

Citing economy, state leans on locals and bonds for water projects

With a month to go before Gov. Gavin Newsom unveils his initial budget proposal for the next year, state officials have been emphasizing the fact that 85% of spending on water infrastructure in California has come from the local level.

The 12% that the state contributes often comes in the form of general obligation bonds passed through ballot initiatives. Newsom has said he would revive his climate resilience bond proposal for the 2022 ballot, and the Legislature has now brought back a bond proposal as well.

“We are excited to continue to identify how to invest in and generate funding for water



CalEPA Secretary Jared Blumenfeld

resilience,” said Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot during the fall meeting for the Association of California Water Agencies Thursday, **“whether it's a general obligation bond in two years' time or other ways to actually identify a way that the state can actually support the region.”**

CalEPA Secretary Jared Blumenfeld recalled how the state went from a \$6 billion surplus before the start of the pandemic to a projected \$54 billion deficit just four months later. He said funding for water projects and resources like new bonds “are much more complicated than they were before.”

(Blumenfeld did acknowledge a recent analysis that projects a \$26 billion surplus for the state, with a \$17 billion potential deficit over the coming years.)

“I know there's a lot of excitement around changes in Washington,” he said. “We need to be circumspect about where the money comes from. Most of it is local.”

Both Crowfoot and Blumenfeld noted a calculation by the Public Policy Institute of California in 2019 showing that local entities generate 85% of the \$33 billion in annual water-related spending. The federal government contributes just 3%.

State Water Resources Control Board Chairman Joaquin Esquivel has focused on this figure as well, saying that the maintenance of aging water infrastructure is being funded by revenue from ratepayers.

“It really does call for a significant federal reinvestment in our systems, not unlike what we saw that built them out to begin with in the '70s and into the '80s,” he said at the Association of California Water Agencies summer conference in July.

The Water Commission has also taken an interest in funding improvements to the state’s conveyance system, hosting the first of a series of public listening sessions on this topic on Tuesday, along with a panel discussions during its November meeting.

“California law is also very clear that the beneficiary should pay for water supply benefits,” said Jay Ziegler, a policy director at The Nature Conservancy, during the meeting, before referencing the Public Policy Institute report.

A co-author on the report, Ellen Hanak, who directs the PPIC Water Policy Center, said in August the money the state has contributed from bonds is usually for projects costing less than \$1 billion. In January, Newsom proposed a \$5 billion climate resilience bond, which earmarked \$1 billion for a range of water projects that would have included storage, conveyance and stormwater capture. He later pulled the proposal in his May budget revision. A similar measure, Senate Bill 45, later died in the Legislature.

With the start of a new session on Monday, SB 45 has returned. **The \$5.5 billion bond would draw \$1.5 billion for “safe drinking water and protecting water supply and water quality from climate risks.”** Another \$190 million would go to protecting agricultural land from climate risks, with \$45 million for multi-benefit projects that conserve ecosystems while presenting some water storage benefits.

During the ACWA conference on Thursday, CDFA Secretary Karen Ross pointed to such partnerships between wildlife conservation groups and rice growers and with on-farm recharge projects as ways to rebuild the groundwater bank.

“If we don’t pay attention to rebuilding that savings account — our groundwater supplies and the water quality of those groundwater supplies for the drinking water — we won’t have sustainable agriculture for our future,” she said. “These are important partnerships, and they are becoming the norm not the exception.”

Ross added that CDFA’s Healthy Soils Program helps to build water and climate resiliency as well. Increasing soil organic matter by 1% saves at least 25,000 gallons of water, she explained.

While growers would appreciate the SB 45 funding, the industry has long called for much more money and to invest it in infrastructure projects.

“The voters passed a bond, Prop. 1, with the full intent that we would be moving forward on more water storage,” said California Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson during the group's annual meeting Monday. “It's time to move forward on Sites [Reservoir] ... It's time to raise Shasta [Dam]. It's time to expand the San Luis Reservoir.”

For his part, Crowfoot recognized the need for the Water Commission to distribute the remaining funding from the 2014 water bond. He vowed the state would not be a barrier to this process.

“I personally am meeting with the Water Commission on a bimonthly basis to make sure that those projects, at least from the state perspective, are on track,” he said.

