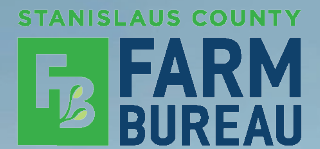


The Stanislaus Farm News

The *voice* of Stanislaus County Agriculture



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To serve as the voice of Stanislaus County agriculture at all levels of government, while providing programs to assist its farms and family members and educate the general public of needs and importance to agriculture.

From the Beef Unit to the Big Stage: Developing Ag Leaders at MJC

By Vicky Boyd, SCFB

Collegiate livestock judging goes far beyond just evaluating cattle, sheep, swine and goats based on industry standards and ranking them. It also includes organizing your thoughts, speaking confidently to defend your reasons behind the placings and

being part of a competitive team.

Jennifer Terpstra, a Modesto Junior College animal science professor, Beef Unit advisor and Livestock Judging Team coach, said she's seen how skills learned during the hours of practice and competition have benefited the personal growth of many students over the years.

"Livestock judging definitely helps with character development," Terpstra said. She speaks from experience as she judged

horses in 4-H and competed in livestock judging while attending Lassen Community College, San Joaquin Delta Community College and California State University, Chico. She credited Ben Beam, who coached the Livestock Judging Team at Lassen before moving to Delta College, along with Dave Daley who coached at Chico State, for instilling in her the love of

livestock judging.

Under the tutelage of Daley, Chico State's 1997 judging team took fifth place at the North American International Livestock Exposition.

"It was an amazing team," said Terpstra, who was a team member. "We were fifth at Louisville, and I learned a lot about evaluating livestock from both of my two mentors."

After teaching agriculture at Lodi and Escalon high schools, she returned to Delta College in 2016 to help rebuild the ag program and judging team following the passing of Beam. Eventually she moved down the road to MJC, where she currently teaches animal science and beef production courses; manages the college's Beef Unit, Angus herd and Beef Show Team; and coaches the Livestock Judging Team.

PERSONAL GROWTH

Lexie Alto, a sophomore from Arcata majoring in agricultural business, had never judged livestock before coming to MJC. The area around Arcata was too small to have FFA chapters offering the program.

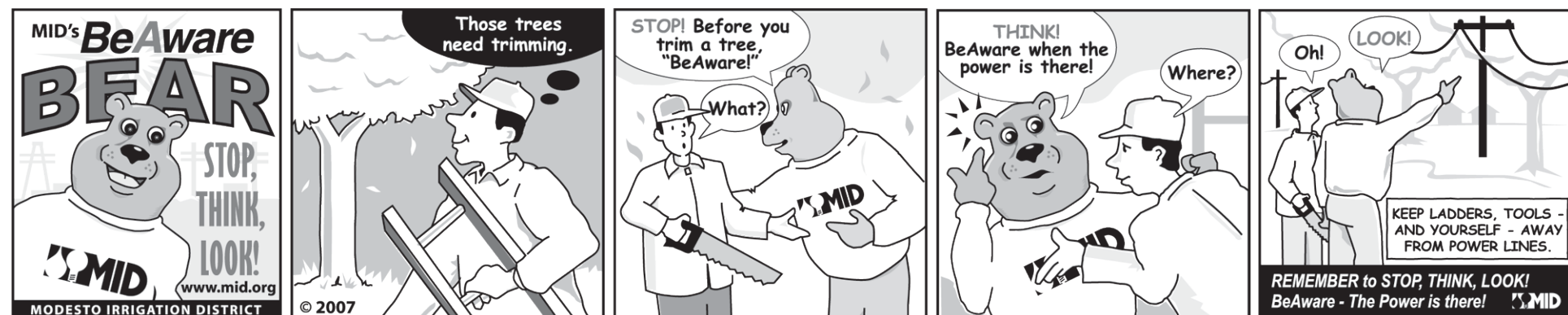
But that's not to say that Alto didn't know beef. She grew up on a fifth-generation cow-calf operation and has her own registered herds of Chianinas and Herefords. When Alto met Terpstra at a National Junior Angus Show and learned about her livestock judging program, she was sold. Alto has been on the team for nearly two

See 'MJC Beef' on page 4



Photo courtesy MJC Livestock Judging Team

MJC's Livestock Judging Team help youth in Fallon, Nevada, learn the art of livestock judging.



years and this semester is one of two interns at the MJC Beef Unit.

"I definitely think with livestock judging, it's the pressure," she said about the activity's challenges. "You have to show up at practices. You have to go to this show and that show. I think these develop the character of the person. That pressure can be hard, but being able to harness it is a very good skill set to develop."

For Alto, who was admittedly timid when she joined the team, livestock judging has also given her more assuredness.

"Definitely before I came here, I was more shy," she said. "I couldn't get out and have the opportunities that I have here. Judging has helped my public speaking and given me more confidence."

Terpstra agreed and said she's watched Alto blossom.

"She was very quiet when I met her at Junior Nationals," Terpstra said. "The growth has been tremendous over these past two years with Lexie. She really was quiet, but

now she's able to stand up for herself and she's able to articulate what she needs and advocate, not just for herself but for other interns at this Beef Unit."

