

The Stanislaus Farm News

The *voice* of Stanislaus County Agriculture



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A dozen Stanislaus County Young Farmers & Ranchers spent about 2 hours one night picking roughly 200 pounds of sweet cherries, which were donated to the Modesto Gospel Mission. The Stanislaus Committee's cherry gleaning received an award for the most innovative Harvest for All project at the recent YF&R State Conference. See page 4

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**WE WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND
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**This program will honor farmworker nominees
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April 7, 2026. Nominees will be interviewed for the
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CASH AWARDS! UP TO \$3,000!

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*This program is brought to you by Stanislaus County Farm
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Questions or additional information?

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Scan to nominate!



SCFB MISSION STATEMENT

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.

Advocacy Updates from CaFB

Additional Wolf Pack Recognized in California

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife has added the Grizzly pack in southern Plumas County to its list of recognized wolf packs, bringing the total number of known packs in California back to 10, following the removal of the Beyem Seyo pack earlier this year. The Grizzly pack has been active for more than six months and includes at least one pup, confirming the presence of a breeding pair. CDFW has also identified two additional areas of wolf activity—one in southwestern Modoc County and another in eastern Sierra County. See the areas of Wolf Activity map. CDFW is

also shifting to reporting depredations in a single updated file instead of individual depredation reports.

Staff contact: Steven Fenaroli, sfenaroli@cfbf.com.

California Farm Bureau Submits Comments on Labor Department AEWB Changes

Earlier this week, the California Farm Bureau submitted comments generally supportive of the U.S. Department of Labor's interim final rule revising the H-2A program. The proposal would update the methodology for calculating the Adverse Effect Wage Rate, or AEWB, and consolidate job duties into two skill categories.

Under the interim final rule, California's AEWB would shift from the current \$19.97 per hour to \$16.45, though the state's 2026 minimum wage would ultimately apply.

The H-2A program has expanded significantly over the past decade, with concerns that the existing AEWB formula has contributed to steep annual wage increases. While some elements of the proposal still require clarification, the interim final rule appears aimed at aligning wage calculations more closely with national labor trends and improving overall program accessibility for agricultural employers.

Member Opportunity: SDRP Stage 2 Applications Open

As a reminder, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Supplemental Disaster Relief Program has opened its Stage 2 application period for producers with qualifying disaster losses in 2023 and 2024. Stage 1 assistance focused largely on commodities traditionally covered by crop insurance, leaving many of California's specialty crop producers waiting for this second phase to access support. The enrollment period runs through April 30. Members are encouraged to access the portal here.

Staff contact: Erin Huston, ehuston@cfbf.com.

Additional Screwworm Detection in Mexico

New World screwworm is not currently present in the United States. The latest detection occurred in a Nuevo Leon, Mexico, feedlot. To date, there have been 13 detections of NWS within 400 miles of the U.S. border. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has already been dispersing sterile NWS flies at this site and will continue to do so for an additional 72 days. Current status of NWS in the U.S. is available on the USDA-APHIS website.

Staff contact: Steven Fenaroli, sfenaroli@cfbf.com.

Help CARB develop a new tool to highlight zero-emission fleets

The California Air Resources Board will hold a virtual public workgroup Dec. 9 from 1-3 p.m. to discuss a new voluntary, non-monetary initiative called Clean Fleet Connect. The proposed tool is intended to highlight fleets using medium- and heavy-duty zero-emission vehicles, connect environmentally conscious businesses with



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Wishing you a joyous holiday season that is Merry & Bright

Stanislaus County YF&R wins Award for Innovation at the CaFB Annual Meeting

By Vicky Boyd

Amidst the holidays and season of giving, Natalie Kidd recounted this year's Young Farmers & Ranchers' accomplishments, wishing they could have given back more to the community.

arships and purchasing at least one county fair animal.

"We're trying to balance fun stuff with giving back to the community and tours," said Kidd, YF&R chair and a Modesto-area almond and walnut grower with her father. "At the end of the day, we're an ag organization and it's important to be involved in ag rather than just being a social club."

How extensive the YF&R activities are will depend on fundraising. This year members held a successful Outdoorsman's Choice sweepstakes that involved five different outdoor packages. Kidd said they hoped to continue it in 2026.

