

How farmers, fish and waterfowl can win in the Sacramento Valley

With 95 percent of California's Central Valley wetlands lost over the last century to urbanization and other land use changes, researchers warn that the area's once prolific native salmon could disappear within 50 years.

In response, rice farmers are trying to reverse that trend and help salmon populations recover. The California rice industry launched its three-year Ricelands Salmon Project last fall. Working closely with conservation groups like CalTrout and building on 40 years of UC Davis salmon research, the California Rice Commission that represents the state's rice growers and millers aims to establish whether former wetlands now separated from the area's rivers can be used to reinvigorate the salmon population.

Along with salmon recovery, the project's sponsors hope their wetlands work will provide widespread benefits to include helping:

- Improve the flow of clean water to cities;
- Reduce flood threats to cities;
- Recharge aquifers ;
- Revive the salmon industry along with its jobs;
- Provide a model for resolving agriculture vs environment issues coast to coast and around the world, and;
- Calm California's long-running water battles that often have led to bitter lawsuits between environmentalists and farmers.



Paul Buttner, California Rice Commission

It's not a cheap or easy effort for farmers and more research is needed. But past research indicates dramatically higher growth rates and survival for salmon raised on winter-flooded rice fields. Confirmation could lead to cost-shared winter-flooding for as many as 100,000 of the Central Valley's half million acres of rice.

A second part of the project is studying winter-flooding for perhaps another 300,000 acres specifically to have rice stubble decomposition create algae to trigger an explosion of the tiny insects that become ideal fish food. Ever since California banned the traditional practice of burning rice straw to clear fields, winter flooding has become standard. **So it's relatively easy, at an added cost of about \$45 per acre, to flood fields and then pump the nutrient-rich water into rivers about every three weeks to feed fish.**

This added "fish food" practice would make up for the fact that most of the area's former wetlands are now cut off from the river system and so can't be used for feeding salmon directly in the field. With careful management and an extra farmworker to manage the gates, however, field-enriched floodwater could be pumped into the river system.

The next step for this project is validating past research by tracking implanted micro-transmitter data from each year's juvenile salmon that are given a head-start in nutrient-rich rice fields.

Tracking the salmon from the field to the Golden Gate on their way to the Pacific Ocean before they return to spawn will decide whether the effort is worth the added cost.

If tracking confirms significant salmon recovery, then the final step will be to recommend specific practice standards for potential USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) cost-share payments to participating rice farmers. Practices could cover everything from floodwater depths to perhaps cutting temporary ditches in laser-leveled rice fields to provide the fish with cooler water and shelter from bird predation.

But as the rice growers and researchers we interviewed pointed out, the practices will need to be flexible. Project leaders learned that lesson this year when they carefully planned on holding floodwater depth at 16 to 18 inches. But exceptional rainfall left the researchers with some fields 7 feet under water, with most of their 30,000 research fish roaming the entire floodplain, not just the 38-acre research plot.

The California Rice Commission's manager of environmental affairs, Paul Buttner, has plenty of reasons to expect the commission's salmon project to succeed. Although he's had only a year to learn all about salmon, he's had 18 years managing the California rice industry's work with migrating birds. **Today, the state's rice fields provide food and habitat for some seven million ducks and geese migrating along the Pacific Flyway each year and for shorebirds nesting in the fields year around. Studies show California ricelands now supply over half of the nutritional requirements of wintering waterfowl in the Sacramento Valley.**

Buttner hopes rice fields will deliver similar results for fish. Yet he knows it will take more work and more cost. He notes that birds spot suitable habitat from the air. Buttner says fish, however, need "plumbing" to get them through the dams, weirs and levees to reach the fields and then swim on to the Pacific.

Buttner explains it will take at least two more years of research to develop salmon-recovery practice standards. But he says this work is going ahead with lots of support. "My industry is very excited about environmental projects," he says. "They want to be a part of creating something new that's a great environmental story." There's also ample funding because the rice industry, including input suppliers, has matched NRCS's \$600,000 in annual funding.

Along with supporting an important environmental goal, Buttner explains "If salmon populations recover, that's better for the long-term position of rice. Everyone needs water, the fish need

water, the farmers need water and if the fish are struggling, it certainly can impact your ability to put water on the landscape.”

Roger Cornwell, general manager of River Garden Farms in Knights Landing, hopes someday all 5,000 rice acres on the 15,000-acre operation will be enrolled in an NRCS practice for pumping fish food into the river. That’s because most of his acreage is “on the dry side” of the levee, which means it isn’t accessible for raising salmon in the fields. For now, he’s convinced the effort he’s put into working with researchers on potential practices will pay off not only in helping salmon recovery but in curbing federal regulations that restrict farming.



