on the same page,” Biden said. “It’s going to be a major priority for me in the opening weeks of my presidency to try to get us back on the same page with our allies.”

Biden said he wants to work with allies to create a “coherent strategy” and the “goal would be to pursue trade policies that actually produce progress on China’s abusive practices — that’s stealing intellectual property, dumping products, illegal subsidies to corporations ...”

One complication may be a recent decision by a World Trade Organization panel in favor of China. The panel ruled that the U.S. broke international trade rules by sidestepping the WTO dispute system when it hit China in 2018 with the tariffs. The U.S. has appealed the ruling, but the WTO appellate court has been effectively shut down because the U.S. continues to block the appointment of new judges.

Reaping rural broadband rewards of USDA’s ReConnect program

Advocates say the Department of Agriculture’s ReConnect program is working when it comes to building out high-speed internet technology into rural America, but say higher speeds and more government funding will be needed in the years ahead.

Announced in December 2018, USDA launched the ReConnect pilot program making available \$200 million in grants, \$200 million in loan grant combinations, and \$200 million in low-interest loans.

Projects funded through the program are required to serve communities with less than 20,000 people where internet service is slower than 10 megabits per second download and 1 megabit per second upload.

Approved projects must develop speeds of at least 25/3 Mbps, according to USDA.

Shirley Bloomfield, CEO of NTCA — The Rural Broadband Association said a strength of the ReConnect program has been the focus on who does and does not have broadband services.

“If there’s one thing that we’ve learned during this pandemic, holy cow it is that broadband is absolutely critical and we need to move as fast as we can as a country to get connectivity out there,” Bloomfield told *Agri-Pulse*.

Bloomfield praised the program for examining each project differently to determine whether the applicant deserved a grant, loan, or grant/loan combination as well as sending officials out to do field tests.

“Which I think is really important because we’ve got to be so mindful that not allowing government resources, which are limited to overbuild existing resources,” Bloomfield stated. But at the same time, she said the bureaucratic process of checking all the boxes is making the process “slower and more methodical than one would hope in a pandemic.”

One of the biggest concerns about deploying high-speed internet is overbuilding, providers getting money to fund a project where high-speed internet already exists.



Shirley Bloomfield, NTCA — The Rural Broadband Association

On Nov. 23, the House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Greg Walden, R-Ore., sent a [letter](#) asking the Government Accountability Office, Congress' government watchdog, to audit the ReConnect program. The E&C Committee has jurisdiction over communications issues, but not necessarily the Department of Agriculture.

Walden cited the \$600 million from a 2018 spending bill used to stand up the program and another \$1.45 billion appropriated in future legislation and said the committee had questions over the connection between the ReConnect program and other government rural broadband efforts.

“Given the need to ensure the most efficient and effective use of federal dollars to promote broadband infrastructure deployment and guard against waste, fraud, and abuse, we request an in-depth GAO audit of broadband support provided by the Rural Utilities Service (RUS),” the letter read.

To date, the first round of the ReConnect program invested \$698 million in 79 high-speed internet infrastructure projects in 33 states. In the second round, the department announced \$642 million for 83 projects in 34 states and territories. The two funding rounds combined total \$1.34 billion, according to [USDA](#).

USDA Rural Utilities Service Administrator Chad Rupe told *Agri-Pulse* awarding projects for infrastructure projects in a lot of areas that are previously undisturbed land can take time.

“You’ve got a situation where you have to conduct environmental clearance, you have a lot of parties and stakeholders at the table, and we have to make sure when we build them out, they are built out to specifications and built out in a quality fashion,” Rupe said.

The department has created a [mapping tool](#) to show projects funded across the U.S. Rupe said it also must be realized the buildout is happening during a pandemic when some stakeholders are shutdown.

“They are having slow communication — a whole series and host of things that complicate a normal buildout are happening at the same time,” he said.

While supporting the program, Janie Dunning, a broadband consultant for the Missouri Farm Bureau, said continued government funding is needed for high-speed internet deployment as well as speeds higher than a minimum of 25/3 Mbps must be achieved moving forward.



Chad Rupe, USDA

“That’s not going to be adequate,” Dunning told *Agri-Pulse*. “I think we found that out with COVID and the need to work remotely, the need to have educational opportunities, (and) the need to have people who can do their business out of their home.”