Years ago, the Stanislaus committee was one of the first YF&Rs to hold a trap shoot as a fundraiser. In 2026, Kidd said they plan to bring it back as their second charitable event of the year.

But Kidd and the YF&R executive team already have plans for 2026 that she hopes include more produce gleaning and community involvement along with farm tours and fun social get-togethers. As part of that, the team expects to fill the open community outreach position.

They also plan to continue agricultural education activities for school students, funding schol-



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GLEANING LEFTOVER PRODUCE

In her first year as YF&R committee chair, Kidd helped organize two gleaning sessions to harvest roughly 200 pounds each of cherries and peaches left after harvest. The fruit was donated to the Modesto Gospel Mission.

Stanislaus YF&R also participated in Harvest for All, a nationwide program promoted by the American Farm Bureau that benefits Feeding America food banks.

County YF&R committees compete at the state level in four categories: food quantity donated, money donated, volunteer hours contributed and most innovative event to benefit a local food bank. The winner goes on to represent California at the AFBF Annual Meeting.

Winning states receive bragging rights and a check from AFBF to donate to food banks of their choice. Since 2003 when Harvest for All was launched, Farm Bureau members nationwide have gathered more than 65 million pounds of food, contributed more than 30,000 volunteer hours and raised more than \$778,000 to donate to local food banks.

“(Harvest for All) is a big deal at the state level,” said Miranda Blagg, who represents Stanislaus and Tuolumne counties on the state YF&R board. “There are quite a few committees that do a lot of interesting things.”

Kern County, for example, hosts a free farmers market while Napa County conducts regular gleanings at the Mission Farm in Napa. Blagg said gleaning post-harvest fields seems to work well for Stanislaus County’s YF&R, although she’d like to see it grow.

This year, the 400 pounds of gleaned fresh fruit as well as the hours the

Stanislaus YF&R volunteers spent picking it went toward the Harvest for All contest, Kidd said.

The Stanislaus YF&R Committee’s cherry gleaning received the Harvest for All award for the most innovative project, which promoted agricultural sustainability and community engagement.

“I’m glad our hard work was seen, and I’m hoping it will renew vigor in our efforts for next year,” Kidd said after the award. “Hopefully next year, we can increase our amount of gleanings and how many people attend.”

One of the challenges with gleaning is finding the farmers who own the land to ask permission.

“We just need to figure out how to get a hold of farmers,” Kidd said. “I see all of these beautiful orchards that aren’t getting picked, and I want to find out who owns them.”

This year, the Modesto Junior College YF&R also conducted a milk drive and donated 124 gallons of milk. Of that, 75 gallons went to the Gospel Mission and 49 gallons to Pirates’ Pantry, an on-campus food closet.

Because the MJC group participates as part of the Stanislaus YF&R Committee, Kidd said the milk donations went toward Stanislaus’ Harvest for All entry.

TEACH ‘EM YOUNG

Once again this year, YF&R helped with Ag Adventure, an effort by the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau Foundation to educate roughly 1,200 third-graders firsthand about agriculture. At the different booths, they could pet farm animals or try their hand at pieces of farm equipment.

See ‘YF&R’ on page 7



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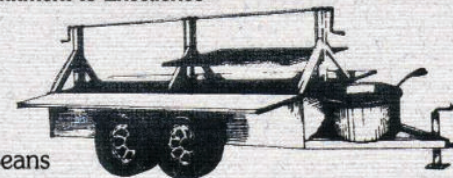
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From 'YF&R' on page 5

The free annual half-day event was held in October at the Stanislaus County Fairgrounds and required numerous volunteers to put it on.

The Stanislaus County Farm Bureau Foundation is currently working with the county Office of Education to expand Ag Edventure to include more third-grade students in 2026.

In San Joaquin County, the county Farm Bureau hosts a similar Ag Venture program that involves all of the county's third-grade

ers. The program is split into four different sections, which are each held at a different location and date within the county to ease transportation and demands on volunteers. In addition, the California Foundation for Ag in the Classroom recently launched a new program that taps YF&R members, said Morgan Nunes, foundation program director for Central California.

Called Farm to Future, it uses educational materials Ag in the Classroom has already developed and enlists YF&R members to expand outreach and take ag-related lessons to students.