Crowfoot pointed to three surface water projects and four underground water projects and said



Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot

a “much more significant amount of funding” will come from the state within the next two years. Proposition 1 was to deliver more than \$2 billion for water storage projects.

Yet decades of delays in funding infrastructure maintenance have exacerbated issues and led to higher costs for repairs. After a two-year effort to allocate \$400 million to the Friant Water Authority to resolve extreme subsidence issues along a stretch of the Friant-Kern Canal, the Legislature effectively killed the measure last summer. Several lawmakers argued the agriculture industry and irrigation agencies should cover the cost.

On the other hand, the proposed Temperance Flat Reservoir recently failed to meet a critical deadline for using Prop. 1 money and federal support when local water contractors were unable to afford their share for the project.

Another proposal that would have delivered funding for fixing the canal, Proposition 3 water bond measure for \$8.9 billion, was defeated by voters in 2018.

“We all want somebody else to pay for projects that benefit us,” PPIC Research Fellow Jeffrey Mount told *Agri-Pulse* in August. “The responsibility for paying for this stuff — the big infrastructure stuff — has been shifting away from the federal government. That, if you're a water user, is scary.”

Mount and his colleagues found that when the state has a budget crisis borrowing more money is not appealing to the general public.

“Bond fatigue is clearly starting to set in,” he said. “The water user community is undoubtedly facing a world with water becoming more expensive.”

Mount said bonds should be reserved for projects that truly create broad public benefit and the state should look to taxes and fees to generate funding for water needs.

The bonds proposed so far have not been big enough either. **The coalition behind the Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley has been putting together a plan to draw more Delta water into the region through an approach that also protects fish, restores native flood plains and recharges aquifers for drinking water. But the price tag currently stands at \$9 billion.**

Scott Hamilton, a consultant for the Water Blueprint, framed it as an investment in a broad public benefit.

“It's totally reasonable that the beneficiary should step up and pay,” he told the Water Commission. “But from a state policy perspective, how does funding water infrastructure compare to the government's role in funding roads or funding high speed rail?”

On the federal side, a water resources bill that should make it easier to fund water projects is one step away from the president’s desk. The House on Tuesday passed the Water Resources Development Act of 2020, a compromise reauthorization bill, by voice vote, sending it to the Senate for final action.

Regardless of the funding mechanism, many are eager to finally see projects move forward.

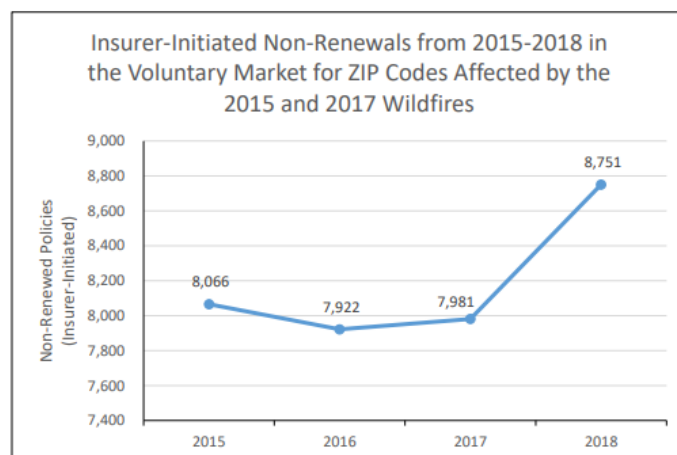
“Let's just do something,” Johansson said. “We sit here in another dry winter crossing our fingers that the rains come.”

California ag businesses struggle with insurance losses, premium increases

While the total damage amounts from California’s 2020 wildfire season is not yet known and several fires continue to burn, rural businesses such as farms, ranches, and others in the agricultural industry are faced with the continued threat of losing the insurance policies that protect the financial aspects of daily operations. And they say a recent moratorium on cancellations doesn’t really help.

When it comes to homeowners’ insurance in the state’s wildfire target areas, a 2019 California Department of Insurance report found the number of plans dropped by insurance companies more than tripled from 2010 to 2016.

The number of policies dropped by insurers because of wildfires increased by 685, from 8,066 in 2015 to 8,751 in 2018.