AIDING PUBLIC SPEAKING

Peyton Wood, a freshman from Siskiyou County majoring in animal science and ag communications, is from a fifth-generation cow-calf operation and has her own registered Angus and Simmental cattle herds. She also is an intern at MJC's Beef Unit. But unlike Alto, Wood had judged cattle and swine for four years in FFA before enrolling at MJC. As she continues her journey, Wood said judging has helped her focus on the good things and not the negative in livestock. Competing also has helped with her public speaking.

"Going into the reasons room, you have to be confident about what you're saying," Wood said. "I know for a fact that this is a good heifer. These are the reasons why I picked this heifer or bull."

The confidence includes modulating her voice as she discusses the reasons for her rankings. In addition, Wood says she has to remind herself to take a breath as she speaks.

Then there's organizing thoughts quickly as she takes notes on the animals she's judging and developing her reasons. And let's not forget how judging teaches life lessons. "Livestock judging is the hard-

est thing I do, and it definitely isn't for the weak," Wood said. "Just because you messed up, you have to keep going forward."

A TEAM ACTIVITY

MJC's Livestock Judging Team is considered a college-sanctioned intracurricular activity. To be eligible, students must be enrolled in or have completed the "Livestock Selection" course within the animal science department and have an interest in evaluating livestock, Terpstra said. They also have to meet a number of other eligibility requirements, including minimum class hours enrolled and grade point average. In addition, she said participants should be committed to attending practices and the various shows. But Terpstra said coaches also realize that most MJC students have several activities going on at once.

"We all have to share the students, which can be a challenge during some times of the year," she said.

For students who join the Livestock Judging Team, they have an opportunity to travel to cattle country, evaluate livestock and learn about different production systems. This year, the team went to the Griswold Cattle Classic in Stillwater, Oklahoma; the Heart City Bull Bash in Valentine, Nebraska; and the Carload Judging Contest at the National Western Stock Show in Denver, to name a few.

To fund travel, Terpstra and judging team members work master showmanship contests at California county fairs during the summer.

"The kids get an opportunity to work the arena and know what it feels like to have all of the pressure of everyone watching you," she said. "After their junior college and collegiate years, they'll start getting phone calls to do actual fairs and shows, and this gives them a taste."



Photo by Vicky Boyd

MJC students Lexie Alto (left) and Peyton Wood are both Beef Unit interns who compete on MJC's Livestock Judging Team.

Starting Strong and Growing Fast: Inside the Farm Bureau Foundation's Next Chapter

By Vicky Boyd, SCFB

On the eve of its second fundraiser, the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau Foundation has already met many of the goals board members initially set. But they're not about to sit still and have mapped out a number of new programs, some of which are already in the works.

Others will begin as soon as this summer, said Stanislaus County Farm Bureau Director of Education and Communication Anna Genasci. Among them are expanding the Ag EdVenture educational program for third-graders, starting a summer youth

ag literacy program at county libraries and possibly hosting a booth at Oakdale's Morning Market.

GENERATING EXCITEMENT

Foundation Board Member Deanna van Klaveren said she's been excited about the Foundation's progress so far.

"I think with the support of Farm Bureau staff, we've accomplished a ton in very short order. And I think that's because there were so many things that needed a place to live and the Foundation really provided it," said van Klaveren, who co-owns Generation Growers wholesale nursery with husband Roger.

She was referring to the Farm Bureau already being involved in a number of activities, such as grower education and Ag EdVenture. But the Foundation opened up additional opportunities to expand those programs as well as start new ones.

Van Klaveren also credited the thoughtful approach the Foundation and board took to develop its vision and mission statement for their success.

"I think the best decision the board made was to start by bringing somebody in to guide us through a process to set up the Foundation well," she said. "We had three or four full days of meetings, but I think it meant everything. We really wanted to be

thoughtful about what this Foundation can do and what does this mean."

Foundation Board Member Wayne Zipser said he was equally excited about the Foundation's progress and appreciated the measured approach taken to develop it.

"I think it was done right," Zipser said. "I like the way they put it together and didn't jump in. We listened to a lot of potential donors that gave us feedback."

As a member of another foundation that collects an administrative fee, Zipser said he wanted to be able to assure possible donors that 100% of their contribution to the Farm Bureau's Foundation would go toward the intended uses.

LONG TIME IN COMING

Discussions about starting a non-profit foundation date back about 20 years, said Zipser, who was the previous Stanislaus County Farm Bureau executive director before retiring. But something always came up, and the foundation never came to fruition until Genasci and current Executive Director Catie Diemel began working on it in earnest a few years ago.

Approved by the IRS in late 2023, the 501(c)(3) non-profit took more than a year to develop goals and establish a board of directors. Guided by three overarching principals — educating youth, growers and consumers — the Foundation held its first fundraiser in March 2025 in Oakdale.

With stronger promotion and a new, more centralized location at the Durrer Barn in Modesto, Genasci said she expected this year's fundraiser on March 26 to be even better attended.