"We'd love to be in every classroom, but it's just not possible," said Nunes, also vice chair of the Stanislaus County YF&R committee. The presentations are made to classes where teachers have expressed interest in the program. This also helps the foundation tailor the lessons to the appropriate grade

level, she said.

State Ag in the Classroom representatives presented two lessons at the YF&R Summer Leaders Meeting and two different plans at the recent YF&R State Conference in Anaheim. In addition, Nunes said she's available to help train anyone in the Central Valley who feels unsure. YF&R members also can conduct lessons in pairs or as part of a small group.

As an added incentive, members track the hours they've contributed to the Farm to Future program over the year, she said. The committee with the most hours logged at the end of the year earns \$1,000.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT YF&R

YF&R is open to anyone age 18-35, whether or not they're involved in agriculture. Kidd invites anybody who's interested to attend one of their socials or tours to see if it might be a fit.

"If you don't know anything about farming but want to learn more, everybody is welcome at our meetings," she said.

For information on upcoming YF&R events, follow the group on Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/stancoyfr/> or contact Kidd at nataliekidd99@gmail.com.



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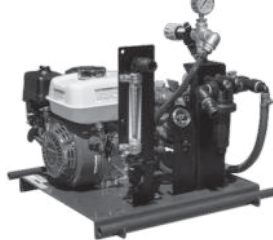
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PESTICIDE SAFETY Information

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY **A No. 8**

Safety Rules for Employees Handling Pesticides in Agricultural Settings



The pesticide label, your training, and the Pesticide Safety Information Series (PSIS) leaflets tell you about pesticide dangers at work. To handle pesticides in agriculture (on farms, forests, nurseries or greenhouses) you must be at least 18 years old. Your employer must teach you how to use pesticides safely and how to protect yourself when you use them. Pesticides are chemicals that are used to control pests: unwanted insects, predatory animals, rodents, weeds, and plant diseases. Spray adjuvants are also pesticides under California law.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE

Your employer must make plans for emergency medical care before you start working with pesticides. If you think that pesticides made you sick or hurt you at work, immediately tell your employer. They must make sure that you are taken to a doctor right away. **DO NOT TAKE YOURSELF.**

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EMPLOYERS: This is the hazard communication leaflet for pesticide handlers. Fill in the blank lines in this leaflet and display a copy of this handout at a central location in the workplace (such as an employee break room). This leaflet must also be posted at all permanent decontamination facilities and decontamination facilities serving 11 or more handlers. If requested, you must read this leaflet to an employee in a language the employee understands.

PESTICIDE SAFETY Information

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY **A No. 9**

Pesticide Safety Rules for Employees Working in Fields



Your training and this leaflet tell you about pesticide dangers at work. Pesticides are chemicals that are used to control unwanted insects, weeds, and plant diseases. If you work on a farm, or in a forest, greenhouse, or nursery, your employer must know about the pesticides used and help you learn how to protect yourself.

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EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE

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John Deere Highlights Organic Farming, Automation, and Future Trends at the Grower Summit

Greg Christensen, Source AgNet West

The Monterey Grower Summit in California showcased the latest in agricultural innovation, bringing together growers, technology providers, and industry experts. Among the highlights was a conversation with Greg Christensen, Marketing Manager for High-Value Crops at John Deere, who shared insights on organic farming, autonomous equipment, and the future of agriculture.

He emphasized the value of the Grower Summit, which provides a platform to interact with growers producing much of the fresh fruits and vegetables we enjoy daily. "It's exciting to see the dedication of growers advancing agriculture in meaningful ways," Christensen added.

John Deere on Organic Farming, Automation & the Future of Agriculture

The Rise of Organic Agriculture

Organic farming continues to grow across the U.S., and John Deere's tools are designed to support this expansion. Christensen noted, "We saw some growth in the industry. Our technology can help farmers be more precise, regardless of production type."

Soil management remains critical. John Deere has developed tools over nearly three decades to monitor and meter inputs, ensuring growers can track what goes into the soil and make data-driven improvements year after year.

Autonomous Tractors: Challenges and Opportunities

California presents unique regulatory challenges for autonomous farming, yet John Deere is actively developing autonomous and electric tractors. Christensen explained, "We are investing in autonomous agriculture globally. Automation helps solve labor shortages and ensures consistent, high-quality results."

