For Members, By Members

June 19, 2026 Volume 77 Number 10

Stanislaus County FARM NEWS PAPER

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Reproductive Technologies Help Cattle Opperations Accelerate Genetic Progress

Feature Story

By Vicky Boyd, SCFB

As reproductive technology goes mainstream, an increasing number of Stanislaus County and California dairy producers have harnessed it to speed up genetic improvements within their herds. A cow bred naturally by a bull or with artificial insemination typically has one calf per year. But modern-day technology, which includes in-vitro fertilization and conventional flush embryo transfer, allows a single elite cow during the same year to pass along her genetics to several calves carried by recipient animals.

"With the cattle market right now, there are crazy high values," said Kaela Cooper, a client service representative at Trans Ova Genetics in Turlock. "Doing this process, it's a big investment. If they get one natural calf, they can sell it for $4,000. And we can make 20 of those in the same calving season. It's a way to multiply their success."

In addition to IVF and embryo transfer, Trans Ova also offers sexing of frozen semen — a process known as reversed sort — to complement its reproductive offerings. While not perfect, sexed semen significantly increases the chances the progeny will be the desired gender, she said.

BY THE NUMBERS

In 2024, the last year for which figures are available, more than 621,000 bovine embryos were transferred within the U.S., up 10% from 2023, according to the Champaign, Illinois-based American Embryo Transfer Association.

Of those embryos, the vast majority involved IVF. And dairy cows accounted for nearly two-thirds of the activity.

Within California, nearly 8,600 dairy embryos were transferred compared to about 6,400 beef embryos, according to association figures. Texas led the nation with more than 127,200 dairy embryos and 148,700 beef embryos.

The premise behind both reproductive technologies is similar: generate numerous viable embryos from genetically elite cow donors for transfer into recipient cows, which may not have the same superior genetics. The difference is in how the embryos are produced.

IN-VITRO FERTILIZATION

With IVF, a technician first administers an epidural to the donor cow at the beginning of ovum pick-up, as non-surgical egg retrieval is called. Guided by an ultrasound, the technician uses a needle to insert into each follicle — small sacs in the ovaries that house oocytes or immature eggs — and aspirates the contents into a collection vial that also includes buffered medium. Typically, a technician can retrieve 15-30 oocytes per animal.

The retrieval technique also can be used on young heifers as well as pregnant animals through 120 days of gestation. This allows cows to produce embryos while they remain in the breeding herd and calve on an annual basis. In-vitro fertilization doesn't disturb the donor's normal heat cycles.

Back at the lab, a technician screens the material into a Petri dish, separating, counting and grading the oocytes based on quality. The oocytes are then transferred into a maturation medium, put in an incubator and shipped to Trans Ova's Iowa headquarters for fertilization.

"We have such a short window," Cooper said. "If it doesn't get delivered when it should, 20-22 hours post-aspiration, then we're out of that fertility window."

One of IVF's attractions is how little semen is required to fertilize an oocyte, she said. A straw of semen from a coveted Angus bull, for example, may run upwards of $10,000, but it can be stretched to fertilize eight donor oocytes.

Once fertilized, embryonic cells are again incubated in a special medium and begin to divide. By day seven, the embryos been graded and are ready to be transferred into recipient cows that have been synched.

The term refers to timing a cow's reproductive cycle so it naturally hits peak receptivity on day seven, the same day as embryo transfer. The embryo transfer procedure is fairly quick and loosely resembles artificial insemination. Top-grading embryos also can be frozen using liquid nitrogen and stored for later transfer.

IVF success rates vary, depending on the breed, age, health and body conditioning of both donor and recipient cows. But Cooper said it's really a numbers game. Of 100 oocytes aspirated, only about 30% will make it to

a fertilized embryo that can be transferred, and then only 50% of those will take. Using frozen embryos and semen slightly decreases the success rate compared to fresh embryos and semen.

CONVENTIONAL FLUSH

Conventional flush embryo transfer, also known as in-vivo fertilization, involves giving the donor cow a series of hormonal injections to promote superovulation or multiple oocytes. Shortly afterward, donors are bred via artificial insemination using two to three straws of semen spaced 12 hours apart.

About seven days after insemination, technicians non-surgically collect the embryos by flushing the donor's uterus and transfer them to synchronized recipients that serve as surrogates. The embryos also may be frozen for later implantation.