Roger Cornwell, River Garden Farms

“Having robust populations of salmon back in the Sacramento River will help loosen or ward off any new regulations affecting our water supplies,” Cornwell tells *Agri-Pulse*. **“That’s the end goal. The more fish, the more water there is for everybody.”**

Jon Munger, VP of operations at Montna Farms in Yuba City, is confident that rice farmers working with researchers “can come up with practices that will help benefit the fish, just like we have done for birds.” Clearly, he says, **“just putting more water down the rivers is not working.”** He sees the answer as reopening the floodplains to feed fish because **“If we can have practices that help the fish population, the end result will include protecting our water rights as well.”**

After investing his own “time money and management” to help salmon recovery, Munger concludes that it’s been a great investment because “Most of the fish work fits in the winter window where you’re holding a water crop, as opposed to a rice crop.” Looking ahead, he sees national payoffs because “As with bird practices, California tends to be the leader in rice and environmental issues, so I think that what’s developed here can definitely be carried out in other farming states across the U.S.”

A closer look at the Nigiri floodplains project

California Trout Senior Scientist Jacob Katz tells *Agri-Pulse* that UC Davis began an intense focus on “floodplains being critical to aquatic ecosystems” in 2011, leading to the ongoing Nigiri Project that has confirmed the floodplains’ importance by “Mimicking natural flood patterns to restore floodplain habitat in the Yolo Bypass.” Katz explains the project today aims “to change the levee system, putting in operable gates, manage the floodplains, hold on to the water ... to create a system that is managed like a winter wetland.”

Katz tells us these changes are needed because otherwise, “agriculture is always going to be embattled and is going to lose many of those battles” to the growing urban sector. He says that by re-engineering water systems to work with how natural ecosystems work, “instead of fish or farms, we can have both.”

Associate Professor Andrew Rypel, the Peter B. Moyle and California Trout Chair of Fish Ecology at UC Davis, says drastic declines throughout California’s native fish species call for “big and bold” action such the Nigiri Project and the salmon recovery work that the Rice Commission, CalTrout and UC Davis launched last fall. He’s hopeful that this work will benefit not only California but also rice areas in states like Arkansas, Mississippi and Texas. Going

beyond rice, he says there's cropland in Illinois "that could be flooded in creative ways for sturgeon and other native fishes there."

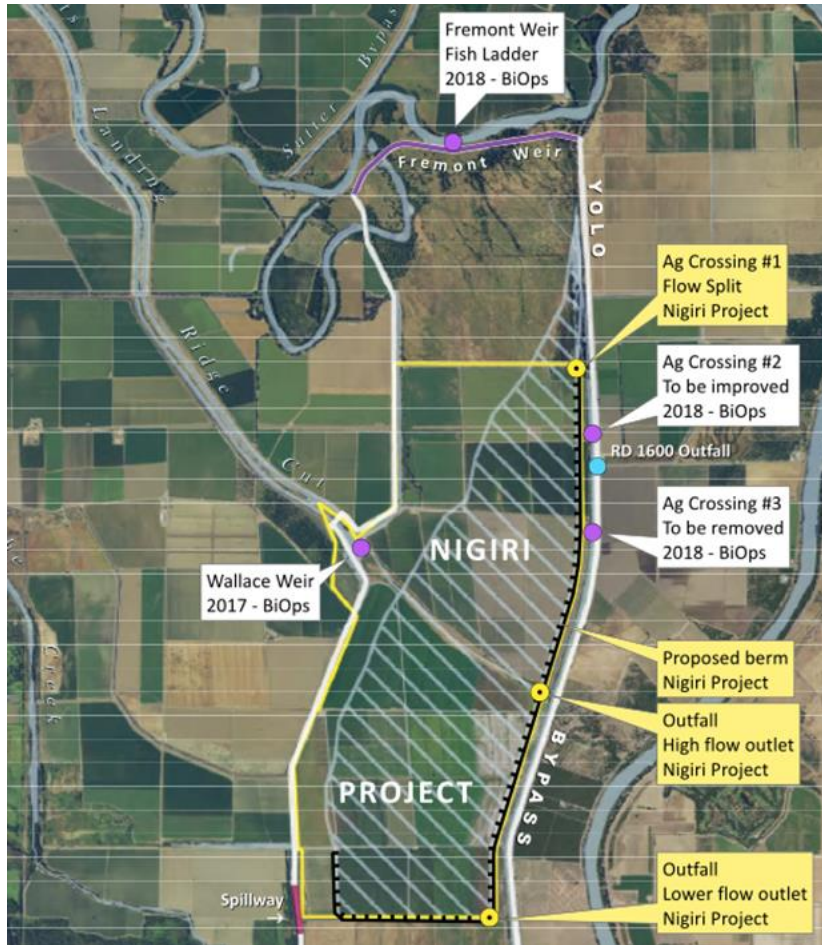
Rypel is optimistic California's salmon recovery work will provide a model to use in places like China, Australia, Korea, and elsewhere that face major challenges from declining fish

populations and "declining freshwater ecosystem integrity."