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Christensen's role focuses on supporting orchards, vineyards, and bedded row crops through advanced agricultural technology. "Whether a grower chooses conventional or organic, we have the same technology to optimize inputs, labor, and farm management," he said.

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Autonomous technology also enables standardization across farms. "Every operator drives differently. Automation ensures tasks are performed exactly as prescribed, safely and efficiently," Christensen said.

Looking ahead, John Deere is piloting autonomous orchard tractors and

See 'Deere' on page 17

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Whole Milk May Be Coming Back to Schools

Source: American Farm Bureau

More than a decade after USDA regulations banned whole milk from school menus, Congress is considering a comeback. The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act would overturn 2012 rules that limited schools to fat-free or 1% milk, aiming to revive a category losing ground and reconnect kids with milk's taste and nutrition.

Behind the debate is a market challenge: U.S. milk output is hitting record highs while fluid consumption falls. Allowing whole milk could provide a small but meaningful outlet for butterfat — key to farm revenue — and create new opportunities for local dairies.

Shifting Dairy Trends

Americans drink far less milk than they used to — down nearly 50% since 1975 and 28% since 2010. Cheese, butter and yogurt consumption has surged, but fluid milk use continues to decline, partly due to changing breakfast habits. Whole milk is the exception: from 2013 to 2024, sales grew 16% while skim and reduced-fat options plunged. Whole milk's share of fluid sales rose from 27% to 38%, driven by interest in protein-rich and minimally processed foods and even appetite-suppressing drug regimens that prioritize fuller-fat, higher-protein options for satiety and sustained energy.

How Whole Milk Disappeared

The National School Lunch Program serves nearly 30 million students daily and accounts for about 7.5% of U.S. fluid milk sales, making its standards influential. In 2012, USDA rules under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act restricted school milk to fat-free or 1%, banning whole and 2% options. Later updates allowed 1% flavored milk, but higher-fat varieties remain prohibited.

Milk consumption dropped sharply after the change. From 2008 to 2018, weekly servings per student fell 15%, with the decline accelerating 77% after the restrictions. When kids skip milk, schools miss nutrition goals, dairy demand weakens and unopened cartons add to food waste and costs.

The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act

The bipartisan Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act would let schools serve whole, 2%, 1%, or skim milk, flavored or plain, as part of reimbursable meals. It also exempts milkfat from saturated-fat limits and bars sourcing from Chinese state-owned enterprises. The Senate approved the bill in mid November and it now moves to the House. Importantly, it doesn't require schools to switch — just gives them the option. Adoption would likely be gradual, shaped by local preferences and budgets.

Market Impact

Even partial adoption could shift dairy demand. In 2024, schools served nearly 4.9 billion lunches, with 85% of students choosing milk — mostly skim or 1%. Whole milk contains about three times more fat than 1%, so reintroducing it would pull more butterfat into fluid use instead of butter, cheese, or powder. If 25%, 50%, or 75% of schools adopt whole milk, annual butterfat demand could rise by 13–18 million, 25–36 million and 38–55 million pounds, respec-

tively. A near-universal shift could divert 45–66 million pounds of butter — about 2–3% of U.S. production — into bottled milk.

Even small increases matter in an oversupplied market. More whole milk shifts butterfat into higher-value fluid milk channels, simplifying processing and reducing the amount of lower-value skim powder produced. For smaller dairies, it could create local farm-to-school opportunities.

Bottom Line

The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act wouldn't dramatically change overall milk use, but it targets one of the few areas where demand can grow. Even modest gains in school milk sales strengthen fluid milk markets, boost butterfat utilization and improve returns to farmers. With milk production at record highs, giving schools the option for whole milk helps absorb supply where it matters most — connecting kids with milk they enjoy and farmers with stronger milk checks.

Daniel Munch is an economist at the American Farm Bureau Federation. This column was adapted from a Market Intel report published by AFBF.

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From 'Advocacy' on page 3

participating fleets, and support the state's broader clean-air and public-health objectives.

Clean Fleet Connect would publicly recognize fleets that voluntarily choose to align with the state's zero-emission goals and would not create new regulatory requirements. The workgroup will provide an opportunity for CARB staff to present the concept and for fleet owners, operators, and hiring and procurement entities to offer feedback.

The session will be held via Zoom. Interested parties must register to participate. More information can be found on CARB's webpage.

