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**Official Publication of Stanislaus
County Farm Bureau
Vol.76 No.6 April 11, 2025**

Carrying on a Legacy: Corinne Santos and the
Heart Behind Herefords , See Page 3

2025 Farmworker of the Year, See Page 8

Published Fridays by the
Stanislaus County Farm Bureau

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advertising@stanfarmbureau.org

Stanislaus Farm News (ISSN: 8750-4960) Copyright ©
2025 is published 20 times per year by the Stanislaus
County Farm Bureau 1201 L St. Modesto, CA 95454. Call
(209) 522-7278 to subscribe. Application to mail at
Periodicals postage prices is pending at Modesto, CA.

The Stanislaus Farm News will publish on the following
dates in 2025: Jan 17, Feb 7, Feb 21, March 7, March 21,
April 11, April 25, May 9, May 23, June 20, July 11, July 25,
Aug 8, Aug 22, Sept 19, Oct 3, Oct 17, Nov 7, Nov 21, Dec
12

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: 1201 L Street Modesto,
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Carrying on a Legacy: Corinne Santos and the Heart Behind Herefords

By Vicky Boyd

Corinne Santos may have grown up on a Holstein dairy farm near Hilmar, but she's passionate about Herefords, a beef breed with a white face and red body.

Corinne credits her late father, John Santos, for instilling in her the love of beef cattle at a very young age.

"Dad showed shorthorn Herefords, which were a lot more prevalent when he was in high school," she said.

"He was a dairy boy but just loved beef," added Corinne's mother, Susan. "He wanted to be a team roper. My mom came from a roping family."

John and Susan started building the family's Hereford herd when Corinne and her brother, Derek, began showing cattle.

Corinne took over when John passed away in 2017.

Santos Hereford Ranch raises registered polled Hereford cattle mainly to sell to youngsters for show animals. She and Susan have carried on John's legacy even after they moved the operation from Hilmar to outside of Oakdale three years ago.

"We just kept going," Susan said. "We have cows that go back four or five generations. How do you just sell that off?"

The Oakdale location also is more convenient for Corinne's job as senior vice president and market manager for Farmers & Merchants Bank of Central California. In addition, she serves as secretary of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau.

Corinne said the arrangement works well because she feeds the cattle and horses early in the morning before work and leaves the utility vehicle prepped for her mom. With Lily, the gray tabby barn cat,

sitting by her side, Susan drives down to the pasture and puts out hay in late afternoon so Corinne can tend to after-hour responsibilities, such as Farm Bureau board meetings, without worrying about the animals.

SOFT SPOT FOR HEREFORDS

Corinne has always had a soft spot in her heart for Herefords because of their gentle disposition, which makes them well suited for youngsters to show.

"You can't really find that in a whole lot of breeds," she

said. "That's why my Dad wanted them for young kids."

On a more personal note, she said she doesn't have to worry about her mom or herself getting head-butted when they're out in the pasture around the cattle.

Despite Hereford's reputation, Corinne starts introducing her calves to human interaction when they're only a few weeks old. Using a calm voice and slow movements, she lets the curious young come to her and she begins scratching their back.

Soon they learn she means no harm and in fact brings hay or grain along with feel-good scratches. Because the cows have been raised this way, Corinne said they aren't bothered by her being around their young. Once the calves have been weaned at about 4 months old, she puts a halter on them and slowly begins preparing them for the show ring.

STARTING YOUNG

When Corinne was 5 years old, John entered her in her first peewee showmanship competition with a shorthorn Hereford. Eventually, she switched to polled Herefords because they don't have horns to worry about.

Describing herself as highly competitive, Corinne has gone on to garner numerous reserve and grand championships in regional and national Hereford cattle shows over the years. Many of the heifers, steers and bulls she has sold from her herd have also had success in the ring.

But Corinne said beauty is more than skin deep. As she decides what cows to breed to what bulls each year, she selects for genetics that also produce a desirable carcass with nice marbling — streaks of intramuscular fat that give beef its flavor, juiciness and tenderness.

"Show animals are no good if they can't come out and produce," she said. "It's not

See Herefords on page 4

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From Herefords on page 3

just about winning the ribbon — it’s what’s put on the plate.”

With the advent of artificial insemination (AI), Corinne isn’t limited to the genetics of her clean-up bull, Romeo, that she uses on cows where AI failed the first time. She can peruse catalogs of bull sires nationwide and order semen based on desirable traits.

Even before artificial intelligence, Corinne said photos didn’t always accurately portray the animals. When she can, she visits ranches to look at bulls she’s considering as well as their progeny to see how the traits were passed down.

DOING HER HOMEWORK

In addition, Corinne said the American Hereford Association has worked hard to track and make available data on superior registered bulls and dams, or mother cows, that meet specific performance criteria.

Among those are low calf weight, calving ease, milk production as well as good maternal traits, weaning weight, yearling weight, carcass weight and marbling. They

also translate to benefits for the producer. Take the inherently larger Hereford compared to some of the other popular beef breeds.

“I think the Hereford has focused on that, which is huge,” Corrine said of the larger frame. “You can’t get away from structure. You can’t get away from body weight.”

She also prefers Herefords for their low birth weight. A smaller calf, especially for a first-time mother, will likely mean fewer birthing issues.

At the same time, that small Hereford calf will thrive and grow quickly during the ensuing four months to have a strong weaning weight.

In addition, the American Hereford Association has compiled data on registered bulls that meet

the Certified Hereford Beef Sire of Distinction. Founded in 1995, Certified Hereford Beef is a premium-branded program that recognizes Upper 2/3 USDA Choice beef and USDA Prime beef.