California's salmon recovery work began over 40 years ago with Peter Moyle, now Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the Department of Wildlife, Fish and Conservation Biology and associate director of the Center for Watershed Sciences, UC Davis.

In an *Agri-Pulse* interview, Moyle said climate change has increased pressure on salmon and therefore the urgency of rescue efforts. But he's optimistic that successful winter feeding of salmon in Yolo Bypass rice fields will spread the practice to other areas.

Longer-term success, Moyle explains, will require major improvements for dams, weirs and levees to give wild salmon



from the headwaters in the Sierras greater access to California's reactivated floodplains. True recovery, he says, can't happen until the floodplains once again host "mostly wild fish," not the hatchery fish that researchers are forced to rely on for their current recovery work while river system obstacles remain in place.

In resisting Trump, California lawmakers put ag in a regulatory pinch

California regulators and policymakers are leveraging the changing tide of party control in the state and the growing anti-Trump sentiment to push back on federal deregulation efforts.

Two reintroduced "resistance" bills and a set of wetlands rules are aiming to preserve Obama-era conservation standards by codifying them into California law. **Yet loopholes could enable more stringent policies with less oversight than the federal standards that existed before Trump took office.** Agriculture could once again feel the regulatory pinch.

The most recent legislation in this effort was the introduction of AB 454 to the assembly. The bill would make it unlawful to harm protected birds according to the federal Migratory Bird

Treaty Act (MBTA), as it stood prior to January 1, 2017—before Donald Trump took the oath of office. Assemblymember Ash Kalra, D-San Jose, authored the bill and presented it yesterday to the committee for Water, Parks and Wildlife.



Assemblymember Ash Kalra

“As we have seen with other issues of environmental importance—with clean water, clean air, endangered species, offshore oil drilling,” he said, “attempts to dismantle environmental laws and standards have put California in the challenging position of needing to secure protection of our natural treasures.”

Kalra said that the Trump administration’s decision to weaken these acts has “reversed decades of enforcement of this.” In calling out agriculture and others in opposition, he said that “it is simply not credible for these industries to claim that simply maintaining MBTA as it has been for decades will harm their industries or prevent California from reaching important economic and renewable energy goals.”

Environmental groups ranging from the Sierra club to the Vegan Society praised the bill, while agricultural, solar and wind groups opposed it. Much of the debate over the bill then centered on one key phrase. According to the bill, the Department of Fish and Wildlife would be able to act on any rule, regulation or order “that is consistent with, or more protective than,” the rules and regulations adopted by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.

In an interview with *Agri-Pulse*, Noelle Cremers, Director of Natural Resources and Commodities at California Farm Bureau Federation, said this phrase gives the department “carte blanche” to go “above and beyond” the existing and former interpretations of the act. That would threaten longstanding provisions that have excluded agriculture at times when birds damage crops or pose a health and safety risk.

She said the Farm Bureau, however, would try to work with Kalra on revising the draft to address these concerns, as the Bureau had done with AB 2627 last year. That first incarnation of this bill died in committee.

AB 454 passed committee and will move to appropriations.

Locking in standards

The story is similar for SB 1. That bill is based on SB 49 by Kevin De León, D-Los Angeles, and Sen. Henry Stern, D-Los Angeles, which also failed last year. When De León left his role as president pro tempore of the Senate, Sen. Toni Atkins, D-San Diego, replaced him and together with Stern authored SB 1 this year.



Noelle Cremers, CFBF

This broad bill aims to preserve the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, Endangered Species Act and Water Quality Control Act.

“That’s not actually what the bill does,” said Cremers. “The bill gives authority to state regulators to go above and beyond what’s in federal regulations.”

She said in many cases California already has that authority and uses it. She argued that it makes it difficult for the state to make adjustments based on changing situations.

“If science dictates that we change our approach to management of certain listed species, like with new biological opinions, we can’t do that because folks who don’t like it would now have the authority to sue and say this is backsliding,” she said.

In February, the Bureau of Reclamation released its biological assessment for the Central Valley Project. If that becomes an opinion, or law, it would lead to a more “flexible” approach to water allocations, based on current conditions. But SB 1 would preempt that by locking the current standards into place.

Stern said his team would have to work with growers and the business community to get to a place of more “certainty and predictability.” Atkins acknowledged that part of the reason for AB 49 failing was the lack of support from the ag industry.

SB 1 has passed its first committee, but will intersect with three more before moving to appropriations.

Regulating the wild

At the AB 454 hearing on migratory bird protection, committee vice chair James Gallagher, R-Yuba City, said he didn’t want this bill to be like the State Water Resources Control Board’s latest proposal. In that, he said, the Environmental Protection Agency had been formulating rules for drastic expansion of the Clean Water Act, when the new administration returned it instead to “a consistent, very clear definition” of the act. Now the Water Board is forming its own rules to “take it to that level.”