Source: Fact Shet Wildfire Nonrenewals (ca.gov)

In November, Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara issued a mandatory one-year moratorium on insurance companies non-renewing or canceling residential property insurance policies. It

followed a similar order in 2019. His department said the move helps 2.1 million policyholders, or 18% of California's residential insurance market, affected to date by the record 2020 wildfire season.

“Losing your insurance should be the last thing on someone’s mind after surviving a devastating fire,” Lara said in a statement. While existing law prevents non-renewals and cancellations for those who suffer a total loss, the new law established protection for those living within or adjacent to a declared wildfire emergency who did not suffer a total loss. Lara said it recognizes for the first time in law the disruption that non-renewals cause in communities following wildfire disasters.

Roger Isom, President of the Western Agricultural Processors Association (WAPA), points out the commissioner’s order only recognizes that disruption for homeowners. Businesses such as farms and ranches are left without the same help.

“And it’s not just because of wildfires,” Isom told *Agri-Pulse*. He said other major events such as earthquakes have also led to insurance companies pulling out of California. “Then you kind of get past it and companies will creep back in and that will drive prices down. That’s what has happened with all these fires.

“There is so much money that the insurance companies have had to pay, that they’ve gotten really picky as to who they’ll write,” he added. **“And some just pulled out of California and said it’s too much of a wildcard for them. It’s cheaper to write [an insurance policy for] a grain mill in Kansas than it is a cotton gin or an almond huller in California.”**

Isom said there is no way to force insurance companies to do business in California, and as the state loses more companies, the lack of competition creates price increases for policy holders.

California Farm Bureau Federation President Jamie Johansson commented on the issue in November remarks before the state assembly's ag committee.

"What California farmers and ranchers need is availability," Johansson said. "And currently that is something we don't have. The affordability of insurance and policy terminations have been problematic as well. We've been informed by our members that premiums have increased from \$8,000 to \$36,000."



Jamie Johansson, California Farm Bureau

He said resolving the issue is a "top priority" for CFBF.

The state does have an insurance fallback called California Fair.

The program was created in the late 1960s after riots and brush fires led people in the state to lose coverage. California Fair is an insurance pool for high-risk policies that counts every insurer in California as a member. However, Isom explained the program only insures up to \$3 million, a number too low for many California ag businesses.

“It’s basically called the insurance of last resort,” he said. “If you have a business that has \$90 million worth of equipment, land, and product, \$3 million isn’t going to do much.”

WAPA held a meeting with Commissioner Lara and asked for an increase in the \$3 million coverage. The insurance commission has increased the coverage amount for homeowners, but business insurance coverage remains the same.

New House Ag leaders push for active, bipartisan panel

The Georgia Democrat and Pennsylvania Republican poised to take the reins of the House Agriculture Committee next year have shared priorities, including climate policy, but different timelines and approaches.

Reps. David Scott, D-Ga., and Glenn “GT” Thompson, R-Pa., were both selected by their respective caucuses as their party’s House Ag leaders for the next two years. Scott — by virtue of a slim Democratic majority — will chair the committee, and Thompson will serve as the panel’s top Republican. Both men indicate they want committee members to continue to work in a bipartisan way across regional differences.



Rep. David Scott, D-Ga. (Photo: Joy Philippi)

“As I told Speaker Pelosi ... I have served on the committee when we had Republican chairmen and we had Democratic chairmen, and I’ve achieved things on that committee underneath both,” Scott said in an interview with *Agri-Pulse*. “Agriculture has been and will be a bipartisan committee because we have a history of that; I have a history of that.”

“Our numbers will be as close as ever,” Thompson said in a separate conversation with *Agri-Pulse*. “Which I think is going to help us continue to work in the bipartisan way we do in agriculture.”

The official committee rosters and party splits will be determined at a later date, but the committee’s Democratic majority could be as slim as two or three votes. For Scott, the close divide shouldn’t slow down an ambitious agenda that includes action on climate change, disaster readiness, and — of course — preparation for the next farm bill.

Reflecting a high priority of President-elect Joe Biden, Scott said that climate change “has got to be our top priority in this committee.” He wants to bring in scientists and other expert witnesses to discuss the subject and help producers navigate the subject, but also to lower the temperature on what can often be a very heated debate.