Each system has pros and cons, Cooper said. "Conventional flushing embryos are your highest quality because they're made by the animal, and IVF embryo conception rate is lower. With IVF you can do it every two weeks on a donor up to 120 days bred. Conventional flushing you can do only a few times a year because it's a lot harder on the cow due to all of the hormones (you have to administer) and breeding three times using AI. Technically they're pregnant for seven days before embryo collection."

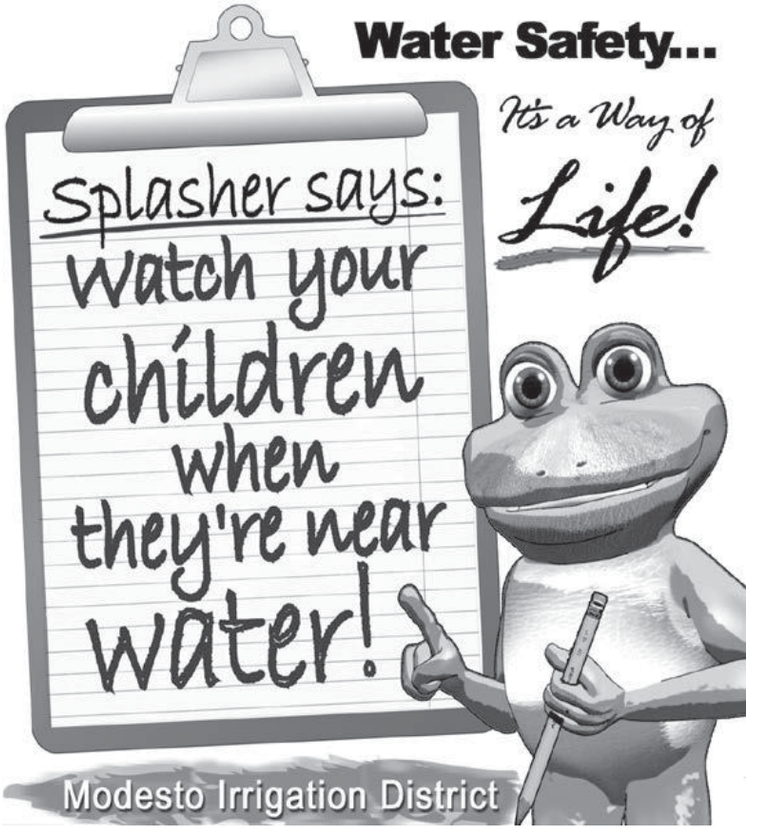
LABOR CHALLENGES

To accommodate oocyte collection throughout the state, Trans Ova has partnered with producers to create four satellite stations: Tulare, Hilmar, Orland and Montague. The original two stations, Hilmar and Tulare, were opened in 2017.

The two northern locations, designed mainly for beef, were opened in the past three years.
"We try to keep the sites about two hours away from everybody," Cooper said about locations with convenience in mind.

Individual producers host the stations on their property, which have the space needed to back up trailers and chutes to unload cattle.

Despite the growing popularity of the reproductive technologies, she said companies like Trans Ova remain challenged by the lack of trained technicians.
"There aren't enough people to put in embryos in this area, so most of these dairies want to train their AI guys to put embryos in for them," Cooper said. "There aren't a lot of embryo transfer schools — the training is the biggest thing."



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On-farm evaluation of lagoon water quality for forage nutrient management on California Dairies

Rúbia Branco-Lopes – UCCE Tulare & Kings, Nicholas Clark – UCCE, Jennifer Heguy – UCCE Stanislaus, Merced & San Joaquin, Joyce Pexton – UC Davis and Deanne Meyer – UC ANR & UC Davis

The nitrogen (N) concentration of lagoon water is highly variable. It changes due to diet, animal and milk cooling systems, manure management and seasonal weather. Nitrogen concentrations in blended lagoon water can vary during a single irrigation event due to changes in lagoon water levels and irrigation flow rates. This variability makes it challenging to apply N to crops precisely when utilizing lagoon water. Lab analyses can provide accurate N measurements but fail to capture the variability that occurs during an irrigation event in real-time. On-farm N measurement of lagoon-blended irrigation water could improve farm N management by providing instant information. However, there is no practical on-farm tool that can directly measure total N in lagoon-blended irrigation water quickly, easily, and at a low cost.