Dunning argued fiber, cables buried in the ground or hung on poles to carry broadband service, is “future proof” technology that helps increase speeds so certain people aren’t left behind.

“We do not care what type of technology is used, but it has to be able to carry the speeds without interruption or it will not be adequate,” she said.

While noting ongoing challenges with deploying rural broadband, Rupe said he felt USDA has done a good job addressing “middle mile” fiber deployment — connecting providers to customers — in rural communities.

Having worked for USDA’s Rural Development office for several years before consulting MOFB, Dunning believes USDA, regardless of administration, will prioritize broadband into the future.

Bloomfield feels the incoming Biden administration “understands the urgency” regarding the need to get high-speed internet deployed across America and urges them to move ahead with programs like the ReConnect.

News Briefs:

EQIP funding available for wildfire recovery. If your farming or ranching operation was hard hit by wildfires this year, USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service may be able to help. Throughout the month of December, approximately \$4 million in funding is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for those impacted by California’s recent wildfires. Rapid response applications can be submitted through your local field office. The application window opened on Nov. 27 and will continue through the end of December 2020.

The Wildfire Disaster Recovery funding supports seventeen conservation practices to treat these immediate resource concerns. Example practices include “Road Closure” to block access or repair rutted roads that lead to erosion; “Herbaceous Weed Treatment” for control of invasive, noxious weeds which will regrow after the fire; and “Woody Residue Treatment” which cuts dead hazard trees and disposes of woody debris by piling, burning or chipping.

“Rapid response is key after a high intensity wildfire,” said NRCS California State Conservationist Carlos Suarez. “This emergency funding allows us to quickly support landowners impacted by recent wildfires and address immediate resource needs.” For more information about the California Wildfire Disaster Recovery funding pool, click here.

MPCI hemp insurance expanded to more states, counties. USDA’s Risk Management Agency has expanded and made a few improvements in the pilot Multi-Peril Crop Insurance (MPCI) plan for hemp for the 2021 crop year. “Hemp offers exciting economic opportunities for our nation’s farmers, and we are listening and responding to their risk management needs,” said RMA Administrator Martin Barbre. For 2021, the program will be expanded to include select counties in Arizona, Arkansas, Nevada and Texas. In addition, coverage will be available in 13 new counties in states with existing coverage: Conejos, CO; La Plata, CO; Moffat, CO; Routt, CO; San Miguel, CO; Kenton, KY; Whitley, KY; Houghton, MI; Granite, MT; San Miguel, NM; Valencia, NM; Scott, TN; Alleghany, VA. Other changes include allowing broker contracts for hemp grain and adjustments in reporting and billing dates. Crop insurance is sold and delivered solely through private insurance agents. A list of insurance agents is available online using the RMA Agent Locator.

USDA repropose school lunch changes. The Department of Agriculture is taking steps to wrap up school lunch changes pursued by Ag Secretary Sonny Perdue that would change milk, whole-grain and sodium reduction requirements. The changes in a proposed rule rolled out last week include allowing flavored, low-fat milk to be permanently available in the program. Half the weekly grains will be required to be whole-grain rich and sodium targets are also tweaked in the final rule to retain Target 1 levels – less than 1,420 milligrams per week – through the end of the 2023-2024 school year. The rule also sets Target 2 compliance – 1,080 milligrams – for the 2024-2025 school year and eliminates the final sodium reduction target – 740 milligrams. The move follows an earlier effort from USDA that was blocked in court earlier this year. Last week’s action seeks “to restore the flexibilities included in the 2018 final rule. Despite this procedural formality, schools do not have to change their meals, thanks to the meal pattern flexibilities USDA has already provided in all child nutrition programs through June 30, 2021, in response to the COVID-19 national emergency.” The proposed rule was published Nov. 25, which triggered a 30-day public comment period.