“Carbon sequestration, no-till farming, all of these things we’ve got to be able to have” as part of the discussion, Scott said. “We’re going to have to bring that climate change issue away from all of this politicization ... it is our farmers that are suffering.”

Thompson also brought up climate change as a top priority of his, but one that he'll approach from the perspective of getting agricultural practices the recognition he feels they're due. He said he wants to avoid overregulation that can be "punishing" to farms. He believes that grazing, responsible forest management, and other carbon-sequestering technologies that can come from agriculture need to be considered as part of the solution to the issue.

“The reality is those things work,” he said. “They’re not political solutions, they’re practical solutions.”

Scott also listed broadband deployment among his top priorities for the committee, as well as a desire to work with the Appropriations Committee to enact legislation that creates a response protocol and funding that can be used for future disasters. That idea, floated earlier this year by current House Ag Chair Collin Peterson, D-Minn., would allow USDA to fund disaster response for producers without an act of Congress and could potentially be funded through the department's Commodity Credit Corp. Peterson, who lost his reelection effort in November, had said such a protocol would have been among his top priorities in Congress.



Rep. Glenn Thompson, R-Pa.

The two new leaders both had kind remarks about the other — Scott called Thompson “very thoughtful and very thorough,” Thompson said Scott is “a gentleman and a statesman” — and both boast lengthy House Ag resumes. Scott also quipped about his “Pennsylvania roots” — he went to elementary school in Scranton — a surefire way, he said, to build a connection with Thompson.

Both chaired or served as ranking member to a handful of panel subcommittees, and both are veterans of several farm bills, experience that will serve them well as they begin to deliberate how to approach a lingering 2023 deadline when the current legislation will expire.

For Scott, he said he'd like to “get my sea legs under me.” He hearkened back to his days in the Georgia state Senate when he gained the reputation as a “members' chairman” for his style of soliciting member feedback before taking concrete action on a bill.

“I want to make sure that I can articulate the ambitions and interest of the members of the committee,” he said.

But Thompson says time is of the essence.

“We need to make up for some lost time,” he said, pointing to action that could have happened had the chamber been doing its regular work in Washington for much of 2020 rather than dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. “We need good oversight. It’s time to start hearing from USDA directly; hearing from farmers and ranchers, and folks within rural communities on what’s working and what’s not working” with the 2018 farm bill.

One thing Scott already knows about the next farm bill is he wants to expand an \$80 million scholarship program for historically Black colleges and universities he championed in the 2018 legislation. Those scholarships, given to agricultural students at 1890s land grant colleges, should be expanded to Hispanic and Native American institutions, he said.

The two new leaders are part of a group of House and Senate Agriculture Committee heads with three of four new faces (Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., will be the only holdover from the last farm bill; Sen. John Boozman, R-Ark., is set to be the Senate panel's top Republican. But both Scott and Thompson expect a solid working relationship with their Senate counterparts. They've both worked with Stabenow on previous farm bills, and Boozman is a former House colleague.

Thompson said he hopes rural and urban America will see results.

"When we get the policy right on agriculture and for rural America, what that means is that every American family — including those in very large cities — won't wake up in the cold, dark, and hungry," Thompson said.

Environmental groups, attorneys general battle EPA over sulfoxaflor

Environmental groups and attorneys general from 11 states are opposing EPA's request to keep the registration of the insecticide sulfoxaflor in place until the agency can comply with Endangered Species Act requirements.

In briefs filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, they argued that EPA's request, supported by registrant Dow Agrosciences, would delay resolution of legal claims over the product for years, and pressed for a ruling to vacate the registration.



The insecticide's use has been challenged before, and resulted in a [Ninth Circuit decision](#) in 2015 vacating its registration until EPA examined its impacts on pollinators. The next year, after Dow Agrosciences amended its request to reduce impacts on pollinators, EPA approved a new registration with new restrictions.

Last year, however, EPA expanded the use of sulfoxaflor (trade names: Transform, Closer) to a host of new crops, including, corn, cotton, citrus and sorghum, but without undergoing interagency consultation as required by the Endangered Species Act.