Ongoing study. We are evaluating if different water quality parameters (electrical conductivity, ammonium-N, specific gravity and turbidity) measured with handheld meters can quickly, accurately and inexpensively estimate N concentrations in lagoon-blended irrigation water. Lagoon water contains N in several forms but mostly as organic N and ammonium-N. Ammonium-N is plant-available; organic N is not available until soil microbes decompose it into ammonium-N. However, both are important to quantify because they both contribute to plant nutrition over a crop season.

We are collecting blended lagoon water samples at irrigation valves on eight dairies in the San Joaquin Valley. During irrigation with lagoon water, water quality is measured on-farm at the irrigation valve using handheld meters, and samples are also collected for lab analysis. We are sampling during summer and winter over two years at dairies with and without anaerobic digesters, the first year is complete.

Preliminary results. Nitrogen concentrations in lagoon-blended irrigation water varied (Table 1). Nitrate-N and ammonium-N are plant-available. Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen represents the sum of ammonium- and organic N

Table 1. Concentrations of different forms of N measured in lagoon-blended irrigation water, shown in pounds applied per acre-inch of water, collected from eight dairies in the San Joaquin Valley (n = 122).

	Nitrate-Nitrogen (lb/ac-in)	Ammonium-Nitrogen (lb/ac-in)	Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen (lb/ac-in)	Total Nitrogen (lb/ac-in)
Maximum	3.51	118.97	267.39	267.39
Minimum	0.004	0.14	0.36	0.004
Average	0.88	47.18	68.39	63.17

A strong relationship was observed between electrical conductivity (EC) measured on-farm and ammonium-N and Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen (TKN) both measured in the lab (Fig. 1). This demonstrates that EC measured with handheld meters can be used as an indirect indicator of N concentrations in lagoon-blended irrigation water. Electrical conductivity is an indicator of how much charge is in water which in turn indicates how many salts are dissolved in the water. As ammonium-N is electrically charged, higher ammonium concentrations increase EC. The relationship between EC and TKN makes sense because ammonium-N is part of TKN.

Take-home message. N concentration in lagoon-blended irrigation water can vary widely. Measurements with a handheld meter (EC) may provide a quick indicator of N concentrations during irrigation, however they do not replace the lab analyses required for environmental compliance.

COOPERATOR NEEDED: If this project is of interest to you, I need to enroll one additional DIGESTER dairy in the Northern San Joaquin Valley for year two data collection. Your time investment will be minimal and include letting me know when manure irrigations are running and where to sample! If you'd like more information, please give me a call at 209.525.6800 or email me at jmheguy@ucanr.edu

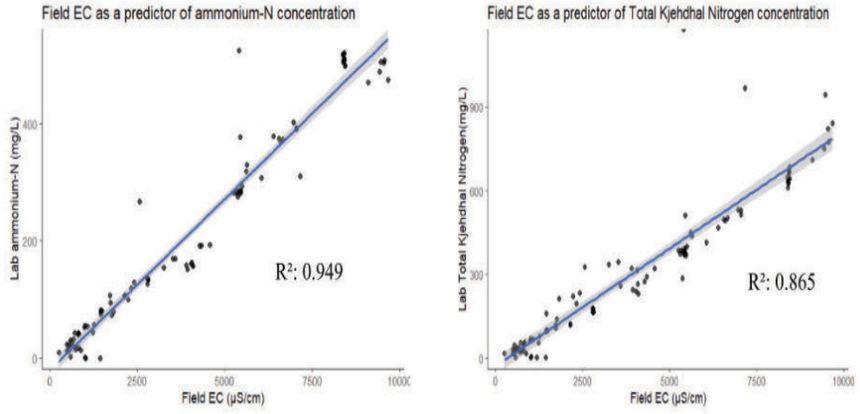

Fig. 1. Relationship between electrical conductivity (EC) measured on-farm and N (ammonium-N or Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen) measured in the lab *[R^2 = how related the EC and ammonium-N or Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen are (closer to 1.0 = stronger)].*