Staff contact: Steven Fenaroli, sfenaroli@cfbf.com.

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California Farm Bureau re-elects officers, welcomes new board members

During the 107th California Farm Bureau Annual Meeting in Anaheim, delegates re-elected all three officers and welcomed five new members, along with seven returning members, to its Board of Directors.

Shannon Douglass was re-elected to a two-year term as president. She is an owner of Douglass Ranch, which raises beef cattle, walnuts, sunflowers, pumpkins, corn and forage crops in Orland.

Shaun Crook was re-elected as first vice president. He is a real estate broker and vice president of his family's timber business in Tuolumne County.

Ron Peterson was re-elected as second vice president. He is a Stanislaus County cattle rancher and dairy farmer who also grows silage crops and almonds.

Neil Nagata, a berry farmer in Oceanside, replaces Ronnie Leimgruber in serving District 1, representing Farm Bureau members in Imperial and San Diego counties. Nagata formerly served on the California Strawberry Commission and is a past president of the San Diego County Farm Bureau.

John Moore, an agriculture land consultant in Bakersfield, replaces Kevin Robertson in serving District 5, representing members in Kern and Kings counties. Moore is a past president and current board member of the Kern County Farm Bureau.

Jeff Dittmer, a hay and grain farmer in Fairfield, replaces Joseph Martinez in serving District 11, representing members in Alameda, Contra Costa and Solano counties. Dittmer has been a Farm Bureau member for 50 years and currently serves as second vice president of

the Solano County Farm Bureau.

Joey Gonsalves, an almond and walnut farmer in Modesto, replaces Jake Wenger in serving District 13, representing members in Stanislaus and Tuolumne counties. Gonsalves is a past president and current board member of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau. He is also a Leadership Farm Bureau alumnus.

Each will serve two-year terms.

August D'Amato of Napa was elected to a one-year term as chair of the Young

Farmers & Ranchers State Committee. She is a member of the Napa YF&R Committee, a District 17 representative and serves on the Napa County Farm Bureau Board of




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Directors. She farms winegrapes. Re-elected to two-year terms on the California Farm Bureau board were Mark Lopez of Fullerton in District 3 (Los Angeles and Orange counties); Lorna Roush of Riverdale in District 7 (Fresno County); Jay Mahil of Madera in District 9 (Madera, Mariposa and Merced counties); Clark Becker of Biggs in District 15 (Butte, Nevada and Yuba-Sutter counties); Johnnie White of St. Helena in District 17 (Marin, Napa and Sonoma counties); Taylor Hagata of Susanville in District 19 (Lassen, Modoc and Plumas-Sierra counties); and Ronald Vevo-da of Ferndale in District 21 (Del Norte and Humboldt counties).



California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass and First Vice President Shaun Crook were elected to serve as delegates at next month's American Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention, also in Anaheim. Second Vice President Ron Peterson was elected to serve as the alternate delegate.

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California Farm Bureau launches philanthropy initiative to support local youth

The California Farm Bureau launched "Giving Back with Farm Bureau," a new philanthropic initiative, during the 107th California Farm Bureau Annual Meeting in Anaheim in conjunction with the California YF&R State Conference.

The hands-on project united Farm Bureau members and event attendees in assembling 1,000 backpacks filled with school supplies, learning materials and healthy snacks. The filled backpacks were donated to OC Fairgrounds: Centennial Farm for distribution to local children. The effort also doubled as a friendly competition, with attendees from different regions competing to assemble the backpacks.

"Supporting our communities has always been an important part of Farm Bureau's mission," said Shannon Douglass, president of the California Farm Bureau, which represents more than 23,000 farmers and ranchers statewide. "This effort reflects that commitment, helping ensure children have the tools they need to succeed in school."

Partners of the philanthropic initiative included California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom, California Giant Berry Farms, California Grown, California Milk Advisory Board, California Walnut Board and Commission, Dairy Council of California, Farm Bureau Bank, Nationwide, OC Fairgrounds: Centennial Farm, Sun-Sweet and UnitedAg.

"Giving Back with Farm Bureau" complemented the meeting's broader discussion on the importance of farming and ranching

and seeks to foster agricultural education by providing resources to local children.