The Center for Food Safety and Center for Biological Diversity [sued](#) the agency, alleging violations of both the ESA and the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA).

EPA, while conceding it had not conducted ESA consultation, asked the court in October to issue an order remanding the matter to the agency while allowing continued use of sulfoxaflor. It said it would begin its ESA review in mid-2025.

"EPA's 11th hour end-run would result in judicial review of petitioners' FIFRA and ESA challenges being avoided entirely, or at best, delayed for about a decade, while sulfoxaflor use continues unabated," CFS and CBD said in their brief, filed Monday.

“Granting EPA’s motion would set a dangerous precedent for future cases,” the attorneys general said in their amicus brief. “EPA could avoid judicial review of potential violations of a law (FIFRA) by violating an entirely different law (ESA).”

In its brief, also filed in October, Dow said EPA had concluded that “sulfoxaflor is not only more effective against the target pests than existing pesticides, but that earlier pesticides ‘present a greater degree of risk to listed species than most new chemistries, including sulfoxaflor.’”

EPA said in its brief the insecticide was less harmful to beneficial insects than alternatives and that disallowing its use would have “disruptive consequences” for farmers.

CFS and CBD, however, said “if anything is cognizable as ‘disruptive’ here, it is *environmental* harm, not economic harm alone,” citing the Ninth Circuit’s initial decision vacating the sulfoxaflor registration.

The attorneys general are from California, Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington, and Massachusetts.

Dairy leaders pressing for DMC sign-up as deadline nears

Like most dairy producers in late 2019, Ryan Klussendorf of Medford, Wis., was optimistic about 2020 dairy prices and did not sign up for USDA’s Dairy Margin Coverage program. But after seeing extreme volatility this year, he’s not taking any chances for 2021 and said other producers shouldn’t either.

Klussendorf is 32 years old and milks roughly 120 cows with his wife. He said one reason he did not sign up for 2020 DMC coverage was to save money.

“Going into the year, with all these trade deals coming together and the market starting to look up for the future, I chose not to do that being it was an extra expense,” he told *Agri-Pulse*.

But Klussendorf wasn’t taking the risk this year. He said he purchased coverage for 2021 as soon as producers could apply, taking into account current dairy market futures as well as expected increasing feed costs.

“There is still going to be that uncertainty with coronavirus going forward and I knew this was the best way to mitigate that risk,” Klussendorf stated.

The program was developed in the 2018 farm bill and replaced the Margin Protection Program. DMC “offers protection for producers when the difference between the all milk price and the average feed price (the margin) falls below a certain dollar amount selected by the producer,” according to [USDA](#).

Sign-up for DMC — as well as the second round of the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) — ends this Friday, but some in the industry are pushing to give producers more time to enroll. On Monday, the National Milk Producers Federation sent a [letter](#) to USDA asking officials to extend the application deadline to Jan. 30.



Chris Galen, NMPF

The letter argued an extension would allow dairy farmers to make better-informed choices while giving both milk producers and USDA staff strained by coronavirus-related challenges, additional time to communicate.

Chris Galen, senior vice president of member services at NMPF, said this year proved those producers who utilized DMC at the maximum coverage level did receive compensation “well above” the premiums they paid into it.

“I don’t want to necessarily predict that will be the case for a third year in 2021, but that certainly is what the indication is right now,” Galen told *Agri-Pulse*.

He said the number-one driver of producer milk checks is cheese sales — or Class III milk futures — and demand for cheese, which has been severely hampered by the coronavirus pandemic.

“A lot of that is in the food service channel,” Galen said. “Until we see a robust return of the food service business in people dining out or just getting takeout, that’s really going to be a headwind.”

Galen noted it's uncertain if USDA’s Farmers to Families Food box program will continue next year. That program — which distributes surplus commodities to needy families — has helped boost cheese prices and other dairy prices.

However, while the food box program and CFAP may have softened the blow from adverse market effects from COVID-19, University of Minnesota Assistant Professor Marin Bozic said they are contributing to a rise in milk production.

In September, milk production year-over-year grew 2.4% and in October it rose 2.5%, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

“Those are extremely large growth rates. Whenever we see milk production go over 2%, the chances are we will end of up with oversupply,” Bozic told *Agri-Pulse*. “My biggest concern for the first part of next year (is) oversupply that may be induced by aggressive policy interventions in 2020.”