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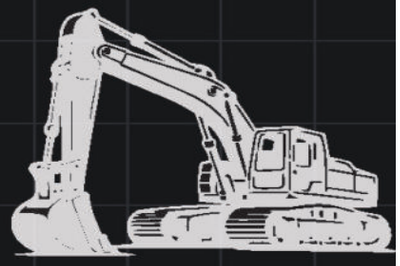

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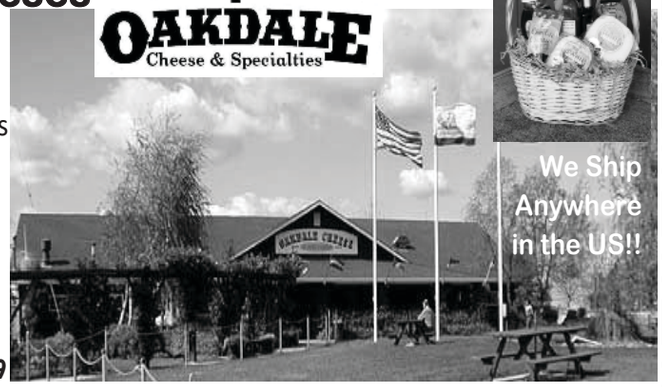

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Dear Abi

Understanding What This Column is About

Dear Abi,

This is a new column in the paper! Can you tell us a little bit about what to expect from this section and how we can submit our questions?

-Genuinely Curious

Dear Genuinely Curious,

Thanks for the first question for this new column! As the new editor of the Farm News Paper, I wanted to have a personal way to connect with members and readers.

This column is going to be a way for readers to submit questions about various topics ranging from questions on new bills or policies, fun ways to involve your kids in agriculture, advice on how to survive the busy seasons and so much more. Scan the QR code or call the office with your questions. I can't wait to connect with you all!

-Abi

UPDATE FROM THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Direct Action Everywhere Update

From Stanislaus County Sheriff's Office

Direct Action Everywhere or DxE is a network of animal rights activists founded in 2013 in the San Francisco Bay Area. DxE uses disruptive protests and non-violent direct-action tactics such as open area rescue of animals from factory farms.

In Stanislaus County we have had a few run-ins with them. Historically they have been much more active in other counties closer to the bay area, but we have seen a recent uptick in our area. DxE typically uses social media to run a disinformation campaign against their current target (farm or facility) much like propaganda. This is designed to build public sentiment and hopefully develop large interests in furthering the cause.

DxE's common strategy in our county has been to send a small unannounced reconnaissance team to their next target farm. They do this discreetly and used to trespass on the farm and seek out situations they can leverage through photographs or video, even to the point of trying to "rescue" or "free" animals. In one such case years back, they tried to rescue a calf from a calving operation. Once they've conducted this portion, they will blast the actions on social media and typically raise the call for protest. They often follow up with a public protest at the targeted areas to rouse interest and intrigue. The Sheriff's Office keeps a watchful eye on their public activities through our Sheriff's Department Threat Assessment Center (STAC). Unfortunately, in this modern time they have access to drones or Unmanned Ariel Vehicles which allow them to fly through your property from afar while capturing video of your operations. This allows them the option of remaining mostly covert and they aren't technically breaking any laws. It is not legal for you to shoot down their drones!

To be forewarned is to be forearmed! The best thing you can do is educate yourself on their operations, tactics and presence. If they trespass on your property they are committing a crime, be sure to always call local law enforcement for a zero-tolerance approach. Ensure your properties are well prepared with no trespassing signs, locked gates and other methods to restrict their ingress. Anytime there are any suspicious vehicles or people around your property be sure to call so local law enforcement can document the incident. If they try to steal your animals that is also a crime. Our best tool is continuous enforcement of their tactics and members as they break the law.

POLICY IN PLAIN ENGLISH WITH TOM ORVIS

How Does a Bill Become Law?

Every law in California starts as a bill introduced by a legislator. Before it becomes law, it must pass through several steps.

CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATOR AT A GLANCE

ASSEMBLY
80 MEMBERS

60 Democrats (75%)

20 Republicans (25%)

SENATE
40 MEMBERS

30 Democrats (75%)

10 Republicans (25%)

Did you know?

Democrats currently hold the

Super Majority

in both the Assembly and Senate? This means they hold **more than two thirds** of the seats.

The Life Cycle of a Bill

1. INTRODUCED

A legislator introduces a bill in either the Senate or Assembly.