To qualify, each Hereford must be registered, certified and meet 10 science-based live and carcass specifications as graded by the USDA.

The data is not lost on Corinne. As part of her efforts to continually improve the family’s herd, she keeps spreadsheets that track each of her animals in several categories. And she’s not afraid to cull ones that don’t perform or are getting too old.



Susan (left) and Corinne Santos have carried on the late John Santos’ legacy of producing registered Hereford beef cattle mainly to sell to youngsters to show.

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Rising wages test ranchers who provide vegetation management

Sheep and goats, increasingly used to eat flammable vegetation in targeted areas, have become a key part of California's wildfire prevention efforts. But ranchers who provide targeted grazing services depend on a viable sheep and goat ranching industry. Their business may be in jeopardy due to a steep rise in the minimum wage ranchers must pay the herders who look after their animals around the clock. Since 2019, that wage has more than doubled, soaring this year to \$4,820 a month. "It's just become untenable," said Andrée Soares, president of Star Creek Land Stewards in Merced County.

California dairies make progress in cutting emissions

At their current pace, California dairy farmers are expected to meet the state's goal for reducing methane emissions from their farms ahead of schedule. Though methane digesters are often credited for doing most of the heavy lifting, California dairy farmers have been implementing other technologies and conservation practices that help them move the needle

toward sustainability. An analysis by researchers at the University of California, Davis, shows that incentive-based programs that drive voluntary efforts by dairy farmers should by 2030 achieve the 40% dairy methane reduction that state lawmakers called for without the need for more regulations.

Research: Overtime law costs farmworkers \$100 a week

In 2023, University of California, Berkeley, assistant professor Alexandra Hill published research showing California's 2016 agricultural overtime law had not achieved its goal of increasing earnings for farmworkers. She found that Assembly Bill 1066 caused workers to lose hours and pay as farmers shortened the workweek to balance their wage bills. Hill said her continued analysis of farmworker employment data shows farmworkers have earned roughly \$100 less per week on average than they would have without AB 1066. "There is really convincing evidence that work hours for individual farmworkers fell after the law went into effect," she said.

State head of natural resources shares

perspective

California Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot spoke with Ag Alert® about managing the state's environment and natural resources, including water, air quality, forests, energy and species. "We can do a better job in state government understanding what the different regulatory impacts are on farmers and ranchers," Crowfoot said. "During the past six years in this job, I've learned a lot from agricultural producers about the aggregated impact, and we can better coordinate our regulatory programs to reduce burdens, whether it is site visits or regulatory timelines, so it reduces the administrative burden. We're open-minded to understanding where regulations aren't working well."

Easter lily producers prepare to ship flowers for spring holiday

California's Easter lily producers are preparing to ship the flowers specially grown for the holiday. Rob Miller, a nursery operator and flower grower in Del Norte County — also known as the nation's Easter lily capital — said he expects to start making deliveries around April 7, with Easter falling this year on April 20. Easter lilies

naturally bloom in the summer. To get them to flower for Easter, growers must manipulate the plants in the greenhouse. "Pushing lilies or plants earlier or holding them off later is a function of temperature," Miller said. "If you need them to be earlier, you have to force them at a warmer temperature. If you're going to hold them a bit later, you



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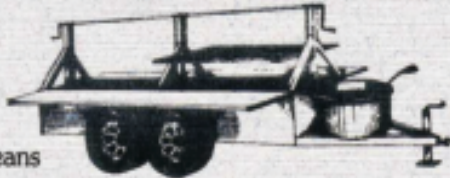
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From FARM on page 5

can run the greenhouses a little cooler.”

landscape goals,” Macon said.

Farmers encouraged to use livestock grazing to mitigate fire risks

By increasing the use of livestock to manage vegetation, also known as targeted grazing, California farmers and ranchers may be an overlooked potential ally in preventing future wildfires. That’s according to new research by University of California Cooperative Extension livestock and natural resources adviser Dan Macon and UCCE specialist Leslie Roche. “Farmers and ranchers are in a great position to adopt targeted grazing because of their lifelong and often multigenerational understanding of their location, along with their ability to balance livestock needs with

Salinas Valley vegetable production ramps up as season changes

With winter turning to spring, vegetable production in California is shifting from the Imperial Valley—the primary region for winter vegetables—back to the Salinas Valley, which dominates the state’s vegetable production for much of the year. “March, April, May is when we start to ramp up once the rain winds down,” said Jonathan Merrill, a Monterey County vegetable grower. “We specialize in partner contracts and grow for bigger brands that you’ll see in the grocery stores. The vast majority of what we do is driven by our customers, the shippers. They tell us cer-

tain amounts or acres per week.”

California Farm Bureau TV program, host win TASTE Awards

California Bountiful TV, the long-running lifestyle program produced by the California Farm Bureau, and its host and executive producer, Aubrey Aquino, won two TASTE Awards at the 16th annual event held last month in Beverly Hills. Aquino was named Best Producer, while California Bountiful TV earned the award for Best Green/Organic TV Program. “It’s truly an honor to receive these awards, and I feel fortunate to be able to share and tell the many stories of California’s agriculture with a television audience,” Aquino said, adding this was the first time the show entered the TASTE Awards.

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Farmworker of the Year, 2025 Winner: Frank Hernandez

By Vicky Boyd

Frank Hernandez wears many hats around Vermeulen Almond Hulling just west of Modesto. He runs the huller and oversees the hulling crew during harvest. He maintains all of the equipment, overhauling machinery during winter. He’s installed irrigation for new orchards, planted new blocks, pulled old orchards, and fabricated and welded platforms for new shelling equipment. He’s also learning about new technology tied to two color sorters the operation recently installed.