“We’re finally going to get a little bit of relief on that, only to go back to really stringent enforcement,” he said, speaking for the farmers in his district.

The proposal Gallagher referenced is the Water Board’s new definition for a wetland, a classification that will influence previously routine farming activities like dredging and filling. The board’s latest definition is more comprehensive than the Trump administration’s recently proposed definition for the waters of the U.S. under the Clean Water Rule and seeks to preserve the 2015 definition implemented by the Obama administration.



Tim Johnson, California Rice Commission

“This is potentially a watershed moment for my industry,” said Tim Johnson, president and CEO of the California Rice Commission, in a Mar. 5 hearing for the Water Board.

The commission had been working with board staff to develop three revised options for a wetlands definition. Johnson said the failure for the board to ignore these options and not “fix” the definition would mean that “we can’t farm rice.” The definition would consider rice fields that are flooded and become winter habitat for migrating birds as waters of the state. The third option that may be adopted attaches the word “wild” to the flooded rice fields, a word that even in its ambiguity would have a massive chilling effect for growers considering such habitats for their fields, according to Johnson. The board and panel then deliberated over the meaning of wild. The water board will have its final vote on the ruling April 2.

DOJ lawyer tells court EPA could have chlorpyrifos decision soon

EPA will make a decision about whether to revoke food tolerances for chlorpyrifos within 90 days of receiving an order from the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, a Justice Department lawyer promised a 9th Circuit panel during oral arguments Tuesday.

No order has been issued yet, but many of the 11 judges on the *en banc* panel in San Francisco expressed frustration with the process to get a decision on chlorpyrifos, a widely used organophosphate that environmental and farmworker groups have sought to ban for years, primarily because of its effects on children. They pressed DOJ Deputy Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Brightbill for assurances that if they ordered EPA to make a decision, it would do so expeditiously.

EPA banned it for residential use in 2000 and received a petition to cancel food tolerances in 2007. The agency finally proposed to do that in 2015, but then-EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt did not finalize that rule, instead deciding in early 2017 to continue to allow its use until its registration expired in 2022.

The League of United Latin American Citizens and other groups sued and won a decision from the 9th (trade name: Lorsban) to revoke food tolerances and cancel registrations within 60 days. On review, however, the court vacated that decision and decided to rehear the case *en banc*, which requires a larger panel than the usual three judges.

“You’ve had 10 years or more to look at this,” Circuit Judge M. Margaret McKeown said to Justice Department attorney Jonathan Brightbill, representing EPA. “How long do you need?”



DOJ Attorney Jonathan Brightbill

Brightbill said EPA had authorized him to tell the panel that the agency will, “barring extraordinary circumstance,” make a final decision within 90 days of receiving the court’s order. The agency has to respond to objections raised by LULAC and other groups to Pruitt’s denial of their 2007 petition.

Attorney Patti Goldman of Earthjustice, representing LULAC, said the court “should order EPA to act on the objections by a date certain.” She added, “If this pesticide is unsafe, it’s got to go and EPA’s got to finalize its revocation rule.” The groups’ opening brief to the 9th Circuit seeks both revocation of tolerances and cancellation of registrations.

Given the many delays on chlorpyrifos, however, she said, “We’re not very hopeful EPA will do what it’s supposed to.”

Much of the argument focused on whether the case was ready for the court to hear — that there actually was a “final agency action” that could be reviewed. But the court seemed satisfied that the case had been teed up for their consideration.

Agricultural groups have been adamant that they need chlorpyrifos, a broad-spectrum insecticide that is used on more than 50 crops, including some for which there are no reliable chemical substitutes, including alfalfa, almonds, apples, citrus, cotton, cranberries, peaches, peanuts, peas, sorghum soybeans, and strawberries.

“For some crops and target pests, chlorpyrifos is the only line of defense, with no viable alternatives,” Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said when EPA asked the appeals court to rehear the case. Losing the use of chlorpyrifos “endangers agricultural industries and is expected to have wide economic impacts.”