2. COMMITTEE REVIEW

The bill is assigned to committees where it is discussed, reviewed, amended and voted on.

3. FLOOR VOTE

The full house votes on the bill - most bills require a simple majority to pass (50% plus 1 vote)

4. SECOND HOUSE

If approved, the bill moves to the other house and repeats the same process.

5. GOVERNOR'S DESK

If the bill passes both houses, it then gets sent to the Governor. **The Governor can:**

- **Sign** the bill into law
- **Veto** the bill
- **Take no action** allowing it to become law with no signature

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July 11th
July 15th
July 17th
July 18th

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Local Vet Tip!

As temperatures rise and county fair season approaches, now is the time to focus on keeping your animals comfortable and healthy. Always provide access to plenty of clean, fresh water and adequate shade. If possible, use fans, misters, or other cooling methods to help reduce heat stress. Remember, the more comfortable your animals are, the better they'll eat, perform, and feel throughout the summer months.

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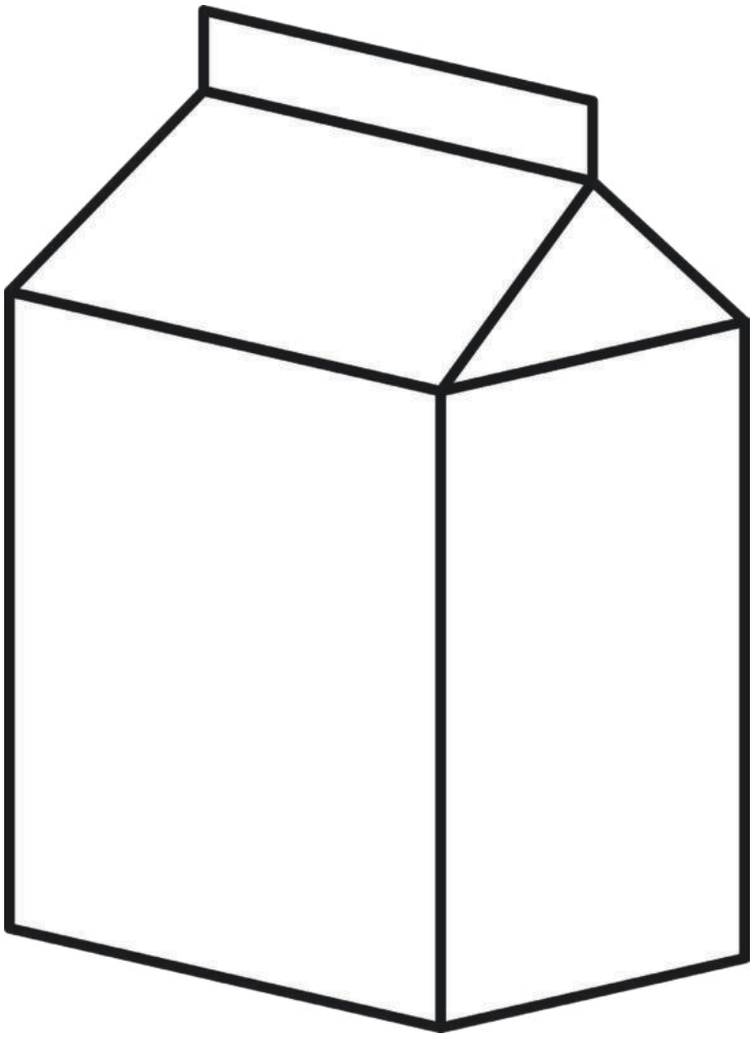

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FARM BUREAU WIN

DID YOU KNOW?

Farm Bureau helped defeat Sonoma County's Measure J, which would have prohibited certain large-scale animal agriculture operations, including many commercial dairies. The measure posed a significant threat to local agriculture and could have served as a model for similar efforts elsewhere in California. Through strong advocacy and help from other agriculture organizations, Farm Bureau helped secure its defeat.