Douglass and American Farm Bureau Fed-



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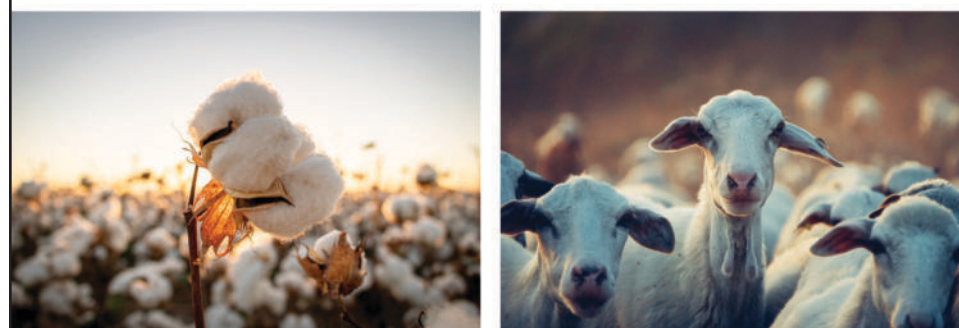
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eration President Zippy Duvall highlighted the initiative's impact and addressed key issues affecting farmers and ranchers, including immigration reform, managing regulatory costs and growing the future leaders of agriculture.

"This (backpack donation effort) is a great example of our county Farm Bureaus giving back to their community," Duvall said. "Growing a new generation that understands agriculture is very, very important because today, people want to know more about their food than ever before."

Teaching children about where their food comes from, Duvall said, opens the door for future generations interested in 4-H and FFA and careers in agriculture.



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From 'Deere' on page 9

battery-electric utility tractors, designed to simplify operation and enhance control, even for operators without prior experience.

Evolving Technology for Agricultural Efficiency

Christensen highlighted the rapid adoption of technology in farming. Rising costs for chemicals, fertilizer, and labor are driving growers to leverage tools for precision farming and operational efficiency.

The evolution of John Deere's technology stack—from machine connectivity to agronomic data collection—enables growers to monitor tractor health, benchmark performance, and improve farm management through software advancements.

Organic Farming Across the United States

While California faces higher costs and regulatory complexity, Christensen notes that the organic farming landscape shares similar challenges nationwide. "Places like Michigan, New York, and Florida have similar goals, but California has more external complexities," he explained.

Farmers often face factors beyond their control, making it crucial to manage costs where possible to maintain profitability.

John Deere in 2026 and Beyond

Looking toward 2026, John Deere plans to expand its autonomous and battery-electric offerings. The company is focusing on pilot programs with growers to gather feedback and refine technology. Christensen explained, "Battery-electric tractors can be operated as easily as a golf cart, making them accessible to a wider range of operators."

Growers interested in learning more are encouraged to visit local John Deere dealerships or explore offerings at JohnDeere.com.

Appreciation for Farmers

Christensen concluded by expressing gratitude for farmers' dedication: "We truly appreciate all the hard work farmers put into providing high-quality, fresh produce year-round. Their work is the backbone of our daily lives."

The Grower Summit highlighted how technology, automation, and innovation continue to shape the future of agriculture, supporting growers in California and beyond.

Warm holiday wishes

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A Snowy Mascot at the Firehouse—circa 1930

Hunter Street station firemen added whimsy to their firehouse in this photo which appeared in the January 13, 1920 edition of the Stockton Daily Record chronicling the unusual snowfall that had happened overnight. Their cold guest was built from the 3-inches that covered most of Central California—the first snow in the area in 13 years—making the Valley into a winter wonderland. Bank of Stockton was 63 years old at the time of this photo.

Miniature dachshund wins California Farm Bureau Farm Dog of the Year

Willy, a miniature long-haired dachshund, has earned the \$1,000 Grand Prize in the fifth annual California Farm Bureau Farm Dog of the Year Contest. The award was an-

nounced during the 107th California Farm Bureau Annual Meeting in Anaheim.

Open to Farm Bureau members, the competition asked entrants to submit photos and answer brief questions about their dog.

Marshal Hagedorn, owner of Hagedorn Forestry Management, works as a tree feller in Shasta and Tehama counties and also runs cattle near Montague. He and his girlfriend, Bailey Thomas, adopted Willy in February 2023. Willy quickly

became an active member of the ranch, helping control critters like rabbits and ground squirrels. When Hagedorn heads into the woods for logging work, Willy tags along, offering both companionship and moral support.