Farmer tax, regulation fears rise after election. Regulations, trade, and taxes are topping the list of farmer fears as the presidential election has now come and gone. The Ag Economy Barometer, a monthly measurement of producer sentiment released by Purdue University and the CME Group, dropped to a reading of 167 in November. This is 16 points below the record high of 183 in October. "This is the opposite of what happened following the November 2016 election," Jim Mintert, director of Purdue's Center for Commercial Agriculture, said in a statement. "That year producers became much more optimistic about the future following the election and, in turn, that optimism about the future helped drive the Ag Economy Barometer up sharply in late 2016 and early 2017." The barometer is based on surveys of 400 ag producers each month; November's surveys were conducted Nov. 9-13. The Index of Future Expectations fell 30 points to a reading of 156 and was driven by farmer pessimism toward the future of the farm economy. But the second round of Coronavirus Food Assistance Program payments and rallying commodity prices helped the Index of Current Conditions rise 9 points to 187, an all-time high for that index. In the November survey, 77% of respondents said they expect more restrictive environmental regulations in the next five years compared to 41% who felt that way in October. Some 66% of respondents said they expect higher income tax rates for farms and ranches in the next five years. Only 35% of respondents felt that way in October.

Farm Hands West: New leadership on House Ag, Resnick promoted

A Democratic steering committee chose Georgia Democrat **David Scott** over California’s **Jim Costa** in a 32-19 vote Tuesday evening. The two were both vying for the position vacated by current committee Chair **Collin Peterson**’s unsuccessful effort to secure another term in Congress.

The steering committee also selected Rep. **Rosa DeLauro**, D- Conn., who has repeatedly and vocally challenged USDA over farm programs, food safety regulation and other issues, to chair the House Appropriations Committee over two other challengers. The full Democratic conference still has to approve all committee chairs — who will take their respective gavels in January.

Rep. **David Valadao**, R-Calif., has regained the seat he lost in 2018 to Democrat **TJ Cox**. The dairy farmer previously served from 2013 to 2019 as the San Joaquin Valley congressman, working on the House Appropriations Committee. But in the 2018 race, he lost by 862 votes to

Cox. This election was also a close race, taking an extra month of ballot-counting before the Associated Press called the race last week. Cox has not yet conceded the election.

Ajit Pai, the chair of the Federal Communications Commission, said Monday he plans to step down from his post as a commissioner on January 20 after eight years at the agency. Pai was the first Asian-American to chair the FCC after President Donald Trump nominated him to lead the agency in 2017. He was appointed by former President Barack Obama and confirmed unanimously by the Senate in 2012 to serve as a commissioner.

Jason Resnick has been promoted to senior vice president and general counsel at Western Growers. He joined Western Growers in 2003 as a staff attorney and most recently served as vice president and general counsel. He currently serves as vice president on the board of directors for the Agricultural Personnel Management Association (APMA).



Raji Brar, Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board

Raji Brar, of Bakersfield, has been reappointed to the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board. She has served in this position since 2017. Before joining the board, Brar was the chief operations officer and owner of Countryside Corporation.

The Waterkeeper Alliance has tapped **Gloria Reuben** as its new president. Reuben is most known for her role as a physician in the medical drama "ER". Reuben served as a trustee with Waterkeeper Alliance from 2007 to 2010. She then became an adviser to Vice President **Al Gore's** environmental organization, The Climate Reality Project. As president, Reuben will represent more than 350 Waterkeeper groups on six continents and promote the organization's vision for drinkable, fishable, and swimmable water.

Secretary **Sonny Perdue** has appointed four new members to serve on the National Mango Board in 2021. The newly appointed members are: **Rod Chamberlain**, Mecca, Calif., domestic producer; **Christopher Ciruli**, Tubac, Ariz., importer; **Alyssa Salome Hind**, McAllen, Texas, importer; and **Daniel J. Lyons**, Homestead, Fla., domestic producer.

Secretary Perdue also appointed 11 individuals to serve on the Hass Avocado Board. The individuals are: **Susan Pinkerton**, Ventura, Calif., producer; **Ben Van Der Kar**, Carpinteria, Calif., producer; **CJ Shade**, Ojai, Calif., producer; **William Carleton**, Carpinteria, producer; Jeff Dickinson, Fallbrook, Calif., producer; **Kimberlin Brown Pelzer**, Fallbrook, Calif., producer; **Keith Slattery**, San Clemente, Calif., producer alternate (1-year term); **Jorge Hernandez**, McAllen, Texas, importer; **Sergio Chavez**, Lake Elsinore, Calif., importer; **Andrew Bruno**, Newbury Park, Calif., importer alternate; and **Peter Shore**, Ojai, importer alternate.