Peach growers want food retailers to ‘practice what they preach’

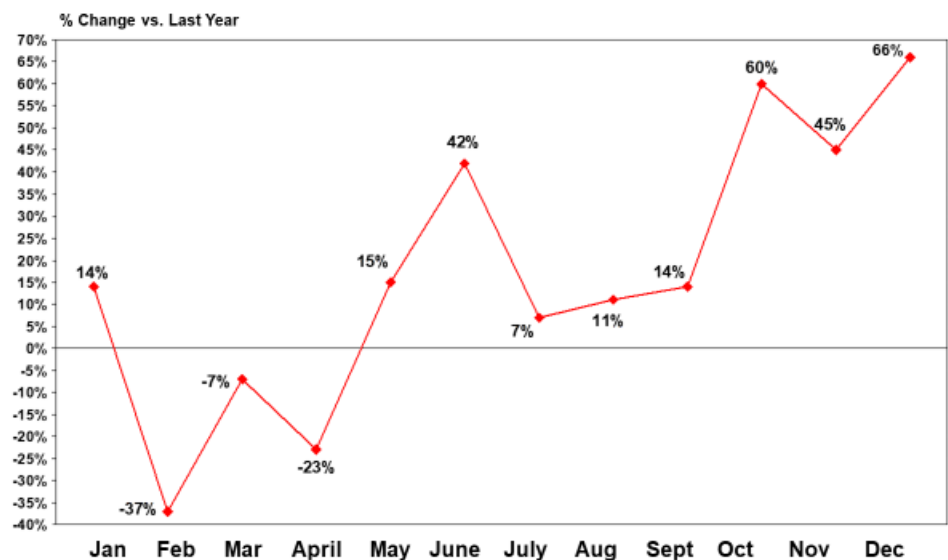
More and more food retailers are promoting locally grown and sourced, yet they still import many low-cost canned products from China and other countries. California peach growers want to see their U.S.-grown products in stores instead.

In a [letter to Kroger](#) last month, Rich Hudgins, president and CEO of the California Canning Peach Association, urged CEO Rodney McMullen to reconsider its decision to sell canned and plastic fruit bowls sourced from China instead of selling U.S.-grown peach products. Similar letters were sent to the CEOs of Save-A-Lot and Lidl US.

“We believe that Kroger’s decision to sell imported Chinese peaches has far reaching ramifications,” Hudgins wrote. “Not only does it unnecessarily hurt American farmers and their families, it also impacts the unionized employees working in California’s processing plants and the local economy in our peach growing areas of California’s Central Valley.” He pointed out that last year, Seneca Foods announced the closure of their Modesto processing plant due to continuing losses related to low-priced subsidized canned peach imports from China.

A Kroger spokesperson told *Agri-Pulse* that the company is reviewing the letter and added: **“As America’s grocer, we are proud that the majority of food Kroger provides is sourced domestically.”**

Percentage Change in Monthly Chinese Canned Peach Import Volume for 2018



2018 Chinese Canned Peach Imports Are Up 509,536 cases (19%)

Source: USDA, Foreign Ag Service

In his letter, Hudgins also pointed to a U.S. government funded study of the Chinese canned fruit industry that disclosed **“tens of millions of dollars (if not more) in unfair subsidies to develop and expand its canned fruit industry.”**

Kroger’s 2017 Sustainability Report highlights the company’s commitment to locally produced goods as a way to lessen the impact on the environment through reduced transportation and minimized handling. Hudgins pointed out that importing Chinese peaches from thousands of miles away should be “in direct conflict” to those commitments.

“It is our hope that Kroger will chose to support the American farmer, American jobs and the American family,” he added.

Hudgins tried a similar tactic with a large retailer in 2011, according to Ag Alert. The association, which represents nearly 400 grower-members, succeeded in influencing Target to sell California-grown cling peaches in 2012.

The Wonderful Company commits to 100 percent renewable energy

The Wonderful Company will continue its commitment to renewable energy with plans to use 100 percent renewable electricity across all its U.S. operations by 2025. As part of this commitment, The Wonderful Company is joining RE100, a collaborative, global initiative led by The Climate Group in partnership with CDP, uniting more than 160 influential businesses committed to transitioning to 100 percent renewable electricity.

The privately-held \$4 billion company sells pistachios, almonds, citrus, pomegranates, bottled water, wines and flowers.



"As a responsible steward of the environment, we've invested more than \$300 million in sustainability research and innovations, clean energy and prudent use of natural resources," said Stewart Resnick, chairman and president, The Wonderful Company. "This is the natural progression of our sustainability efforts and the right thing for us to do as leaders in the agriculture industry."

The Wonderful Company first invested in renewable electricity in 2007 with a ground-mounted solar installation. The project generated nearly 15 percent of the required energy at its pistachios & almonds processing facility. In 2013, the company quadrupled its investment in renewable energy, installing rooftop solar panels at its JUSTIN Wines, Wonderful Pistachios & Almonds, and Halos facilities. The Halos project became the largest privately owned single-site solar rooftop in the U.S.

In January 2019, The Wonderful Company signed its first large-scale power purchase agreement with NextEra Energy to build a 23-megawatt solar project on 157 acres of fallow farmland at company facilities in California's Central Valley. Once completed, the project will generate enough clean electricity each year to grow nearly half of the company's pistachio, almond, and pomegranate crops and bring the company's global renewable electricity use to approximately 25 percent. The firm plans to source the remaining 75 percent of its

electricity from renewable energy projects sited primarily on company land in the Central Valley. Combined with additional off-site renewable energy projects that will maximize emissions savings, and continued investments in energy efficiency, The Wonderful Company plans to reach 100 percent renewable electricity in the U.S. by 2025, and globally by 2040, the firm said in a release.