MAKING PROGRESS

One of the Foundation's first projects was partnering with Macerich, Vintage Faire Mall's parent company, and the Modesto Irrigation District on a set of murals high-

See 'Foundation' on page 8



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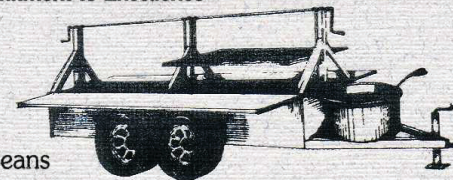
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Ag Innovation in Action

By: Zippy Duvall, American Farm Bureau President

Not every good business idea starts in a boardroom. Most of the time for farmers, good ideas start out in the field, solving problems that just won't wait. Maybe it's a better way to track equipment or a tool to save some time during harvest. That spirit of innovation is what drives agriculture forward. And it's exactly what we see year after year through the Ag Innovation Challenge.

Ag Innovation Challenge Brings Ideas to Life

Now in its 13th year, the Ag Innovation Challenge gives entrepreneurs a chance to showcase their innovative businesses that address challenges facing America's farmers, ranchers and rural communities. Every

year, we see applicants from across the country working on solutions to real issues on the farm, whether it's improving efficiency, lowering costs, or helping farms run more smoothly.

Through the Challenge, we don't just recognize those ideas, we help move them forward. Thanks to support from sponsors including Farm Credit, Bayer, John Deere, Farm Bureau Bank, Farm Bureau Financial Services, ClearPath and T-Mobile, we're able to meaningfully invest and take these ideas further, including a grand prize of \$100,000.

Just as important, these entrepreneurs gain exposure, feedback and connections that help them grow beyond the competition.

How the Ag Innovation Challenge Works Each year, entrepreneurs from across the country step forward with ideas that could make a real difference for farmers and

ranchers. Through a competitive process, those ideas are evaluated by experts from across agriculture, helping narrow the field to a group of 10 semi-finalists.

From there, the top teams continue to refine their ideas and advance to the final round at the American Farm Bureau Convention, where they take the stage to share their businesses with a judging panel in front of farmers, industry leaders and a live audience.

Apply Now for the 2027 Ag Innovation Challenge

We're now accepting applications for the 2027 Ag Innovation Challenge, and I'm looking forward to seeing what this next group of entrepreneurs brings to the table.

There's no shortage of challenges in agriculture right now. But there's also no shortage of people willing to step up and tackle

them. If you're developing something that can help farmers and rural communities, I encourage you to apply or pass along the word to someone who should. Because when we invest in innovation, we're investing in the future of agriculture, and the families who depend on it every day.



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From 'Foundation' on page 5

lighting the county's top 10 crops and the people and resources behind them. The display was visible for about six months near the mall's entrance during the busy 2025 holiday shopping season. The good news, Genasci said, is the Foundation has been given permission to use the artwork from the panels. She envisioned repurposing them as pop-ups that can be displayed during ag days or at other public events.

In addition, the Foundation has increased the number of youth scholarships it awards, thanks to a generous supporter.

"We received a donation from a retired grower, and that has helped grow that program," Genasci said. "He'll be part of the selection committee and will be there when it's awarded."

The financial award also will bear his name.

STARTING 'EM YOUNG

Abi Fair, SCFB membership and grower relations coordinator, has reached out to all of Stanislaus County's public schools about participating in Ag EdVenture. The nearly day-long event allows third-graders to learn about and experience agriculture first hand. In the past, the program involved about 1,300 students within the Turlock City School District. "Right now, based on current sign-up, we will double this in the fall," Fair said.

Eventually, the Foundation hopes to include all of the county's 7,700 public school third-graders.

This summer, the Foundation plans to launch a youth agricultural literacy program at the county's 13 library branches. Two retired ag teachers are developing the curriculum, and a Modesto Junior College summer intern will help manage the program. MID has agreed to sponsor the educational effort, which is similar to Ag in

the Classroom.

The literacy program has two goals, Genasci said. One is to educate youth through hands-on activities, while the other is to create some ag awareness among the adults who brought them.

With only a handful of employees, the Farm Bureau is already stretched thin, Genasci said. To help staff the additional events, she put out a call for volunteers. About 30 to 40 people replied. "With a small staff, this will be really helpful so we can cover more ground," Genasci said.

GROWER EDUCATION

The Foundation also continues to build on grower educational programming, Genasci said.

"We offer trainings almost every other month on topics from pesticide handling safety to legacy planning," she said. Most are held online, while a few, such as Spray Safe, are conducted in person. As part of a partnership with Stanislaus County Workforce Development, the Foundation has received grants to help offset the cost of various training efforts. The most recent was the English Language Learner at Work Program, which focused on ag-related vocabulary that farm workers may encounter.

In another collaboration, the Foundation plans to team with MJC to bring the Noble Research Institute's three-day in-person Noble Orchard Essentials regenerative educational program to Stanislaus County. It is planned for May 12-14.

"The Foundation is making a donation to help cover the cost of that program and in return, the cost for Farm Bureau members



will be reduced,” Genasci said.

The science-backed program “equips participants with practical tools and regenerative knowledge to enhance soil vitality, strengthen tree and vine health, and boost both yield quality and whole-system profitability,” according to the Noble Institute website. The Ardmore, Oklahoma-based non-profit hosted a similar one for pecan growers recently at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas.