“He’s kind of the soul behind all of us,” said owner Paul Vermeulen. “He makes sure everyone has what they need to get going. And talk about knowledge — there’s not a job in almond farming that he hasn’t done.”

On top of that, Hernandez is a confidant and mentor to Vermeulen, and they share the same philosophies of loyalty and faithfulness.

“As a family business, love, care, compassion and kindness have always been how we do things,” Vermeulen said.

Hernandez started working for Vermeulen’s grandfather, Paul Dunlop, in 1980. He has stayed with the family farming operation over the years because of the wide variety of jobs he does as well as the way he’s treated.

“It’s the respect they give you,” Hernandez said. “They treated me good, so I figure I’d stay here. But all of the Dunlop customers back in the days, they were just as respectful.”

For those reasons and more, Vermeulen nominated Hernandez for the Farm Worker of the Year Award. When Hernandez was told he was selected for the overall top honor, he said he had never been nominated for anything in his life, let alone won.

“For him to nominate me, I feel great, and I want to thank him,” Hernandez said of Vermeulen.

Farmworker of the Year continues

Now in its fifth year, the Farm Worker of the Year award program was started by the Stanislaus Farm Bureau, AgSafe and the Modesto Rotary Club during the COVID pandemic. They saw it as a way to recognize essential workers vital to producing, harvesting and packing food.

The awards continue today to spotlight the people who help feed and clothe not only Stanislaus County residents but also those elsewhere and around the world. Joining the efforts this year is Central Valley Opportunity Center and Stanislaus County Agricultural Commissioner.

A love of mechanics

Hernandez started working part-time for Paul Dunlop during harvest while still in high school. One of his jobs was helping level almonds in the pick-up machines and buggies, since they didn’t have augers.

He also had a lawn mowing business and would tend his customers along Blue Gum Avenue as he drove to or from the Dunlop farm. Once he graduated, he went full time at the almond operation and eventually gave up his lawn business.

While Hernandez has always had an interest in mechanics from working on vehicles, he learned the agricultural side from Paul Dunlop.

“He was really mechanical, really electrical,” Hernandez said. “I picked up a lot from him. He’s an awesome guy, really respectful. I learned a lot from him working side by side.”

Hernandez’s love of auto mechanics continues today as he works to keep his pride and joy, a gray 1966 Ford F-100 pick-up, running. The truck also reminds him of his father, who had a 1966 Ford truck.

Generational transitions


Vermeulen remembers as a 5- or 7-year-old child coming to the family farm and helping Hernandez pull brush for a couple of hours. When Vermeulen began working for Dunlop, he said pulling brush became his responsibility and Hernandez was his boss.

Vermeulen took over the family businesses 13 years ago, and the roles shifted — Hernandez became a mentor. He also has been an integral part of the businesses’ growth.


Currently they include farming almonds, hulling and shelling almonds, and trucking.

In the 1960s, the operation had a single huller wedged into an old cattle milking barn. When Vermeulen decided to expand offerings, he turned to Hernandez to engineer the installation, which involved taking the barn up a story to accommodate new color sorters for the sheller.

As they showed visitors around the operation recently, both joked about how they squeezed all of the machinery into the old



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barn, thanks in large part to Hernandez's welding and fabrication skills.

No slow time

Although the general public may believe almond farming is only a seven- or eight-month endeavor, Vermeulen said that's not the case at all. Once harvest ends and they've hulled and shelled their last nut, maintenance season begins.

"If it's raining or other people are fishing, we're in the huller taking it apart," Vermeulen said. In the sheller, they'll repair 200 electric motors, sprockets and other pieces. They'll also tear into all of the harvesters and sprayers, checking components to try to preempt in-season breakdowns.

Most of their equipment is older and doesn't have the high-tech electrical and computerized components of today's machinery. But the recently added color sorters do, and Hernandez has taken it upon himself to learn the technology.

Hernandez has been married to his wife, Sylvia, for nearly 43 years, and they live in Ceres. They have five adult children — three daughters and two sons. Over the years, a couple of them have worked on the farm during harvest.

"They're good workers," Vermeulen said, smiling as he wondered where they got their work ethic.

Gold Winners:

Antonio Arias
Through good times and bad, Antonio

Arias has remained dedicated to Durrer Dairy LP near Modesto. He started feeding calves in November 1990 and has taken on numerous tasks over the years.

Currently, he is the outside supervisor and assistant herdsman for the dairy.

"He's always on time and rarely takes days off," said Chris Durrer, owner "Tony is always thoughtful of others and takes pride in his work."

Always open to new ideas, Arias will seek suggestions from Durrer, the dairy's veterinarian or other industry specialists.

Unless he has specific plans and informs everyone at the dairy beforehand, Arias is the last person to leave for the day. He also helps others finish their duties before leaving.

Durrer describes him as a "very genuine person" who is easy going and courteous to those around him. Arias also attended Stanislaus County Farm Bureau leadership training.

For several years, he also was a server/cook for a Modesto restaurant, but he always made the dairy top priority. His commitment hasn't gone unnoticed.

Durrer said he's heard positive comments about Arias from several vendors, neighboring farmers and others, "Wow, he still works here? He's going to be really hard to replace when he decides to hang it up!"

Alfred Gomez
For more than half a century, Alfred Gomez has worked for Cox & Perez Farms near

Westley and performed every task there is. Currently he tends all farm ground operations.

With his tenure, Gomez understands the importance of timing when it comes to farming.