USDA prepares for national on-farm soil health demo

The 2018 farm bill tasks USDA with nurturing American agriculture’s conservation groundswell around soil health and associated building of soil organic carbon (SOC).

One such assignment is the Soil Health Demonstration Trial (SHDT), in which USDA will pay farmers incentives to adopt and experiment with crop and soil management practices that build up SOC while also establishing participants’ soil carbon baseline and record their success in raising those levels. The trial is a principal piece of the “on-farm conservation innovation trials and related research reporting” mandated by the legislation along with \$25 million to conduct such trials.

With the SHDT, USDA is asked to “establish protocols for measuring carbon levels in the soil and testing carbon levels” in the land farmers have enrolled in the trial, and to report back on the resulting “changes in soil health and, if feasible, economic outcomes, generated as a result” of the trial. This section for on-farm innovation trials envisions a diversity of geographic regions ... taking into account factors such as soil type, cropping history, and water availability.”

Eventually, the data collected could help USDA establish standards and protocols that can be used in marketing carbon reduction and other environmental benefits, says Lara Bryant, director of water and agriculture for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

“There’s an appetite to create a value stream for these farmers, placing a value on ecosystem services the farmers are providing. You’re seeing the private sector step up with the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium, and you have coalitions like ours ... getting something in the farm bill, (and) we see some leadership from USDA as well. It’s all just a reflection of what people want,” she says.



Lara Bryant, NRDC

“We definitely are encouraging USDA ... to use all of the data we have available, from all the sources,” says Bryant. The trial should provide for “standardizing and collecting all that information and putting it together in a way that’s accessible — where we’re getting baseline data and using it to inform the different models” for estimating and scoring changes in soil carbon, she says.

Former NRCS Chief Bruce Knight agrees: “It’s important that this project fills gaps on data for water quality and quantity as well as carbon.”

Soil health itself has a burgeoning crowd of disciples beyond conservation-minded farmers and environmentalists. Several leading food and farm commodity companies, for example, recently launched

the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium to provide a voluntary soil carbon market to reward producers adopting conservation practices such as no-till farming and planting cover crops to increase soil carbon. The Soil Health Institute also recently released its report on how human health itself depends on soil health.

In fact, a consortium of agribusiness and environmental advocates drafted the provision and persuaded Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) to add it to the farm bill. Now, they're now pressing USDA for timely execution.

A joint letter to USDA from the American Coalition of Ethanol, Environmental Entrepreneurs, National Corn Growers Association, Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Minnesota Farmers Union says their idea is “to encourage farmers to implement practices that improve soil health to increase drought resiliency, improve nutrient utilization ... adopt conservation crop and soil management practices that sequester SOC, and (provide farmers with) economic assistance to complete full soil profile SOC measurement after practices have been instituted.”

One of the consortium, Nicole Lederer, chairman of California-based Environmental Entrepreneurs, says by “building strong metrics for establishing and measuring increases in soil carbon,” farmers can “show that a service has been rendered” and “sell their carbon performance as a real ag product.”

Similarly, in its requests to USDA on implementing the farm bill, the Sustainable Food Policy Alliance — created by food giants Mars, Danone, Nestle and Unilever — put a premium on “improved soil health management in a manner that is simple and more applicable to leverage corporate resources and scale our efforts with our farming partners for soil health improvement ... we have a strong interest in knowing that our farming partners, through improved soil health, for example, are increasing both environmental and economic impacts.”

The Fertilizer Institute, meanwhile, may be best known for its members' marketing urea and anhydrous ammonia. But TFI Agronomy Director Sally Flis welcomes the work to be done by SHDT and the farm bill's conservation innovation projects.

TFI's approach to crop amendments, called 4R, “is all about selecting the right source of fertilizer and the right rate and the right time and right place,” she says. “We're interested in how do these practices work together” as well as “how do 4R practices improve soil health? So, if you're managing for soil health, and that's your primary goal — increasing soil carbon — how do you need to change your nutrient management practices to achieve that goal?” She notes that best soil management practices and materials will change when soil carbon increases.



Sally Flis, TFI

NRCS is working on this new farm bill trial program, but does not yet have a target date for fiscal year 2019 implementation.

“As part of implementing the 2018 Farm Bill,” says agency spokesman Justin Fritscher, “NRCS is developing guidance so that participating entities and producers collect soil health data using consistent methodologies and assessments, making the data more useful to NRCS and stakeholders ... (although) we are still early in implementing the farm bill.”