CONSUMER OUTREACH

To connect with consumers, the Foundation has applied for a booth at the Oakdale Morning Market, held Saturdays from May through September on Third Avenue. Each week, the market features a local nonprofit organization that serves community residents.

The Stanislaus County Farm Bureau Foundation recently volunteered to host an Agriculture In The Classroom regional mini-conference in September. Rather than conduct a statewide teacher conference annually, California Ag In The Classroom has decided to hold the big event every other year. In the off years, a county will host a regional mini-conference.

The state Ag In The Classroom program will conduct the in-class learning sessions. The Stanislaus County Farm Bureau Foundation will be responsible for the venue and scheduling farm tours, which includes finding growers willing to speak to teacher participants.

Thinking outside of the proverbial box, the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau Foundation is making a point to get involved with community activities outside of traditional agricultural venues.

Genasci herself is a recent graduate of Leadership Modesto, an immersive 10-month-long leadership development program run by the Modesto Chamber of Commerce. Now she, along with Anthony Ratto, Ratto Brothers operations manager, serve as ag day chairs.

“The participants are not necessarily families with ag, so it’s an opportunity to network with other folks in our county to shed light on what we do and the importance of ag in this county’s economy,” she said.

Learn more about the Foundation here: <https://stanfarmbureau.org/farm-bureau-foundation/>





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Governor hopefuls vow to cut regulations
Six candidates running to be California's next governor said last week during a televised forum in Fresno that if elected, they would roll back regulations that have made it challenging to farm in the state. Antonio Villaraigosa, a Democrat and former mayor of Los Angeles, referred to a study from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, that found the cost to California lettuce growers of complying with the state's environmental, labor and food safety regulations increased by more than 1,300% from 2006 to 2024. "That's not sustainable," Villaraigosa said. "There actually is agreement that things are broken in Sacramento." The forum, which was hosted by the California Farm Bureau and more than two dozen other agricultural groups,

kicked off the final stretch of campaigning ahead of a June 2 primary election that will determine which two candidates advance to the general election in November. "We found it to be a critical time to highlight to candidates that agriculture and our rural counties are important," California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass said.

Farmers gather to talk sustainability projects at dairies

California dairy farmers have faced new challenges in recent years as they work to beef up their sustainability practices. About a decade ago, the state passed the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and legislation setting a target to reduce livestock methane emissions by 40% of 2013

levels by 2030. "The reality of implementation is right here, right now," California Department of Food and Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross said last month at the annual California Dairy Sustainability Summit in Visalia. The event focused on connecting dairy farmers with tools to save water and reduce methane emissions and other ways to make their operations more sustainable amid changing state requirements. Speakers said reaching California's sustainability targets will be challenging, but there's hope in the progress already made. "I really have a lot of optimism that this can be done, but it's going to take the collective will of all of us," said Bill Swanson, Stantec vice president of global practice leader for wa-

ter resources planning and management.

Democrats vying for governor criticize overtime law

Two Democrats running to be California's next governor scorned a state law that their own party, along with influential labor unions, celebrated as a major victory a decade ago. The state's 2016 agricultural overtime law was meant to raise wages for farmworkers, but research has shown it ended up reducing overall earnings as employers shortened the workweek to keep their production costs down. Katie Porter, an Orange County Democrat and former member of the U.S. House of Representatives, cited the law as an example of policies "that don't make sense and that drive up costs." Porter made the comments last week during an April 1 gubernatorial candidate forum at California State University, Fresno. Antonio Villaraigosa, a Democrat and former mayor of Los Angeles, agreed with Porter's comments on the overtime law. "You're right," Villaraigosa said, citing research from the University of California, Berkeley, that documented the reduction in farmworker income.

Ingredient market increases demand for pistachios

Soaring demand for pistachios from chocolatiers, bakeries and other food manufacturers is providing a timely boost to California's world-leading pistachio sector. Industry experts said the success of Dubai chocolate—a viral sensation invented by a United Arab Emirates dessert company—has proven more than a fad. "Every chocolatier is using pistachio paste and has a green chocolate bar," said Ali Amin, owner of Los Angeles-based Primex International Trading, which markets pistachios to countries around the world. Amin said the culinary trend has gone beyond chocolate, with pistachio paste seeing new or increased use as an ingredient in all kinds of food products. Zachary Fraser, president and CEO of the American Pistachio Growers, said he expects demand for pistachios will remain strong and bring increased returns to growers even as more acres come into production in California. "We are riding the Dubai



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chocolate craze, fueling it and building a movement,” Fraser said.

Pest control innovator shares take on biopesticides

Pam Marrone, founder and former CEO of Marrone Bio Innovations, now ProFarm Group, shared her insights on biological pesticides, or biologicals, in a recent interview with Ag Alert®. Marrone said she believes that by 2040 biologicals will be more widely used than traditional pesticides on farms. “It all comes down to education,” said Marrone, who is an entomologist by training. “The products are there. There’s good science behind them. There’s plenty of registered products and more coming every day.” She noted there are just nine new chemical active ingredients awaiting approval by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, whereas there are about 70 biologicals awaiting EPA approval. “The innovation in biologicals is huge,” Marrone said. “We’re going to have lots of registered products, so it’s about bridging the gap between products registered and how to use them on the farm.”