"When there is ground work to do, he does it and manages his tractors and equipment on his own," said Tony Verissimo, manager. Gomez also shares his vast knowledge to other employees who need help.

Over the years, he has learned English and has obtained a private applicator's card. What has struck Verissimo is Gomez's positivity and can-do attitude.

"Alfred is the type of employee who looks for an opportunity, not a hand out," he said. "He just loves to do his job. Alfred is always willing to help no matter what the job is."

Miguel Lopez
For 35 years, Miguel Lopez has harnessed his passion for farming to lead an irrigation team of 10 to 15 workers at Ratto Brothers Inc. near Modesto. But he's also a passionate family man, having put three sons into positions of success within agriculture.

In his role at the specialty vegetable operation, Lopez checks various crops and locations and coordinates the team. He's responsible for all fertigation programs, pump stations and cultivating.

"Miguel continues to work harder than all, truly leading by example," said Man-

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From Farmworker on page 9

ager Anthony Ratto. “Rain or shine, day or night, Miguel will be there. He shows a passion for farming, always demanding the most, and not afraid to show a person what that looks like.”

Over the years, Ratto said Lopez has accumulated a wealth of knowledge that helps him solve problems. He also has climbed the ranks within the company and has earned a private applicators license. In addition, he can navigate any challenge thrown at him and in the end wind up with “beautiful vegetables to sell.”

“Miguel has been an instrumental part of our farm team for decades,” Ratto said. “He’s worked himself up through dedication, attentiveness and the ability to understand. The Ratto Family is proud to be working alongside Miguel Lopez.”

Jesus Pantoja

For the past 31 years, Jesus Pantoja has worked for Rod Gambini, who grows tree nuts and forage crops near Oakdale. When he’s not irrigating field crops, Pantoja helps out in the walnut huller.

“That guy never quits,” Gambini said about Pantoja’s non-stop energy. “I’ve never had a guy like that before.”

During most of the summer, his main focus is running flood irrigation in the forage crops, a task he takes to heart.

“There’s not a stitch of dirt that’s dry,” Gambini said. “He stays out there and moves the water around.”

Pantoja comes in early and goes home late, making sure the irrigation water is set up in the fields to run all night. By doing so, he eliminates the need for Gambini or someone else to have to change the water in the middle of the night.

Regardless of the job, Gambini described Pantoja as “very conscientious and shows he’s always thinking of new ways to get

the job done. He always does more than expected.”

When not working for Gambini, Pantoja runs his own lawn care service and painting business. In fact, he painted Gambini’s house last year.

Pantoja has put three children through college.

Silver Winners:

Maximillano “Max” Camberos

Maximillano “Max” Camberos has an eye for detail, something that comes in handy as an equipment and sweeper operator for Five Rings Harvesting.

For the past 10 years, he has rarely called in sick and has become known for his neatness and attention to detail, said Manager Tony Verissimo. Five Rings Harvesting is a custom-harvesting operation near Westley.

Camberos doesn’t hesitate to help other employees, even if it’s not his job, and he shares his knowledge freely with new workers.

Describing him as a “work horse,” Verissimo said Camberos also doesn’t mind filling in for others who want a weekend off. In addition, Camberos has earned his pesticide ap-

plicators license.

One of the challenges he has overcome is moving to the U.S. with minimal English knowledge and resources.

Despite a focus on getting the job done, Camberos also has a humorous side. “It’s a pleasure working with Max, he is funny and is always willing to help with any aspect of the harvesting process,” Verissimo said.

Jorge Mercado

Having worked for three generations of the Bays family near Westley — most recently as equipment foreman — Jorge Mercado has become known for his quiet get-it-down attitude.

“He’s not big on trying to oversell himself, but he’s good at figuring things out,” said Daniel Bays, who with his father, Ken, and grandfather, Gene, operate the Bays Ranch. They grow tree nuts, apricots, processing



Frank Hernandez wears many hats around Vermeulen Almond Hulling. Pictured here, he accepts his award as 2025 Farmworker of the Year.

tomatoes and lima beans.

Mercado takes care of daily servicing and repair of the equipment used on the ranch. He also helps train equipment operators how to properly drive the machines.

During the busy harvest season, Bays said Mercado takes the initiative to fuel and move equipment so it is waiting in the proper field at the start of the workday. He also stays late or comes in early to make sure everything gets done.

“He adjusts his schedule without being asked,” Bays said. “He’s always willing to help out and get the job done. He takes ownership in the operation himself.”

Over the years, Mercado has completed numerous training sessions or classes, earning certificates in forklift operation, equipment safety, fuel transport and conflict management, to name a few.

He and his wife, Josephine, have raised

four children, whom they were supportive in attending and graduating college. They’re now proud and very involved grandparents.

Throughout the years, Bays said their families have attended each others’ social gatherings, and the Mercados have become part of the extended Bays family.

Hector Ruiz

As the irrigation supervisor in charge of a crew of three at Cox & Perez Farms near Westley, Hector Ruiz is the first to arrive in the morning and the last to leave in the evening. An employee for 30 years, he manages irrigation schedules and maintains all pumps, motors and elevator screens.

What has helped Ruiz excel in his role is his attention to detail and how he cares for his crew, said Farm Manager Tony Verissimo.

“Hector never complains and is always on time,” Verissimo said. “He’s a very kind

person who helps in all areas of the farm and shares his knowledge with fellow employees.” That includes pitching in even if it’s not in his immediate area.

In addition, Ruiz has become CPR certified and has obtained a private applicators license.