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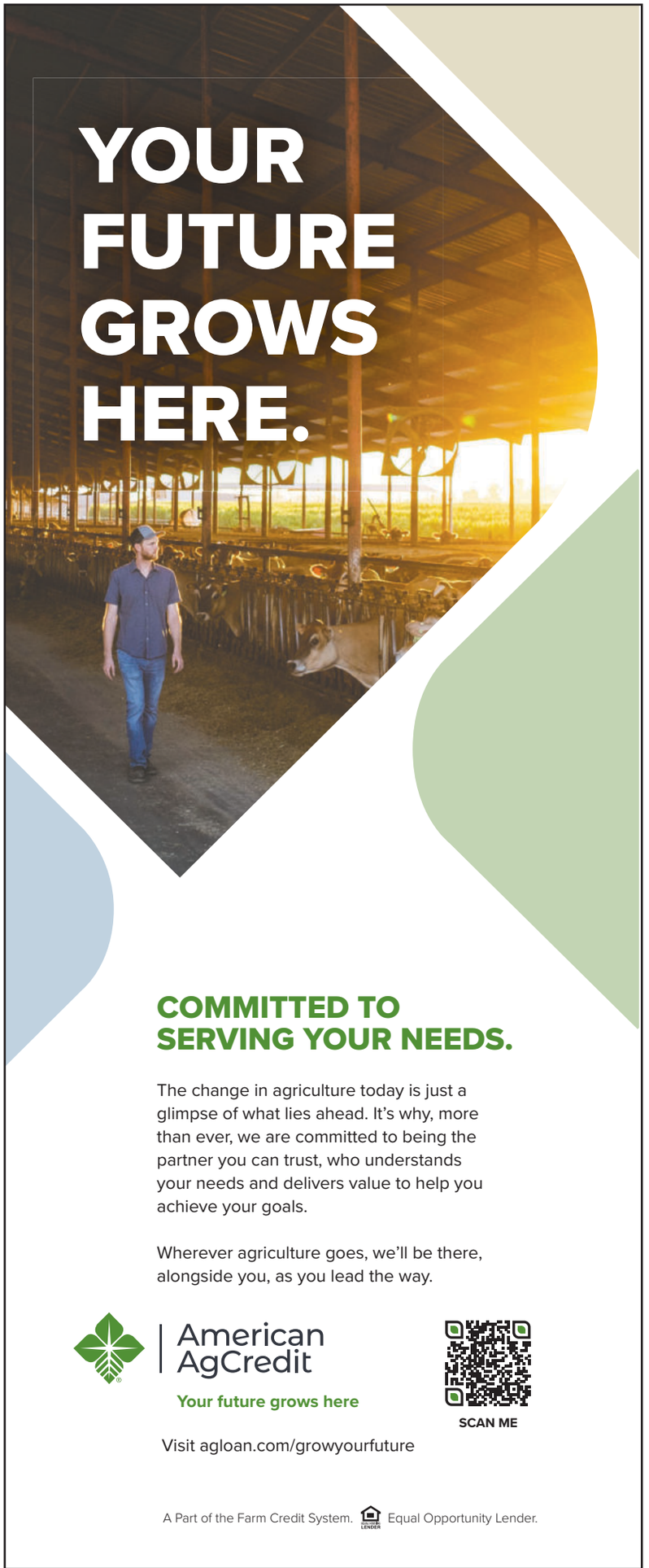

Your Voice on Issues that Matter, Calling on the Capitol Series

By: Caitie Diemel, SCFB Executive Director

California Farm Bureau's annual Calling on the Capitol advocacy program concluded on May 26 in Sacramento after a series of member visits held over the spring, starting in March and wrapping up in May. Calling on the Capitol brings Farm Bureau members directly to the State Capitol to meet with legislators and discuss the impacts of proposed legislation on California agriculture.

Stanislaus County Farm Bureau was represented by 12 members who participated in meetings with six legislative offices, including both State Senators and Assemblymembers. On May 26 alone, Farm Bureau members met with 28 legislative offices. Throughout the four-day advocacy series, more than 51 Farm Bureau members met with 70 legislative offices, ensuring agriculture's perspective was heard as lawmakers considered key policy proposals.

May 26th was a particularly busy day in the Capitol, with

many bills were being heard on the floor that week, making our visit feel particularly impactful.

Key Legislative Priorities

Discussions focused on several bills and issues currently affecting California agriculture, including AB 1585, AB 2646, and AB 1603.