Sonoma County dairy farmer completes leadership program

Sonoma County dairy farmer Jennifer Beretta was among 10 leaders honored last month by the American Farm Bureau Federation as graduates of the organization’s 12th Partners in Advocacy Leadership class. PAL is designed to help agricultural leaders accelerate their engagement abilities and solidify their roles as advocates for agriculture. “I learned a lot of leadership skills,” Beretta said of PAL. A past president of the Sonoma County Farm Bureau and current member of the board of directors, Beretta helps run the Beretta Family Dairy in Santa Rosa. The certified-organic, pasture-based dairy supplies to the Petaluma-based creamery Clover Sonoma and has been recognized for its decades of environmental stewardship and conservation practices. “My No. 1 goal here at the dairy is to continue to tell our story,” Beretta said.

California’s top exports to China fell by 64% in 2025

California agricultural exports to China saw a 64% decline last year, with the top 13 commodities in total falling from an average of \$1.55 billion to \$554 million, according to new research published by the University of California Giannini Foundation of Agricultural Economics. After joining the World Trade Organization in 2001, China became one of California agriculture’s fastest-growing foreign markets. That trajectory changed in 2018 and 2019 with the first U.S.-China trade war. Then, in 2025, while California farmers were still recovering from the effects of that trade conflict, the U.S. imposed tariffs on Chinese imports, and China responded with retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods, including many California-grown farm products. Some of the largest losses caused by the recent trade war occurred in California’s tree nut industry. The value of annual pistachio exports to China declined from 2024 to 2025 by about \$478 million, while almond exports fell by roughly \$228 million.



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Agricultural Commissioner's Office & Stanislaus County Farm Bureau 2026 Continuing Education Schedule



Stanislaus County Agricultural Commissioner's Office is happy to announce our continued partnership with the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau for the 2026 Continuing Education Series. With this partnership will come the ability for us to host a wide variety of other topics and increase your access to continuing education credits. All in-person classes will be held in Harvest Hall at 3800 Cornucopia Way, Modesto, CA 95358.

In-Person Class Schedule

May 28, 2026 10am-12pm 2hrs. L&R

- Contracted Employees: Determining the Responsible Employer
- Pesticide Handler Safety Training

June 10, 2026 5pm-7pm 2hrs. L&R

- Common Violations
- Notice of Intents & Pesticide Use Reports

June 25, 2026 10am-12pm 1hr. L&R/1hr. Other

- Bees & Neonicotinoids
- Best Management Practices for Bees

July 9, 2026 10am-2:30pm 2hrs. L&R/2 hrs. Other

- What to Expect During a Use Monitoring Inspection
- Drift Prevention & Best Application Practices
- Calibration Demonstration
- New Technology with Drones

August 25, 2026 10am-12pm 2hrs. L&R

- Commodity Fumigation Inspections
- Field Fumigation Inspections & Regulatory Requirements

October 13, 2026 10am-12pm 2hrs. L&R

- New Grower Regulatory Expectations
- Permit Conditions/Alternatives & Mitigations

November 4, 2026 10am-12pm 1hr. L&R/1 hr. Other

- How to Read a Label & Label Review
- Agricultural Pest Updates

December 8, 2026 10am-12pm 1hr. L&R/1hr. Other

- Burrowing Vertebrate Fumigation Requirements
- Rodent Control: Carbon Monoxide Demonstration

Online Webinar Schedule

April 21, 2026 5pm-6pm 1hr. L&R

- High VOCs and Label Review

July 29, 2026 5pm-6pm 1hr. L&R

- Regulatory Reminders & Updates

September 17, 2026 5pm-6pm 1hr. L&R

- Worker Health & Safety General Standards of Care

October 22, 2026 5pm-6pm 1hr. L&R

- School Notification & Regulations

Please visit our website <http://www.stanag.org> and click on continuing education to register for your spot at our continuing education class. Once you register for the class, you will receive an email confirming your spot has been saved.



All classes are still pending approval from CDPR. For verification of CE hours and category approval, please call (209) 525-4730 one week prior to the class or work-shop. If you need Spanish translation of any of our scheduled classes, please contact our office one week prior and we will make arrangements. Si desea una traducción al español de una de nuestras clases programadas, comuníquese una semana antes de la fecha de la clase, para intentar hacer acomodación.



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How AI is transforming weather forecasting

The following information is provided by Nationwide®, your approved insurance and financial services company.

Weather is one of the biggest challenges farmers, ranchers and agribusiness owners face. With severe weather becoming more frequent and costly, having the right tools and strategies to protect ag operations is critical. Artificial intelligence (AI) is stepping in to help meet that need — transforming how forecasts are generated and how agricultural operations prepare for weather-related risks.

The rising cost of weather damage

Did you know that wind and hail damage make up 35% of all farm-related damages each year? That's according to Nationwide claims data that also show the cost to repair a single hail-damaged vehicle has surged by 46% since 2020. This trend doesn't just affect vehicles; these losses extend to essential farm structures like grain bins, machine sheds and outbuildings, as well as vital equipment such as tractors and combines.