Verissimo used the word “consistency” to describe how Ruiz approaches his job. “He has great attitude and never complains. He’s a true leader.”

That same work ethic allowed Ruiz to learn English and find employment when he first came to the U.S.

In farming, which can sometimes be hectic, Verissimo said having someone with Ruiz’s demeanor can be a blessing, “Hector is a very calm and level-headed leader who is kind and considerate,” he said. “It’s a true pleasure having him on our team.”

Honorable Mention:

Juan Acosta
Over the past 10 years, Juan Acosta has moved up through the ranks of Five Rings Harvesting, a custom-harvesting business near Westley. Currently, he is harvesting supervisor and manages 12 employees and all harvesting equipment.

Acosta started as an equipment operator



All of the nominees were celebrated on April 1, 2025 at the Modesto Rotary Luncheon. Guest speaker, Karen Ross, Secretary of California Department of Food and Agriculture, shared her insights on agriculture and the important role Stanislaus County growers and agricultural workers play in our state.

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Agriculture, the Backbone of our Economy

By Zippy Duvall, American Farm Bureau President

Across the country this morning, men and women in every region and every state are rising to grow the food, fiber and renewable fuel Americans depend on. Most of them have been working for hours before sunup this morning, and many will be working

still as the sun dips below the horizon this evening. The days are long on the farm, and the work is hard. Farmers and ranchers don't shy away from a hard day's work, though. We know our nation is counting on us, not only to keep our food supply secure but also to help fuel our economy.

The latest Feeding the Economy report highlights the critical role U.S. agriculture plays across our economy. While fewer than 2% of Americans are farmers, 100% of Ameri-

cans need a farmer, every day. Farmers are the key to a long supply chain, from tractor manufacturers upstream to grocery stores downstream. Today, this supply chain directly makes up more than one-seventh of the U.S. economy. In 2024, the direct and indirect economic impact of the agriculture supply chain totaled \$9.5 trillion, or one-third of the U.S. economy. To put that in terms of the global economy, if the U.S. agricultural supply chain were its own country, it would support the third largest economy in the world. Let that sink in for a minute. That is an American-grown success story.

Agriculture's economic value is fueling jobs too. In 2024, direct employment in the food and agriculture supply chain grew by more than 1 million jobs. Altogether, jobs directly in the food and agricultural supply chain make up 15%

of employment in the U.S., for a total of more than 24 million jobs. When you add in all the jobs supported by agriculture, the yields nearly double. From scientists and researchers to engineers and truck drivers, farmers and ranchers and their supply chain support more than 47 million jobs in the U.S.

As farmers and ranchers know from hard, personal experience, yields are not guaranteed. One good season—or even one dozen good seasons—does not guarantee the next. We cannot take agriculture for granted. Most consumers got a glimpse of this truth with the empty grocery store shelves at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the egg shortage this year. But our memories can be short, and most folks do not understand the tremendous pressures farmers and ranchers are facing.

From inflation and rising labor costs to an outdated farm bill, many farmers are operating on razor thin margins, and some cannot hold on for a better season. Farm bankruptcies were up 55% from 2023 to 2024, and more than 141,000 farms went out of business from 2017 to 2022, according to USDA's Census of Agriculture. I give these reminders not to be despairing but to remind us of how important it is that we remain committed to strengthening American agriculture. That's why Farm Bureau is actively engaging with lawmakers and leaders across Washington and across the country. From Capitol Hill to federal agencies, we are taking a seat at the table to address the challenges facing agriculture. We know Americans are counting on farmers, and farmers are counting on us.

Farmers and ranchers have been raising American-grown products for generations. And if we're going to keep agriculture strong to ensure a secure food supply and to help feed our economy, we need to ensure that farmers and ranchers have the tools they need. Farm Bureau is committed to being the leading Voice of Agriculture because we understand how high the stakes are for farmers, ranchers and rural communities. Our nation is stronger when farmers and ranchers have the resources, tools and freedom to do what we do best: feed our nation and our economy.



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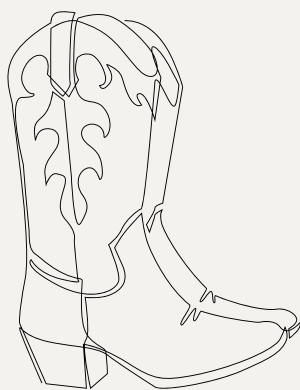


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Transportation • Warehousing

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1234 (Ortega), which imposes an additional 30% penalty on any award, order or penalty issued by the Labor Commissioner. Styled as an “administrative fee,” the fee penalizes employers who seek a Labor Commissioner hearing to adjudicate honest disputes of facts and circumstances of a supposed violation of wage and hour requirements enforced by the Labor Commissioner. Farm Bureau opposes. Staff Contact: Bryan Little; blittle@cfbf.com

Avian Flu Petition Filed with Standards Board

On March 20, Valley Voices and the UC Merced Farm Labor Center presented a proposal to revise the Zoonotic Aerosol Transmissible Disease Standard (Zoonotic ATD) to the monthly meeting of the Cal/ OSHA Standards Board and formally submitted Petition 608 to the Board on March 21. The petition calls for employer-paid sick leave (over and above 40 hours/five day paid sick leave already needed in the Labor Code) for the ostensible purpose of removing an ill employee from the workplace and facilitation of isolation for ill employees. There are no known instances of human-to-human transmission of H5N1. The petition also envisions employer-provided broad-based exposure testing of dairy employees for H5N1 that the California Department of Public Health lacks the resources to support, and tighter occupational safety requirements for dairies and poultry farms where H5N1

may be present. H5N1 infections in dairy farms appears to be waning, with fewer than half as many dairies under quarantine as in January, and no new human cases reported since January. The Board has six months from the filing date to consider whether to grant, deny or grant in part Petition 608. Staff Contact: Bryan Little; blittle@cfbf.com