AB 2646 would establish a minimum hourly wage of $19.75 for certain agricultural employees beginning in 2027, with future increases tied to inflation. Members shared concerns about the impact rising labor costs could have on California farms and ranches already facing significant economic pressures. This would impose roughly a 30% increase in agricultural wage floor in one year and would apply to both H-2A workers and domestic workers doing similar work. Farm Bureau opposes this bill.

AB 1603 addresses PFAS compounds in pesticide products and could affect the availability of important crop protection tools. This bill potentially impacts 1,153 products used in agriculture, structural pest control and public health programs. Farm Bureau members emphasized the need for science-based regulations that protect both the environment and agricultural productivity. This takes tools out of our toolbox without any reasonable ability to put new tools back in. Farm Bureau opposes this bill.

Members also discussed AB 1585 and the importance of maintaining clear labeling standards that protect the integrity and market value of California agricultural products. Current standards require that 100% of grapes included in California wine are in fact grown in California. American wine however, only requires 75% of the grapes to be grown in America. This bill is a truth in labeling bill requiring that 100% of grapes included in American wine are grown here. Farm Bureau supports this bill.

Additional conversations focused on the Wolf Livestock Compensation Program and the growing need to support ranchers experiencing livestock losses as wolf populations expand throughout the state. This budgetary ask includes funding for a multipronged approach with funds available for: compensating ranchers for livestock losses, staffing for fish and wildlife, research at the UC level and UC Cooperative Extension support to ranchers and communities. Additional funds would work go to a Coexistence program, recognizing that if the state wants wolves on the landscape, it must support the ranchers who live and work there.

Members also highlighted the potential benefits of autonomous tractors and other agricultural technologies that can improve efficiency, sustainability, and workforce challenges, and the antiquated laws that prevent the use of their use in California. By talking with lawmakers now, we are hopeful that as industry is ready to present changes, legislators are already up to speed on the necessity of updating these regulations.

The Value of Advocacy

Calling on the Capitol provides an important opportunity for legislators to hear directly from farmers and ranchers about how policy decisions affect agricultural operations and rural communities. With large numbers of members showing up, more offices can be reached. We met with several legislators from Los Angeles and other urban areas that might not receive routine visits from agriculture groups. By sharing their experiences and concerns, Stanislaus County Farm Bureau members helped ensure that agriculture's voice remains part of the legislative process as bills continue moving through Sacramento.

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As a Stanislaus County Farm Bureau President's Club Member, insureCAL values the work Farm Bureau does to support agriculture while also appreciating the opportunity to connect with the farming and ranching community they serve.

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Colbie and his team are the best and always go above and beyond to support Farm Bureau. Thank you to insureCAL for your support of our organization!

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Vance Ahlem

Stanislaus County Farm Bureau President

As a walnut grower and producer of corn and silage crops, Vance Ahlem understands both the challenges and opportunities facing California agriculture. Serving as the current Stanislaus County Farm Bureau President, Vance is passionate about ensuring agriculture has a strong voice at every level of government.

One aspect of agriculture that often surprises people, Vance says, is just how technology-driven the industry has become.

"People don't realize how technology driven agriculture is," he explains. "From plant genetics, animal genetics and farming technologies, innovation plays a major role in creating the precision we need in agriculture."

For Vance, Farm Bureau's value lies in its ability to advocate for farmers and ranchers while they focus on running their operations.

"Farm Bureau provides a voice for agriculture at the county, state, and national levels," he says. "It allows farmers and ranchers to continue attending to their businesses on the farm."

His message to potential members is simple: "Your voice matters in the future of California agriculture."

When asked about his favorite agricultural commodity, Vance quickly responded, whey protein.

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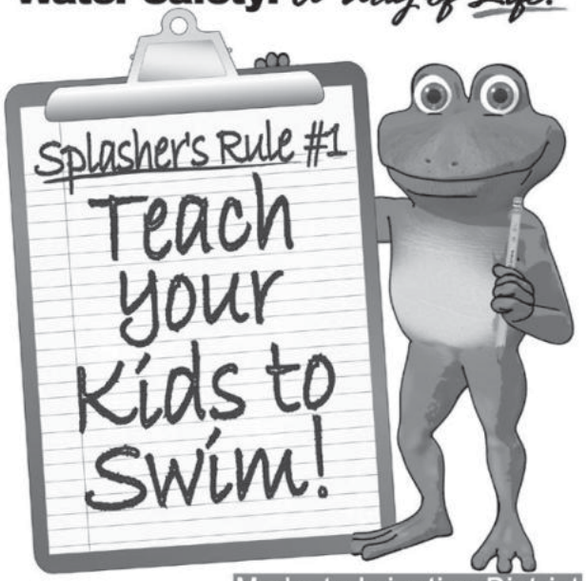