Tips to help reduce severe weather risks

- Secure structures and equipment. Use storm-rated roofing, secure loose items and store vehicles and equipment indoors before storms.
- Inspect regularly. Check grain bins, fencing and outbuildings for vulnerabilities to prevent weather-related damage.
- Review insurance. Ensure policies provide adequate coverage for property and equipment.
- Document assets. Inventory major assets, including descriptions and photos, to streamline insurance claims.
- Sign up for weather alerts: Register for real-time hail and wind alerts to stay prepared.

How AI is improving weather forecasting

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology is helping transform severe weather forecasting, making it more actionable for farmers. Newer AI-based models like Tomorrow.Io's that is employed in Nationwide's real-time weather alert offering allow for faster, more detailed forecasts that enable farmers to better prepare for events like hailstorms.

Children's Garden

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"Compared to previous tools and technology, AI offers the ability to complement traditional weather forecasting by learning severe weather patterns in large datasets to more rapidly generate forecasts with growing accuracy," Mariah Pope, Senior Data Scientist at Tomorrow.io. "We have a lot to learn about AI in weather forecasting. But the more we learn, the more we can find out how it can help manage the risk to farm property posed by severe weather."

Protect your ag operation with real-time weather alerts

Weather alerts notify farm customers of severe weather at up to five locations. These timely texts help you take action to reduce weather losses. By staying informed, you can protect your farm, reduce losses and strengthen your operation's resilience. The program also provides actionable safety tips for both before and after

storms, as well as guidance on long-term preparation to minimize damage.

The future of AI in weather risk management

AI's role in weather forecasting will continue to grow. As it does, it will offer farmers, ranchers and agribusiness owners greater climate resilience, higher operational efficiency and fewer uncertainties. By leveraging larger datasets and improving accuracy, AI is facilitating smarter decisions to help protect agricultural property and livelihoods.

"AI weather forecasting still leaves room for errors, but we have found it can learn complex dynamics that lead to severe weather formation. AI forecasts run very quickly and have the potential to be more accurate and provide faster insights than previous technologies," Pope said. "The more we continue to learn about AI for weather modeling, the better we can tune models to predict when and where severe weather will strike."

See more about how AI is currently helping shape the livestock industry. Talk to your Nationwide Farm Certified agent to explore

ways AI can help you better manage the weather risks you face on your farm. Sign up for real-time weather alerts today to safeguard your farm.

Visit AgInsight-Center.com for more resources and expert tips to help you run a successful business and maintain the safety of your operation.

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California Farm Bureau Cofosts Gubernatorial Candidate Forum on Rural Affordability

Agriculture was a central focus of a gubernatorial candidate forum at California State University, Fresno, this week, with candidates addressing key issues impacting farmers and ranchers, including water, regulation, energy costs, food prices and long-term industry stability. The discussion highlighted the importance of ensuring California agriculture remains viable in an increasingly challenging economic and regulatory environment.

Notably, multiple candidates acknowledged that some well-intended policies have produced unintended consequences. This included discussion of the state's 2016 agricultural overtime law, with several candidates agreeing it has resulted in "farmworkers earning less — not more."

California Farm Bureau continues to advance solutions to address these challenges, including Senate Bill 921, which proposes an agricultural overtime tax credit aimed at helping agricultural employers manage rising labor costs while supporting increased earning opportunities for farmworkers. Farm Bureau looks forward to continuing engagement with candidates and policymakers to advance practical, effective solutions for agriculture and rural communities. Watch the full forum: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecuIRt5zXws

USDA Reveals Forest Service Reorganization

On Tuesday, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced plans to reorganize the U.S. Forest Service, signaling a shift toward more regionally focused operations. As part of the plan, the agency's headquarters will relocate from Washington, D.C., to Salt Lake City, Utah.

In California, a new California-Hawaii state office will be established in Placerville to serve as an operations center, while a Na-

tional Training Center will be developed in Vallejo.

The reorganization will also result in the closure of several regional offices, including those in Anderson, Fresno, Chico, Fort Bragg, Mt. Shasta and Hat Creek as operations are consolidated. A full readout of the plan can be seen here. The transition is expected to occur during the next year and reflects USDA's broader effort to improve coordination through increased state and regional presence.

Staff contact: Matthew Viohl, mviohl@cfbf.com.

State Water Board's Second Statewide Agricultural Expert Panel Releases Panel Report Detailing Nitrogen Requirements

On March 30, the California State Water Resources Control Board released the Second Statewide

Agricultural Expert Draft Panel Report. Comments are due by 12 p.m. on April 30.

The draft focuses on nitrates leaching to groundwater from irrigated agriculture and possible statewide nitrogen-related regulatory limits on nitrogen application and nitrogen discharge. Specifically, the draft includes the panel's recommendations on issues relevant to the panel charge questions, which ask the panel to consider the approaches in state water board Order WQ 2018-0002, In the Matter of Review of Waste Discharge Requirements General Order No. R5-2012-0116 for Growers Within the Eastern San Joaquin River Watershed that are Members of the Third-Party Group (Eastern San Joaquin Water Quality Order) and State Water Board Order WQ 2023-0081, In the Matter of Review of General Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges from Irrigated Lands Order No. R3-2021-0040 (Central Coast Ag Water Quality Order or "Ag Order 4.0").