California Milk Advisory Board Annual Meetings


CMAB is hosting annual meetings around California. These meetings will highlight the many ways the CMAB marketing team has been busy putting nutritious California dairy products into the hands of consumers in California, across the U.S. and around the world. In advance, please RSVP for the

meeting you plan to attend. Staff Contact: Steven Fenaroli; sfenaroli@cfbf.com

Oppose: SB 667 – Disruptive Rail Restrictions Would Increase Costs and Delay Goods Movement


The California Farm Bureau opposes SB 667 (Archuleta, D), which would impose arbitrary limits on train lengths—making it more difficult to move goods efficiently throughout the state. The bill risks creating a patchwork of conflicting rules across a national rail system, leading to supply chain delays and increased transportation costs. Staff Contact: Steven Fenaroli; sfenaroli@cfbf.com

CDFW Posts March Depredation Reports



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CDFW has posted new depredation determination forms to the CDFW Gray Wolf webpage, under "Potential Conflict and Depredation". Seven new depredation determinations have been added for March 2025. Three of the confirmed depredations are attributed to the Diamond pack in Plumas County.

Any 'Confirmed' or 'Probable' depredations are eligible for CDFW's Wolf Livestock Compensation Program Staff Contact: Steven Fenaroli; sfenaroli@cbbf.com

Oppose: AB 491 – Codifying Climate Targets Threatens Farming Flexibility AB 491, authored by Assemblymember Damon Connolly (D-San Rafael), passed out of the Assembly Natural Resources Committee last Monday and is now headed to the Assembly Appropriations Committee. The California Farm Bureau currently opposes AB 491, which would codify into law the targets set by the California Natural Re-

sources Agency for natural carbon sequestration and nature-based climate solutions. The bill would require the state to meet each of these targets by specific deadlines. One provision of particular concern would mandate converting 20% of conventional farming systems to organic by 2045. The Farm Bureau has advocated that such goals should remain aspirational – not statutory – allowing for flexibility and adaptation as technologies and practices evolve. AB 491 has not yet been scheduled for a hearing in the Assembly Appropriations Committee. Staff Contact: Richard Filgas; rfilgas@cbbf.com

Federal Affairs

President Announces Wide-Ranging Tariffs Last week, President Donald Trump unveiled a series of planned across-the-board tariffs on the majority of countries around the world. These tariffs range anywhere from 10% up to nearly 50%, depending on the existing trade deficit between the US and a given country. As of right now, Can-

ada and Mexico are not included in these, although existing auto and steel tariffs (and others) do remain in place for those countries. As of writing, the major question mark is what the responses will be from other nations. China announced on Friday that they will be implementing a flat 34% tariff on US products in the coming days, while other countries and the European Union are still weighing their responses. ABBF President Zippy Duvall issued a press release urging the administration to work towards a swift resolution, warning that tariffs threaten the economic sustainability of the agricultural industry. While targeted tariffs can certainly protect specific American commodities, across-the-board tariffs are rarely utilized in this fashion, and there are questions about the levels at which the administration chose to tariff other countries. While some countries' leaders have announced they will be working with the White House to reduce any existing trade deficit, the vast nature of the tariffs makes it difficult to ascertain the direct impacts until retaliatory measures are implemented. Cali-

formia exported over \$23 billion in agricultural products in 2023, with international markets being a critical component for many growers around the state. While exports vary by commodity, tree nuts, dairy products, and wine account for a significant portion of them. CABB is actively working this issue and will continue to provide updates. Staff Contact: Matthew Viohl,

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CAFB Supports Federal Bill to Delist the Gray Wolf

Last week, CAFB joined with the American Farm Bureau Federation and several other state farm bureaus in a letter of support for H.R. 845, the Pet and Livestock Protection Act. The legislation would delist the gray wolf as an endangered species, highlighting that its population has rebounded significantly in recent years. Its listing under the Endangered Species Act adds a number of regulatory restrictions on entities within and adjacent to their habitats, which have continued to grow as well. Predation has become a significant challenge for those dealing with these issues, and the delisting would offer better protections for those looking to limit their presence as their habitats expand. Staff Contact: Matthew Viohl, mviohl@cfbf.com

CAFB Joins Coalition Letter in Support of USDA’s Wildlife Services


Late last month, CAFB joined with hundreds of other organizations in support of the USDA’s Wildlife Services program through a letter to key Congressional leaders. Housed under the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the program works to prevent, minimize, and manage the billions in wildlife damage to both public and private entities each year. Their reach includes all fifty states and three US territories, helping reduce the impacts of predators, working on responses to emerging animal diseases, carrying out tens of thousands of technical assistance projects, and a number of other public-private partnerships. With several agencies looking to cut and reduce their bureaucratic footprint, the letter emphasizes the importance of this program’s mission. Staff

Contact: Erin Huston, ehuston@cfbf.com

USDA Announces Deadlines for Trade Promotion Programs

Last week, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced several application opportunities for the Market Access Program (MAP), Foreign Market Development Program (FMD), Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops Program (TASC), and the Emerging Markets Program (EMP). The application deadline for all four programs is June 6th. All four combine to offer millions in international opportunities for domestic producers—or to assist as producers seek new markets. This includes overseas marketing and other promotional activities, as well as technical assistance. Members are encouraged to review these programs, as several have been oversubscribed due to their popularity in recent years. Staff Contact: Matthew Viohl, mviohl@cfbf.com

Update on the Corpo-



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The Rising Cost of Compliance: A Growing Burden on Agriculture

By Anna Genasci, SCFB

Regulatory compliance is an ever-increasing challenge for California's farmers, with costs rising at an alarming rate. In a recent episode of Farm Bureau Friday, we spoke with Norm Groot, Executive Director of the Monterey County Farm Bureau, about a study his organization commissioned to assess the financial impact of regulatory requirements on agriculture.