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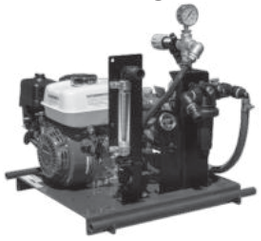

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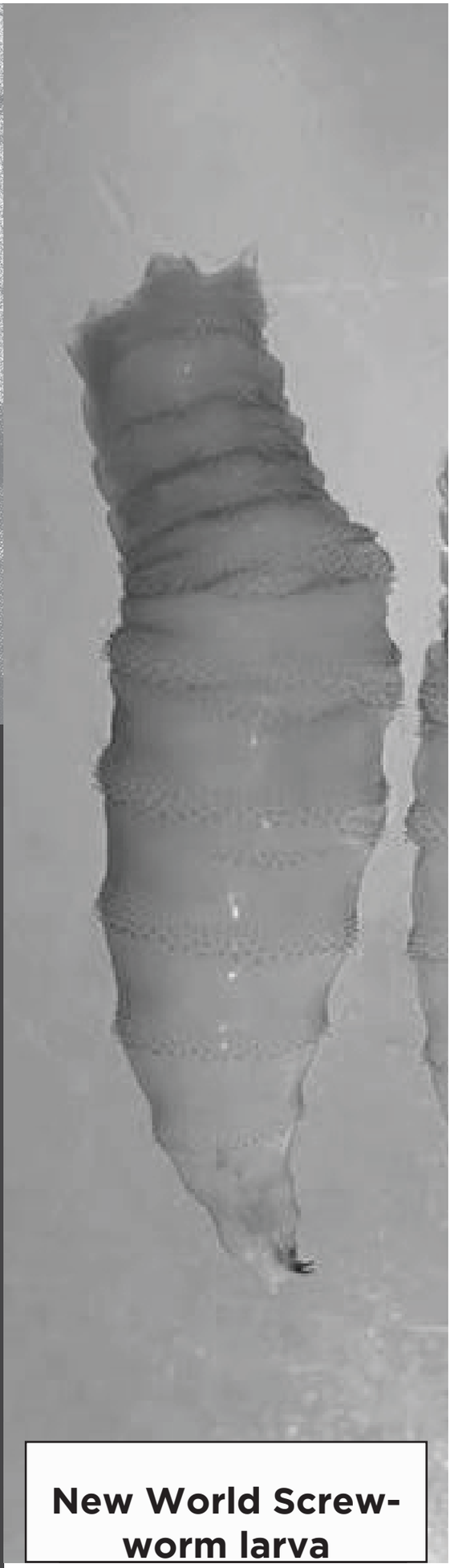

New World Screw-worm larva

Important Update!

New World Screwworm Case Discovered in the U.S.

AFBF Staff

American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall commented today on USDA's announcement that the first case of New World screw-worm (NWS) has been reported in the United States.

"The re-emergence of New World screwworm in the United States after 60 years will have an immediate impact on farmers and ranchers in the affected areas. We are confident that the longstanding coordination between the states and USDA will enable a quick response and hopefully limit the negative impacts and resulting market volatility.

"We encourage farmers, ranchers and pet owners to familiarize themselves with the signs of NWS and notify a veterinarian if infection is suspected. It is important to be clear about the fact that this re-emergence does not threaten the safety of our food supply. We are fortunate to have one of the safest food supplies in the world, which includes multiple layers of protection.

"We knew the screwworm could one day migrate north, and we appreciate USDA and Secretary Rollins for the coordination and mitigation efforts that have already occurred. Farm Bureau is committed to working with USDA and the affected areas in any way to eliminate this pest once again from the U.S."

New World Screw-worm Fly

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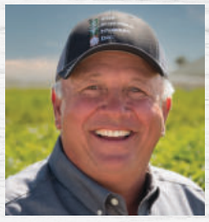

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