"I hike around and cut the oversized trees that the loggers can't handle with their machines," Hagedorn said. "He goes with me everywhere every single day."

Willy, though not a traditional herding breed, has taken to the job naturally. He's never been trained to corral livestock, but he uses his bark and energy to move calves and even larger cattle.

"That's just it. He's so small and when he



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comes out of the grass at full speed, they don't really know what to think," Hagedorn said.

The first runner-up honor, and a \$500 prize, went to Jim, a border collie owned by Kelsey Nichols of Solano County. At Nichols' 3,000-acre Rio Vista Ranch, Jim is known for his loyalty and hard work. After losing a hind leg to infection, Jim is now back to his regular duties.

Second runner-up, and \$250, was awarded to Corduroy, owned by Sam Terpstra of Stanislaus County. The labradoodle enjoys hunting for pests and "earns his keep every day, patrolling for gophers and joining in on daily tasks," Terpstra said.

Third runner-up, and \$100, went to Sheila, an Australian cattle dog who catches gophers, digs mounds and brings joy to everyone on the vineyard managed by her

owners, August D'Amato and Ben Forgeron of Napa County.

The Farm Dog of the Year Contest is supported by Nationwide.





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California Farm Bureau president heralds 'bright future' for agriculture

California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass applauded the organization's principles and accomplishments this year in an address delivered today at the Farm Bureau's 107th Annual Meeting in Anaheim.

Douglass, who is a diversified farmer and rancher in Glenn County, acknowledged challenges farmers face while expressing her conviction that Farm Bureau's advocacy efforts will bring about positive changes.

"Despite all the challenges we have in the world, all the challenges we have in agriculture, we still have a tremendously bright future," Douglass said. "I believe that it's because of Farm Bureau that the future of California agriculture looks bright."

The Farm Bureau president highlighted several of the organization's achievements this year, including work by its policy advocates to reduce utility rates and to impact state laws pertaining to farmland conservation and protecting livestock from coyotes.

"I think our voices were heard," said Douglass, who was elected in 2023 to lead the Farm Bureau.

Douglass also applauded the Farm Bureau's decision this year to take a principled stand in support of the farm workforce.

In August, the Farm Bureau president and California Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas co-authored an opinion piece in The New York Times advocating that a pathway to legal status be created for undocumented farmworkers.

"We simply talked about why this issue is important, why it's important not only on our farms and businesses from a business perspective, but why it's important from a people perspective—and how we value and appreciate the people that work on our farms and are involved in our communities and our families," Douglass said. "We are going to continue fighting on the issue."

During her address, Douglass celebrated efforts by several county Farm Bureaus to grow their membership this year, including the Lake, Nevada, Napa, Plumas-Sierra, San Francisco, Santa Cruz and Solano County

Farm Bureaus, while also acknowledging efforts by the San Bernardino and Alameda County Farm Bureaus.

"We've got over 100 years of history—a whole century of work that's been laid out before us," Douglass said. "All that investment allows us to look ahead at a really bright future."



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Almond Board of California Board of Directors Vote to Discontinue Funding for USDA Objective Measurement Report

Modesto, CA – December 9, 2025 – The Almond Board of California (ABC) Board of Directors has voted to cease funding for the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Objective Measurement Report, marking a change in California almond crop estimates going forward.

This decision follows extensive consultation with growers, handlers, and other industry stakeholders, as well as a thorough review by the Almond Forecast Task Force, comprised of industry members, who compiled recommendations for the Almond Quality and Food Safety Services (AQFSS) Committee. After further review and discussion, AQFSS provided their recommendation to the Board of Directors. The Board's goal is to ensure crop

estimates remain factual, unbiased, and responsive to the evolving needs of the industry.

Since the 1960's, ABC has contracted with USDA NASS to produce the Objective Measurement Report in July. However, industry feedback has highlighted ongoing challenges in accurately capturing variables such as larger crop sizes, diverse grower practices, and weather events across California's production regions.

While funding for the Objective Measurement Report will end, the California Almond Subjective Forecast, published annually in May by NASS, will continue. ABC remains committed to providing accurate and timely information to support the California almond industry and will continue collaborating with USDA and industry partners to refine crop estimation methods.