Of course, Bryant points out, USDA is hardly starting from zero in measuring sequestered soil carbon and emissions of greenhouse gases on the farm. It developed one tool to do that, called COMET-Farm, with Colorado State University, for example, and, in fact, announced an updated, more user-friendly version in January.

NRCS also continues to build on its Rapid Carbon Assessment, a system initiated in 2010 to measure and inventory the amounts and distribution of the country’s soil carbon stocks and to set up models to estimate changes in the carbon levels owing to land use change, farm management, conservation practices, and climate change.

News Briefs:

Almond Board makes education fun. There is probably a limit on how many slides and educational brochures any grower can absorb during a given year. Most are dry as a bone and unlikely to move the educational “needle” in terms of training. So, the Almond Board of California took a different tactic last fall, adding a bit of fun to the educational component. You can’t help but smile when you watch the “Mummy Shake video” and also learn why it’s important to “shake for a sanitation break” in this short lesson. It was well-received and so they decided to try a few more. Here is a link to the full Irrigation Station playlist. The organization released the playlist this past January in order to provide growers with entertaining demonstrations of how they can improve their irrigation practices and improve water use efficiency.

Henry Avocado announces recall. Henry Avocado Corporation announced last Saturday that it is voluntarily recalling California-grown whole avocados sold in bulk at retail stores because they have the potential to be contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes*. The San Diego County-based firm said it was issuing the voluntary recall “out of an abundance of caution due to positive test results on environmental samples taken during a routine government inspection at its California packing facility.” There are no reported illnesses associated with this recall. The recalled products – California-grown conventional and organic avocados — were packed at Henry Avocado’s packing facility in California and distributed in Arizona, California, Florida, New Hampshire, North Carolina and Wisconsin. All shipments from the packing facility are subject to the recall (Henry Avocado did not begin packing there until late January 2019). Avocados imported from Mexico and distributed by Henry Avocado are not subject to the recall and may continue to be sold and consumed. Consumers who have purchased any recalled avocados are urged not to consume them, but to discard them or return them to the place of purchase for a full refund. Consumers with further questions may contact Henry Avocado at (760) 745-6632, Ext 132 or visit www.henryavocado.com/media

EPA considering limiting state dicamba restrictions. EPA is asking for comments on whether it should continue to allow states to restrict pesticide use based on local conditions — something states have done in the past two years to prevent damage to off-target crops and other plants from dicamba drift. In a web posting last week, the agency said most of the Special Local

Needs requests it receives are for new uses, as specified in the law, but some are designed “to narrow the federal label, such as to add a more restrictive cut-off date, to add training and certification requirements, or to restrict the use directions by limiting the number of treatments permitted by the federal label.” This year, for example, Illinois and North Dakota have imposed June 30 cutoff dates for dicamba use, while Arkansas settled on a May 25 cutoff date. Those states and others also have added additional restrictions. Rose Kachadoorian, pesticide program manager in the Oregon Department of Agriculture and president of the Association of American Pesticide Officials, said states should be allowed to impose conditions because they each deal with different landscapes, humidity, soil types and crops. AAPCO and some states plan to submit comments to EPA, which said it would take public comment on the issue. “We look forward to a robust public dialogue on this matter,” an EPA spokesperson said without offering specifics on when EPA would announce a formal public comment period.

Cargill, Heifer International launch Hatching Hope initiative. Cargill and Heifer International want to transform 100 million lives by helping smallholder farmers raise chickens and eggs. In an initiative announced last week at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs’ Global Food Security Symposium, the food giant and the nonprofit said they are teaming up to bring financial and technical assistance to women farmers in Kenya, India and Mexico. The Hatching Hope initiative “will drive awareness of the nutritional benefits of poultry and eggs and stoke demand through local and national education campaigns,” Cargill and Heifer said in a news release. “Farmers will be connected to markets and equipped with the goods and services they need to be successful participants in the poultry value chain.” Chuck Warta, president of Cargill’s premix and nutrition business, told *Agri-Pulse* on the sidelines of the symposium in Washington the effort grew out of Cargill’s desire to engage its employees. “Our employees grew up on family farms,” Warta said. “They’re passionate about this. They look for ways to give back to our communities.” Warta also said Cargill is “not bashful” about its desire for participants to become customers of Cargill Animal Nutrition or suppliers in the future. “It may take 30 years, it may take three years, we don’t know, but we should be doing it with the intent that we can create customers for the industry we’re in,” he said. The partners plan to work with 4 million smallholder farmers by 2030 in order to benefit 100 million people in the communities surrounding those farmers. Work began in India last fall with 300,000 farmers. The companies are inviting other companies or organizations to participate.