The study, originally conducted in 2006, was initiated in response to concerns over the costs associated with water quality regulations under the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program. At that time, Monterey

County farmers, particularly leafy green and vegetable growers, were beginning to see a significant financial burden.

By 2017, the study was updated to reflect a decade of regulatory expansion. The results were staggering: regulatory costs had increased by 795% in just ten years. Groot explained, "It was just the genesis of that irrigated lands program, and really, as we moved through the different iterations, we realized that there were other regulatory programs impacting costs as well."

Recognizing the continuing regulatory pressure on farmers, the Monterey County Farm Bureau commissioned another update in 2023. The latest findings revealed yet another increase—this time by 63.7% in just a few years. "Unfortunately, what we found is that we had another 63.7% increase in

regulatory costs," Groot said. "Labor, particularly wages, but also health and safety, add chemical use, and the permitting that's going on there—all of these factors continue to push costs higher."

This study, prepared by Cal Poly San Luis Obispo professors Lynn Hamilton, Ph.D., and Michael McCullough, Ph.D., provides an updated look at regulatory compliance expenses since 2017. The findings indicate that the cost of compliance for lettuce growers has reached \$1,600 per acre, a staggering 1366% increase since the original study in 2006. "Regulatory costs are now 12.6% of total production costs, while the farmgate value of lettuce has only increased by 0.37% from 2017 to 2024," Groot emphasized.

The sharp rise in compliance costs is attributed to new regulatory requirements, including the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, the Irrigated Lands Program, equipment emissions regulations, and evolving workplace mandates such as minimum wage and worker safety requirements.

The study also analyzed regulatory compliance expenditures in areas such as food safety practices and inspection audits, air quality, water quality, crop protection reporting, labor health and safety, and wages. Among these categories, the most significant cost increases were in labor health insurance requirements and water quality compliance, while food safety costs remained relatively steady.

Groot emphasized that these regulatory costs don't just affect farm businesses but also consumers, as they contribute to higher food prices. "We have another iteration of our irrigated lands regulatory program, but we're also looking at air quality issues, food safety, labor laws, and chemical use. All of these things add up, and in the end, it impacts what people pay at the grocery store."

While regulatory costs continue to dramatically increase, the farmgate value of crops has only marginally increased to cover these expenses. This financial strain makes it increasingly difficult for California farmers to remain competitive in a global market.

The study serves as a critical tool for advocating policy changes that balance environmental and worker protections with the economic viability of farming operations. Organizations like the Monterey County Farm Bureau continue to work toward policies that ensure regulatory fairness while sustaining local food production.

As compliance costs continue to rise, it's essential for the agricultural community to stay informed and engaged. "It's great to be that voice of agriculture here," Groot stated. "We need to make sure that the agricultural community can continue moving forward despite these challenges." By working together, farmers and industry advocates can push for practical regulations that support both environmental stewardship and economic sustainability.



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Protecting Land and A Way of Life
Subtitle: Funding Available for Landowners

*By Charlotte Mitchell, Executive Director
California Farmland Trust*

Agricultural conservation easements (ACE) have been a successful tool for 1000s of landowners across the country since the 1970s. In California alone, there are over 100 land trusts using conservation easements to fulfill landowners’ conservation goals. Landowners and family farmers can reach their goals of protecting the land for agriculture by using an ACE.

Simply put, an ACE is a legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified

entity, such as CFT, to sell or donate the development rights on the land, to ensure that a farm or ranch operation can continue perpetually, unthreatened by conversion to other non-agricultural uses.

No two conservation easements are alike. Each is tailored to the desires of the landowner, the interests of the funding source and the unique character of the land. CFT is not involved in the day-to-day farm operation, and the general public is not granted the right to enter the property. Some limited construction may be allowed under certain and specific instances. New farm buildings and future single-home sites are commonly included in the easement terms. The landowner can change crops between trees, vines, and row crops at any time.

The most important is to have full and complete information before starting the process. ACEs are not for everyone or every property. CFT meets directly with each landowner and provides comprehensive information and answers all questions. The final decision is made by the landowner. CFT will NEVER pressure a landowner if an ACE is not the right decision for all parties.

There are many land trusts that work to conserve various natural landscapes, but the focus of CFT is strictly farmland. “We are an agricultural organization helping farmers to protect their land,” remarks CFT Executive Director, Charlotte Mitchell. “The easements we hold are referred to as ‘agricultural’ conservation easements because they protect the agricultural re-



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sources," she adds.

The decision to place an ACE on a property is voluntary and the landowner remains as the property owner. However, once an ACE is in place, it is in perpetuity. The land may be sold or inherited, but the easement and its restrictions remain. The land is protected by prohibiting conversion to non-agricultural uses. The terms of the easement do not negate or modify state or federal law, and a conservation easement cannot prevent condemnation through the eminent domain process.

There may be tax benefits for a landowner who donates all or a portion of the ACE on their property. The easement must meet the conservation purposes included in Internal Revenue Code section 170(h)(4) to qualify

for an income tax deduction. A conservation easement must be granted in perpetuity to a qualified conservation organization to qualify as a charitable gift. CFT strongly recommends that landowners consult with a tax advisor and independent legal counsel before proceeding with an easement.