Bozic said some dairy producers may be banking on ad hoc programs to continue next year, but called that an extremely dangerous assumption.

“It would be reckless to bet the farm on continuing the programs that are more likely than not to go away,” he told reporters Friday during a USDA virtual press conference.

Sign-up levels for next year are below overall enrollment numbers for 2020.



Marin Bozic, University of Minnesota

As of Dec. 7, roughly 45%, or 11,166 out of 24,897 producers with established production history, had signed up for coverage in 2021. There are 37,468 licensed dairy operations in the U.S., according to NASS.

Last year, DMC enrollment for 2020 coverage as of Dec. 7 amounted to 13,499 producers, or 51% out of 26,274 operations with established production history.

Bill Northey, USDA's undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation, expects more sign-ups for 2021 than 2020 after the way the program worked this past year.

“Certainly, there is an insurance premium that producers need to pay, but that was quickly covered as soon as we saw a drop in market prices back in April, May and June,” Northey told *Agri-Pulse*.

Northey said he talked to producers who valued paying the premium because they knew they were covered during the uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic.

News Briefs:

NRCS seeks feedback on water quantity issues. To better understand issues and solutions involving water availability in the Western United States, USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will be hosting virtual “listening sessions” next Thursday and Friday for producers and other members of the public. The sessions — which will be held at 10 a.m. EST on both days — are meant to gather input from the public about what water-related issues are hindering producers and ways that they can be addressed. “We have heard from stakeholders that we need to do more to address water quantity issues in the western U.S.,” Kevin Norton, acting NRCS chief, said in a release. “This listening session will enable us to hear directly from people at the local level on how to improve our programs and operations.” According to the Federal Register listing, those interested in attending the session should send their first and last name, organization, job title, city, state, email address and phone number to WesternWater@usda.gov and do so by Dec. 15 at noon. Those who wish to speak during the session must register by Dec. 18. The release states that those who cannot attend or do not wish to speak at the listening session can submit written feedback by email or mail, but must do so before Jan. 19.

Leafy green pilot yields traceability suggestions. A recent pilot project showed some data gaps and offered suggestions to the Food and Drug Administration for improving traceability in the food system. In all, six organizations took part in three pilots over a four-month time frame with supply chain partners like growers, distributors, and retailers. They used a standard “Produce Traceback Template” to track romaine lettuce through three separate supply chains and mimicked the FDA’s role in conducting the traceback. Supply chain members, starting with the point-of-sale or point-of-service, used the template to provide key data elements that allowed an item to be traced back to its source. The expert groups conducting the traceback analyzed the information provided by each supply chain node to determine next steps. Although the participants stated they would adopt the template in the future, the pilots revealed opportunities to refine the template and highlighted the need for a greater focus on education. The pilot report provides guidance on a path forward for future use of the template including additional industry training and modifications to maximize effectiveness and increase ease of use. Notably, the data that enabled each of the teams to independently and successfully identify

the finished product lot purchased by the consumer is not currently captured by the template. These data included business intelligence such as sales data, stock rotation, inventory controls and delivery schedules. These were critical in bracketing the scope of the traceback. The six organizations that led this industry activity included: FMI-The Food Industry Association; GS1 US; the International Foodservice Distributors Association; the Institute of Food Technologists; Produce Marketing Association and United Fresh Produce Association.

Millions of rural Americans to receive highspeed internet from FCC program. Over 5 million unserved rural homes and businesses in 49 states, along with the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, will get high-speed internet access through the Federal Communications Commission’s Phase I Auction of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, the FCC announced Monday. About 99.7% of these locations will receive broadband with speeds of at least 100 megabits per second upload and 20 megabits per second download. Over 85% will get gigabit-speed broadband. “We aimed for maximum leverage of taxpayer dollars and for networks that would meet consumers’ increasing broadband needs, and the results show that our strategy worked,” FCC Chairman Ajit Pai said in a statement. A total of 180 bidders won auction support, including cable operators, electric cooperatives, incumbent telephone companies, satellite companies, and fixed wireless providers. The commission’s structuring of the reverse auction yielded an allocation of \$9.2 billion; the total budget for Phase I of RDOF was \$16 billion over 10 years. The approximately \$6.8 billion left over from Phase I will be rolled into Phase II, which had an initial allocation of \$4.4 billion. In August 2019, FCC proposed to establish the \$20.4 billion RDOF program to deliver high-speed internet to rural homes and small businesses that do not have it.