Farm Hands on the Potomac: Dolcini heads home

California Gov. **Gavin Newsom** appointed **Val Dolcini** to join the California Environmental Protection Agency as deputy secretary for agriculture. Most recently, Dolcini served as president and CEO for the Pollinator Partnership in Washington, D.C., spearheading efforts to plant milkweed and other pollinator plants in buffer areas to support monarch butterflies. During Dolcini’s career, he served at the USDA Farm Service Agency as state executive director for California, then as FSA administrator from 2014-2017. He also worked as a staffer for Lt. Gov. **Cruz Bustamante**, Gov. **Gray Davis**, Rep. **Vic Fazio** and House Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** earlier in his career.



Val Dolcini

Western Growers hires **Anna Bilderbach** as the new learning and development manager on the human resources team. Bringing over 20 years of experience in financial services, non-profit, and project manager positions in this role she is responsible for conducting all training for Western Growers member farmers and the agricultural community, in both English and Spanish..

Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee **Collin Peterson** announced several new staff members and position changes last week. **Melinda Cep** returns to the committee as legislative and policy director. She most recently served as senior director for the U.S. markets and food team at the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). In her past experience on the committee, she served as a fellow during the 2008 Farm Bill. She also worked at the USDA serving as deputy chief of staff to former secretary of agriculture **Tom Vilsack**. Coming to the committee from the National Association of Conservation Districts, **Carlton Bridgeforth** joins as professional staff. **Jasmine Dickerson** has been appointed to serve as staff director for the Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations. Before coming to the subcommittee, she was the legislative director for Delaware Rep. **Lisa Blunt Rochester**. Appointed to serve as staff director for the Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research is **Brandon Honeycutt**. He previously served in the office of California Congressman **Jimmy Panetta** of California and in the office of congressional relations at USDA during the Obama administration. **Félix Muñoz, Jr.** becomes the staff director for the Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry. Muñoz previously served as a legislative assistant to Congresswoman Marcia Fudge, D-Ohio. **Ashley Smith** joins the committee to serve as staff director for the Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit. She most recently served as the legislative director for Rep. David Scott, D-Ga. Current staff member **Mike Stranz** was appointed to serve as staff director for the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, and **Katie Zenk** becomes Staff Director for the Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture, as well as the Economist for the Committee's Majority staff. **Lyron Blum-Evitts** is tapped to serve as the committee's member relations coordinator after leaving the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee where she served as DCCC's policy director. Lastly, **Mickeala Carter** joins as outreach coordinator. Before joining the Committee, she served as communications director and senior legislative assistant to Rep. Filemon Vela D-Texas.

Michawn Rich and **Meghan Rogers** have moved up to communications director and deputy communications director, respectively, for Secretary of Agriculture **Sonny Perdue**. A native



Michawn Rich

Nevadan, Rich has been at USDA since the beginning of the Trump Administration, first serving on the beachhead team. Before coming to the USDA, she worked on Ohio Sen. **Rob Portman's** senate reelection campaign as communications director and before that worked as deputy communications director for **Sen. Dean Heller**, R-Nev. Rich steps into this position after former communications director **Tim Murtaugh** moved on to join **President Trump's** reelection team. Rodgers has been at the USDA since August 2018 and came to the department from Capitol Hill where she worked as the communications director for Rep. **Tom Rooney**, R-Flo., and legislative correspondent for **Patrick Meehan**, R-Penn.

Settling in to her new position at USDA is **Ashley Willits**. Willits works as an advance lead for Secretary of Agriculture **Sonny Perdue**. She is currently finishing her degree while working at USDA. The upstate New York native will graduate in May from Tarleton State University with a degree in Agricultural Communications.

Joel Baxley, acting assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development, tapped **Chad Rupe** to serve as the acting administrator for USDA's Rural Utilities Service, effective April 1. Rupe has served as USDA Rural Development state director of Wyoming since 2017.

David Marten begins a new job as deputy director, D.C. Office for Washington Gov. **Jay Inslee**. Marten most recently served as legislative assistant for Rep. **Denny Heck**, D-Wash. **Emily Kolano** has taken over handling agriculture, labor, science/digital technology, and space issues and **Jaxon Wolfe** has added Puget Sound recovery, environment/natural resources, energy, Tribes, transportation, and ports to his portfolio for Rep. Heck.

Marrone Bio Innovations, Inc. (MBI) hired **Brian Guess** to work as Southwest U.S. Territory Sales Manager. Guess has over 12 years of growing operations experience, most recently serving as the director of Field Operations for LIV Organic Produce. Before that, he managed regional grower operations in Southern California for Homegrown Organic Farms. MBI is a global provider of bio-based pest management and plant health products.

Stepping down as Organic Valley's CEO is **George Siemon**. Siemon was one of seven founders who created Organic Valley and has served the company since 1988. Organic Valley has appointed **Bob Kirchoff**, current chief business officers, to step in as interim CEO.

Best Regards,

Sara Wyant

Editor

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