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Staff contact: Kari Fisher, kfisher@cfbf.com.

CDFA Releases Climate Resilience Strategy for California Agriculture

The California Department of Food and Agriculture released the final iteration of the "Climate Resilience Strategy for California Agriculture" this week. The 156-page document provides an overview of state actions underway to help the state's agricultural communities prepare for, respond to and thrive under the increasing pressures of climate change as well as outline additional areas of opportunity for further action. The strategy was developed with input from farmers and ranchers, nonprofits, technical experts, state agencies and others to ensure that objectives, goals and actions reflect stakeholder input and needs.

Overarching goals recognized in the strategy include:

1. Improve the bottom line for farmers.
2. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
3. Support economic development.
4. Provide health and environmental benefits.

The document can be found on CDFA's website here.

Staff contact: Richard Filgas, rfilegas@cfbf.com.

Administration Announces New Grazing

MOU to Boost Grazing on Federal Lands
The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of the Interior announced a new memorandum of understanding aimed at improving the federal grazing permitting process.

The agreement focuses on reducing administrative burdens, increasing collaboration with permittees and launching "ranch immersion" programs to give federal em-

ployees firsthand experience with ranching operations. The effort is part of the administration's broader Grazing Action Plan announced last October.

Staff contact: Matthew Viohl, mviohl@cfbf.com.

NRCS and Irrigation Association Sign

MOU to Expand Irrigation Support

The Irrigation Association announced it has signed a memorandum of understanding with U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service to support irrigation-related projects.

Under the agreement, professionals certified by the association, including certified irrigation designers and certified agricultural irrigation specialists, will be eligible to participate in NRCS's Technical Service Provider program for irrigation services. Additional details have not yet been posted by NRCS, but updates are expected as the partnership develops.

Staff contact: Matthew Viohl, mviohl@cfbf.com.

California Farm Bureau applauds Farmworkers Day

California Farm Bureau recognized efforts in the state Legislature to honor farmworkers' vital role in California agriculture through the designation of Farmworkers Day. Assembly Bill 2156—signed into law last week—renames March 31 as Farmworkers Day, formerly Cesar Chavez Day, to acknowledge the commitment and contributions farmworkers make to sustain the state's agricultural production. "California is the leading grower of fruits, vegetables and nuts in the United States, and farmworkers are essential to ensuring crops are planted, worked, and harvested on tight timelines," California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass said. "Farmworkers are at the heart of every harvest, and their contributions deserve recognition on both this special day, and year-round as well."



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CALIFORNIA DAIRY DISTRICT 4 SEEKS AMBASSADORS TO SERVE AS 2026 DAIRY PRINCESSES

Annual Dairy Princess Contest Returns to
Turlock in June

TURLOCK, Calif. – January 27, 2026 – Each year, an exceptional group of young women are selected to represent California’s dairy farm families and their respective districts as advocates on behalf of the leading agricultural commodity in the state. During their one-year term, these Dairy Princess ambassadors represent the dairy industry in several local and state activities.

Applications are now open for eligible candidates to compete in the District 4 Dairy Princess contest.

The District 4 Dairy Princess and her alternate will represent Alameda, Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Mariposa, Merced, Monterey, Sacramento, San Benito, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, and Yolo counties. The application deadline is Friday, May 1, 2026.

The contest will be held in June in Turlock. Contestants must be turning 17 by September 1st of 2026 and can be up to 20 years of age by the contest date and be unmarried. Contestants can qualify to be a candidate by fulfilling the requirements of at least one of the following: 1) Have resided on a dairy cattle farm at some time during her life (does not have to currently reside on a dairy cattle farm); or be the daughter and/or the granddaughter of a past or present dairy cattle farm owner, 2) Be the daughter or ward of a person presently employed full-time as an owner or employee of a dairy cattle processing plant or dairy distributor in California, 3) Be the daughter or ward of a person employed full-time on an operating dairy cattle farm in California, 4) Be currently employed, or the daughter or ward of any person employed in a dairy cattle-related industry, such as dairy financing, sales, or service; veterinarian; milk tank, grain, or hay truck driver;

milk inspector; grain supplier; hay dealer; alfalfa and/or grain producer; or raise dairy replacement heifers, 5) Currently is or has been a member of a 4-H or FFA program where she participates in dairy cattle-related projects, i.e. raise and show dairy cattle and/or evaluate dairy products; owns or has owned her own dairy cattle.

Dairy Princess ambassadors are selected during events in districts throughout the state, where they showcase speaking skills, knowledge of dairy, and plans to represent the industry during their one-year term.

California Dairy Princesses serve as industry advocates in their home district and throughout the state, supporting the reputation of milk and dairy products through appearances at schools, fairs, industry meetings, service clubs, and parades. The newly selected princesses and alternates will also participate in a mandatory orientation week where they receive professional development coaching.