Lori Ajax, Bureau of Cannabis Control Chief, announced she will retire from her post after 27 years of state service. 21 of those years were served at the Department of Alcoholic Beverage

Control. She was appointed by Governor Jerry Brown as chief of what would become the Bureau of Cannabis Control in February of 2016. Her last day on the job is today.

President-elect **Joe Biden** has announced he will appoint **Janet Yellen** to the position of treasury secretary. He has also picked **Neera Tanden** to run the Office of Management and Budget. Tanden currently serves as president of the liberal think tank Center for American Progress.

The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) has named **Sharon Parrott** its new president, succeeding **Robert Greenstein**, who founded the liberal research and advocacy group 40 years ago. Parrott, currently CBPP's senior VP for federal policy and program development, was an associate director at OMB in 2016-17 and counselor to the office for human services policy at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in 2009-12. As a Congressional Research Service (CRS) expert, Greenstein helped the Senate Agriculture Committee make several improvements to the food stamp program in the 1973 farm bill. He became administrator of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service in 1977 and later a special assistant to the secretary. He founded CBPP in 1981 with a staff of four and led its growth to 150 today.



Sharon Parrott

Pietro Antonio Tataranni has been asked to be the new global chief medical officer at PepsiCo, Inc. Tataranni joined PepsiCo in September 2018 as the deputy chief scientific officer and senior vice president of life sciences. He led the company's nutrition sciences, sports science and external innovation strategies. Before joining PepsiCo, Tataranni worked at Sanofi.

Annick Miller Rivera now serves as the Republican staff director under Rep. **Tom McClintock**, R-Calif., for the Subcommittee of water, ocean, and wildlife under the House Natural Resources Committee. She was previously a professional staff member for Rep. **Rob Bishop**, R-Utah, on the House Natural Resources Committee.

Laura Forero is now a legislative assistant for Rep. **Doris Matsui**, D-Calif., covering the portfolio for energy, environmental protection, and immigration. She previously worked at the League of Conservation Voters as a legislative representative.

Johanna Montiel has been tapped to be the new legislative director for Rep. **Salud Carbajal**, D-Calif., She was previously a senior policy adviser. She covers the portfolio for energy, environmental protection, labor, public lands, natural resources, and transportation... **Nancy Juárez** has left the office where she served as deputy chief of staff.

Jennifer Goedke now serves as chief of staff for Rep. **Jared Huffman**, D-Calif. She previously worked in the office of Rep. **Mike Thompson**, D-Calif., as deputy chief of staff.

Brennan Summers has been promoted to a legislative assistant for Rep. **Mike Simpson**, R-Idaho. He covers the portfolio for agriculture and food, environmental protection, public lands and natural resources. He previously worked as a field representative and social media director.

Emily Kolano has moved to the office of Rep. **Jason Crow**, D-Colo., to serve as the new legislative director. She handles the portfolio for ag, appropriations, commerce, energy, environment, natural resources, trade, and transportation. Kolano came from Rep. **Danny Heck's**, D-Wash., office where she was a senior legislative assistant. She replaces Justine Meuse who left Crow's office.

Arielle Devorah has moved up to communications director for Rep. **Ann Kirkpatrick**, D-Ariz. She previously served as deputy communications director.

Sally Tucker now serves as the communications director for Rep. **Joe Neguse**, D-Colo. She previously worked on **Joe Biden's** campaign as the Colorado press secretary.

Guido Goldman, founder of the German Marshall Fund of the US, has died. He was 83. Goldman served on the GFU board of directors as chair and retired in 2012. Goldman was director of the program for the Study of Germany and Europe at Harvard University's Center for European Studies (CES). He served as the founding director of CES for twenty-five years. Born in Germany in 1937, his family fled to the United States in 1940. He attended Harvard University and was passionate about governmental affairs. A visionary Europeanist, he started the German Marshall Fund to help improve trans-Atlantic understandings.



Guido Goldman

Best regards,

Sara Wyant
Editor

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