Farm Hands West...

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in California has appointed **Wendy Rash** as the new State Water Quality Specialist on the Ecological Sciences Staff in Davis, Calif. Rash previously served as district conservationist in both Solano and Napa counties and as a soil conservationist in El Dorado, Yolo, and Solano counties.



Wendy Rash

Speaker **Anthony Rendon** has appointed Assemblymember **Eloise Reyes**, D- San Bernardino, as the next Assembly Majority Leader for the 2021-22 Session. Assemblymember Reyes has served in the Assembly since 2016. She will be the fourth woman and the first Latina ever to serve as Assembly Majority Leader in California.

Nathan Click has left the office of Gov. **Gavin Newsom** where he served as Newsom’s communication director. Click left the post to start his own political strategy and communications firm. Before becoming Newsom’s communications director, Click served as his communications director on his 2018 campaign. Before that, he was Vice President-elect Kamala Harris’ campaign communications director for her 2016 Senate campaign. Newsom has named **Jesse Melgar** to succeed Click as communications director. Melgar joined Newsom’s press office in Jan. 2019., and previously worked for Secretary of State **Alex Padilla**.

After 36 years with Mission Produce, **Jim Donovan** is retiring. In 1984, after graduating from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo with a degree in agriculture business, Donovan joined Mission Produce as an export sales manager. He spent most of his career in his current position of senior vice president of global information and industry affairs. Throughout his career, he worked on developing and growing distribution sources in Mexico, Chile, Peru, Colombia and New Zealand.



Martha Scott Poindexter

Martha Scott Poindexter will be returning to the Senate Agriculture Committee as staff director for GOP Sen. **John Boozman**. Poindexter previously led the committee staff from 2005-2010 under Georgia Sen. **Saxby Chambliss**. She has served on staff of the Senate Intelligence Committee and most recently was vice president for government and industry affairs for Bunge. To learn more about Poindexter, watch her [Meet the Farm Hand](#) interview.

The American Seed Trade Association has hired Senate Ag veteran **Janae Brady** as its new senior director of government affairs. Brady previously served on Sen. **Pat Roberts'**, R-Kan., Ag Committee staff as a senior professional staff member. She advised Roberts on issues related to international trade, agricultural research, biotechnology, crop protection and agricultural defense. Before the committee, Brady worked on trade and food security policy issues at Gordley Associates.

President-elect **Joe Biden** has selected Rep. **Marcia Fudge** to lead the Department of Housing and Urban Development, according to media reports. Prior to the offer to lead the housing agency, Fudge, a member of the House Ag Committee, had been in the running to lead the Agriculture Department. Several other media outlets are reporting that former Secretary of Agriculture **Tom Vilsack** will be Biden's pick for USDA.

Biden has also selected California Attorney General **Xavier Becerra** to head up the Department of Health and Human Services. Becerra, a former member of Congress, played a prominent role in the drafting of the Affordable Care Act. As AG, he's also supported environmental justice advocates on farmworker rights, anti-pesticide groups in challenging federal regulations and environmental organizations in lawsuits against agricultural interests.

The House Republican Steering Committee has identified and selected the representatives to serve as ranking members in the 117th Congress. Leading the Republicans on the [House Ag Committee](#) is Rep. **Glenn Thompson of Pennsylvania**. Thompson previously served as vice chairman of the Agriculture Committee and most recently as ranking member of three of its subcommittees. Heading up the Energy and Commerce Committee is Rep. **Cathy McMorris Rodgers** of Washington. She served as chair of the House Republican Conference for six years, and is currently the co-chair of the Rural Health Caucus. Rep. **Kay Granger**, Texas, was tapped to lead the Appropriations Committee. Rep. **Bruce Westerman**, Arkansas, will lead the Natural Resources Committee. Rep. **Mike Bost** of Illinois, has been selected to lead the Veterans Affairs Committee. He also serves on the Agriculture Committee.