The California Dairy Princess Program has been in effect since 1958 and is supported by California dairy producers through the California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB) and by local planning committees. Information and application forms are available at:

<https://www.californiadairyprincess.com/ca-dairy-princesses>. Additional questions can be directed to Anastasia Stuyt, California Dairy Princess Coordinator, at dairyprincess@cmab.net.

California is the nation’s leading milk producer, and makes more butter, ice cream and nonfat dry milk than any other state. California is the second-largest producer of cheese and yogurt. California milk and dairy foods can be identified by the Real California Milk seal, which certifies they are made with milk from the state’s dairy farm families who lead the nation in sustainable farming practices.

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About Real California Milk/California Milk Advisory Board

The California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB), an instrumentality of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, is funded by the state’s dairy farm families who lead the nation in sustainable dairy farming practices. With a vision to nourish the world with the wholesome goodness of Real California Milk, the CMAB’s programs focus on increasing demand for California’s sustainable dairy products in the state, across the U.S. and around the world through advertising, public relations, research, and retail and foodservice promotional programs. For more information and to connect with the CMAB, visit RealCaliforniaMilk.com.

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California Farming at a Crossroads: Shannon Douglass on Policy, Pressure, and the Path Forward

Source: AgNet West

California agriculture is facing one of its most pivotal moments in decades. In a recent interview at Fresno State with “the Ag Meter”, California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass shared candid insights on the challenges confronting farmers—and the political decisions that could shape the industry’s future.

A Strong Showing for Agriculture in the Governor’s Debate

Douglass expressed optimism following a major gubernatorial debate that brought six candidates together to discuss issues impacting California agriculture. For her, the significance went beyond politics.

She emphasized how meaningful it was to see 30 agricultural groups unite, highlighting the Central Valley’s importance and reinforcing agriculture’s critical role in California’s economy.

More importantly, she noted a shift: Candidates demonstrated a deeper understanding of complex agricultural issues—particularly water challenges like those involving the Delta. This level of preparedness marks progress compared to past election cycles, where such topics often lacked

depth.

Regulatory Pressure: A Top Concern for Farmers

While the debate covered a range of issues, Douglass made it clear that regulatory burdens remain front and center for California farmers.

She pointed out that:

- Many new laws disproportionately impact agriculture
- Regulations often increase operational costs
- Farmers and ranchers are feeling growing frustration

Critically, she stressed that the governor has real authority in this area. Through policy direction and oversight, the next administration can either ease or intensify these pressures.

Is California Agriculture in Crisis?

When asked directly whether the industry is in crisis mode, Douglass didn’t hesitate to acknowledge the seriousness of the situation.

She described the current moment as:


- “A very scary time” for California farming
- A period marked by economic strain and uncertainty
- A turning point that demands leadership and action

However, she also balanced that concern with cautious optimism. While challenges are significant, she believes the industry can recover with the right policy direction and leadership.


Why the Next Governor Matters More Than Ever

Douglass underscored the enormous influence the governor holds over agriculture, particularly in two key areas:

See 'Pressure' on page 22




WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



STANISLAUS COUNTY FARM BUREAU

SECURE




YOUR SPOT

Workforce Development Roundtable


MAY 12, 2026

Guest Speaker > Sheriff Jeff Dirkse



<https://stanfarmbureau.org/events/>


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1. The Power to Veto

She highlighted the importance of a governor willing to question and veto unnecessary legislation.

In her view:

- Not every new bill is beneficial
- Many proposals unintentionally harm agriculture and business
- Strong leadership requires restraint—not just action

2. Strategic Appointments

Beyond legislation, the governor appoints individuals to key positions that shape agricultural policy.

Douglass emphasized the need for:

- Leaders with real agricultural experience

- Decision-makers who understand farming realities
- A stronger connection between government and industry

The Importance of the Right Team

One of the most compelling points Douglass made was about leadership beyond the governor.

She argued that:

- A strong, knowledgeable team can be just as important as the governor
- Individuals with agricultural ties bring essential perspective
- Business understanding is critical for effective governance

In some cases, she suggested, the team behind the governor may even have a greater impact than the individual at the top.

A Call to Action: Get Involved

Looking ahead to the spring and summer, Douglass delivered a clear message: engagement matters.

She encouraged:

- Farmers, ranchers, and supporters to stay politically active
- Participation in advocacy events at the state capitol
- Younger generations (35 and under) to step up and get involved

These advocacy days provide a direct opportunity to speak with elected officials and ensure they understand how regulations affect real farms and ranches.

How to Join the Effort

For those interested in supporting California agriculture or becoming more involved,

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Douglass invited listeners to connect through the California Farm Bureau.

Through their platform, individuals can:

- Attend events
- Participate in advocacy efforts
- Join a statewide network supporting agriculture

Final Thoughts

Shannon Douglass' message is clear: California agriculture is at a critical juncture, facing mounting pressures but also new opportunities for change.

With informed leadership, thoughtful policy, and increased public engagement, the industry can navigate these challenges and emerge stronger.

But the path forward depends heavily on the decisions being made today—especially at the highest levels of state government.

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