Currently, there is funding available for agricultural conservation easement projects. CFT is offering three educational workshops that interested landowners can choose to attend. Please select a date that works for you and register by calling 916-687-3178 or emailing info@cafarmtrust.org.

April 10th 11:30 am – 2:00 pm
El Capitan
609 W. Main Street, Merced

May 7th 11:30 am – 2:00 pm
Wine and Roses

2505 W Turner Road, Lodi

May 15th 11:30 am – 2:00 pm
Greens on Tenth
953 10th Street, Modesto

Staff is available to meet with landowners to determine if a property meets the selection criteria and whether it makes sense to proceed to the next level of discussion. Remember, placing an ACE on one's property is a voluntary decision that must be based on full and complete information.

For more information:

Visit our website www.cafarmtrust.org or call us directly (916) 687-3178
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Basic ACE Facts:

Each agricultural conservation easement is tailored to the desires of the landowner.

- The landowner retains ownership and continued use of the land.
- California Farmland Trust is not involved in the day-to-day operation, and the public is not allowed on a property with a conservation easement.
- The land may be sold or transferred to heirs in a will or a trust, but the easement remains in place allowing that property to stay in agriculture for future generations.
- Property taxes and capital gains may be minimized by placing a conservation easement on your land.

ACEs can be a tool for farmers or ranchers.

- The landowner can conserve the land as a testimonial to his or her ancestors who originally worked the land and would want it to remain in agriculture.
- The proceeds from the sale of an ACE can be used to pay down debt, acquire additional property, or for any other purposes.
- An ACE can be an estate planning tool, enabling the transfer of assets among siblings prior to the death of the landowner.
- An ACE can be used as a tax planning tool, by donating all or a portion of an ACE.

The importance of immediate workers' compensation reporting

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

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, agriculture ranks among the most hazardous industries with one of the highest work injury rates in 2022.1

When workplace injuries occur, workers' compensation coverage can play a critical role in providing the right financial and medical support to the injured worker if reported immediately. Understand how reporting workplace injuries can benefit the physical and financial health of your agricultural business and employees.

Five reasons to report workplace accidents immediately

- Lower claim costs. Delays can exacerbate injuries, leading to increased medical costs, longer time off work and higher legal fees.
- Better employee relationships. Quick reporting shows injured employees they are valued, aiding in their recovery and easing their return to work.
- Smoother claim investigations. Timely reporting helps preserve evidence and witness statements, crucial for accurate claim investigation.
- Lower litigation costs. Prompt action can prevent employee dissatisfaction, reducing the likelihood of a litigated claim.
- Compliance with state laws. Many states impose fines for late reporting of workplace injuries, making timely reporting not only ethical but also a legal requirement.

What to report and when

All workplace accidents and injuries for farm workers should be reported immediately regardless of severity. Report accidents the moment you become aware of them. There's no need to wait for complete information.

The initial report should include:

- Injured person's name and phone number
- Date of accident
- Location of accident
- Brief description of accident

Nationwide offers several convenient options to help you file a claim. You can report a claim via phone, fax, online or through your agent. Workplace injury services and resources You have complimentary access to risk management services (PDF) and safety resources to help prevent accidents before they happen. Proactive measures can significantly reduce the risk of workplace injuries, creating a safer environment for everyone.

For non-limb-threatening and non-life-threatening injuries, our Nurse Triage Hotline (PDF)

provides workers' compensation customers with 24/7 access to registered nurses. This helps injured employees and their supervisors or farm owners or managers determine effective courses of action and assist in coordinating treatment with an appropriate authorized provider.

Specialized claims support for agribusinesses With expertise in farm, ranch and commercial agribusiness claims, our specialized Agribusiness Claims team understands the unique challenges you face. These dedicated professionals are equipped to help minimize disruption to your operations so you can feel confident you're getting the best possible outcome. Visit AgInsightCenter.com for more resources and expert tips to help you run a successful business and maintain the safety of your operation.

1 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) Nationwide, the Nationwide N and Eagle, and Nationwide is on your side are service marks of Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company. © 2025 Nationwide



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Friday, May 2nd / Cocktails 5:30PM /
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OakdaleCAchamber.org/events/ag-scholarship-dinner

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Modesto City Schools FFA Scholarship Fundraising Luncheon



Thursday, April 17th, 2025

11:30 AM - 1:00 PM - MJC ACE Ag Pavilion

Join us for the 28th Annual Ag Aware Voss-Berryhill Scholarship Luncheon, where we come together to support the next generation of agricultural innovators. This meaningful event highlights the incredible achievements of Modesto City School's FFA students and raises crucial funds to provide them with scholarships that will shape their future careers. Enjoy a fantastic meal while connecting with local farmers, industry leaders, and community members who share a passion for agriculture and education. Don't miss the opportunity to invest in the future of agriculture.

Stay tuned for the exciting announcement of our keynote speaker, a prominent figure in agriculture, who will share invaluable knowledge on the future of farming and new innovations shaping the industry.

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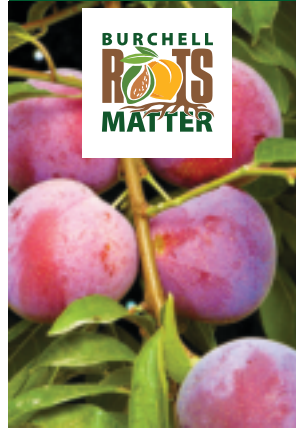


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