Congressional Western Caucus Chairman-elect **Dan Newhouse**, R-Wash., has named **Sean V. O'Brien** as the organization's new executive director for the 117th Congress. He succeeds **Tim Charters**, who will continue to serve the Western Caucus through the 116th Congress, ending Jan. 2. O'Brien currently serves as the deputy chief of staff and legislative director for Newhouse and handles the energy, forestry, and natural resources portfolios. His portfolio also includes Newhouse's work on the House Appropriations Energy and Water Subcommittee.

Heath Tarbert, Commodity Futures Trading Commission chairman, has announced the names of the 22 members to serve on the Agricultural Advisory Committee's new Agricultural Futures Contracts with Open Interest Subcommittee. The subcommittee will be chaired by **Joseph Janzen**, assistant professor in the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois. To view the full listing of members added to the subcommittee, click [here](#).

The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture has brought on **Ronald "RJ" Karney, Jr.** as the new senior director of public policy. Karney most recently served as director of congressional relations for the American Farm Bureau Federation. Karney brings experience in the areas of rural development, broadband, appropriations and budget, and other financial security issues impacting farmers and ranchers. He started with NASDA on Monday.

Samuel Kieffer is headed to the American Farm Bureau Federation to be the new vice president of public affairs. He currently serves as the chief administrative officer for the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau. He has been with PFB since 2005 and also is a 12-year veteran of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, where he served as a logistics officer. Kieffer starts with AFBB in January.

Sarah Grace Fowler has been promoted to associate director of communications for the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, and will handle all communications related to NASDA. **Amanda Culp** has transitioned her role to handle events for the association and is now the senior director of events.

Sarah Dean has taken a new role at John Deere, now working as the global public policy manager. She previously was the senior manager of international affairs. Dean has been with John Deere for 11 years.

The American Agricultural Law Association has selected **Tyler Buswell** of Utah to serve as its new president-elect. **Ashely Ellixson** of Arizona and **Paul Goeringer** of Maryland have also joined the board as new directors. Buswell succeeds **Pat Dillon** of Iowa, who will become the immediate past president.

Lisa Safarian is stepping down from her post as president of crop sciences of North America for Bayer. Safarian has worked in various positions the past 30 years, holding roles with Bayer and Monsanto. **Brett Begemann** will step in as interim lead for the crop science business for the U.S. and Canada until a long-term solution is put in place.



Lisa Safarian

The National Chicken Council has brought on **Polina Burko** as the new director of meetings and member services. Burko brings 10 years of experience in the hospitality industry, with a focus on event planning and management. The native of Russia is currently perusing her master's degree in Business Administration.

The International Poultry Council has reelected **Robin Horel** as president for 2021. Horel serves as president of the Canadian Poultry & Egg Processors Council. **Ricardo Santin** has been selected to serve as vice president. He serves as vice president of the Brazilian Association of Animal Protein. **Jim Sumner**, president of Poultry Export Group, will serve as treasurer.

The Plant Based Foods Association has added three new members to its 2021 board of directors: **Armetha Pihlstrom**, National Account Manager, Impossible Foods; **GW Chew**, Founder and CEO, Something Better Foods; and **Sadrah Schadel**, Co-founder and Chief Creative Officer, No Evil Foods. Their terms begin Jan. 1.

National Association of Conservation Districts has named **Michael Wilson** this year's recipient of the Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) Conservationist of the Year Award.

Gene Gregory, former president and CEO of United Egg Producers (UEP), passed away Dec. 3. Gregory began his career in the 1950s, working for Corn Belt Hatcheries in Gibson City, Ill., where he eventually worked his way up to vice president and general manager. In 1970, Gregory started serving on committees for the Midwest UEP and eventually chaired the producer committee for animal welfare. In 1992, Gregory was tapped to serve UEP as its senior vice president and in 2007, he was appointed UEP president and CEO. A memorial service will be held in Gibson City, Ill., in early 2021. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to the First Baptist Church of Gibson City, 628 South Church Street, Gibson City, IL 60936.

Best regards,

Sara Wyant
Editor

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