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The New World Screwworm (NWS) is a growing concern for cattle producers, with its recent spread northward from Panama into southern Mexico. Confirmation of the first human case in the U.S. in August 2025 shows the pest is a reality for not just the U.S. cattle industry but also other livestock, wildlife, pets and people.

What is New World Screwworm and how does it harm animals?

NWS is a parasitic fly whose larvae infest open wounds on warm-blooded animals, feeding on live tissue. This infestation causes severe pain, tissue damage and even death if untreated. Cattle, especially newborns like young beef or dairy calves, are particularly vulnerable. The parasite is zoo-

notic, meaning it can be transmitted across species, like between cattle and humans.

After the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) closed the U.S.-Mexican border to livestock trade in July 2025 to help prevent its spread, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) confirmed the first human case of NWS in the United States in August 2025. The individual had recently traveled to El Salvador, and the case was confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Maryland Department of Health. The parasite has not been reported in U.S. livestock this year.

Why ranchers and dairy farmers should be concerned with New World Screwworm

- Economic impact. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates the New World Screwworm threatens over \$100 billion in U.S. livestock-related economic activity. Further economic impact in the form of higher consumer beef prices is possible if cattle trade remains disrupted

for an extended period.

- Livestock mortality. Infestations can lead to high mortality rates, especially in young or injured animals.
- Wildlife spread. Migratory animals can carry NWS across borders, making containment difficult.

What ranchers and dairy farmers can do to prevent NWS damage and losses

Effectively preventing New World Screwworm in a cattle herd is an effort on multiple fronts. Watch for a few key symptoms, including irritated behavior, head shaking or biting or licking wounds. If you see large numbers of larvae or egg masses in and around open wounds (including where they've been branded, castrated or dehorned, or around umbilical cords or genital areas), that's a sign animals are experiencing negative health effects. As with

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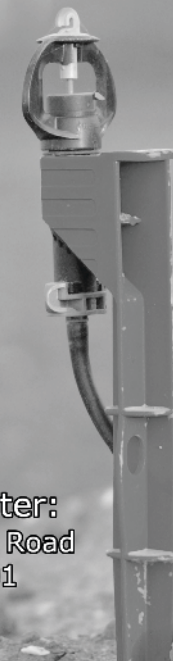
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other illnesses, infected animals may stop eating or segregate themselves from the rest of a herd.

"Surveillance and early detection are so important to preventing economic losses from NWS," said Nationwide Senior Dairy Consultant Dan Rice. "Even if you're not 100% certain but see some of the telltale symptoms, report cases to your veterinarian immediately. This will help contain its spread."

There isn't currently a veterinary drug approved for NWS. But veterinarians can administer products labeled for other fly infections to prevent myiasis, or when a fly strikes an animal to begin feeding on host tissue. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has a list of approved treatments that, though considered "extra-label," can help prevent NWS damage.

What's being done to stop NWS around the

country

After the first U.S. case was confirmed, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials announced an enhanced strategy to prevent the spread of NWS. The plan includes:

- A \$100 million investment in new technologies
- Construction of a sterile fly production facility in Edinburg, Texas, capable of producing 300 million sterile flies each week
- Strengthened border protections with expanded patrols or "Tick Riders" as well as newly trained detector dogs

"This strategy focuses on surveillance and aims to strengthen protocols to keep NWS from crossing into the U.S.," Rice said. "Until there's adequate supply of sterile flies to help eradicate the pest, it's best for ranchers

to stay watchful for NWS and report any potential infection to their veterinarian or other local animal health experts."

See more about New World Screwworm. Talk to your veterinarian, local Extension livestock specialist or Nationwide Farm Certified agent to learn more about how you can help keep NWS away from your herd and take the right action if it does infect your animals.

Visit AgInsightCenter.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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Autumn rains hasten persimmon harvest

California's persimmon harvest accelerated last month as crews worked to pick fruit ahead of mid-November rainstorms. Persimmons withstand rain better than some fruits, but after multiple storms, "the fruit gets riper and breaks down faster," Yuba County farmer Steven Springer said. The Golden State grows most of the nation's persimmons, though at roughly 3,000 bearing acres in California, the crop's footprint is smaller than other relatively niche fruits such as pomegranates and kiwifruits. Production is concentrated in the San Joaquin Valley, with some acreage in the Sacramento Valley and in central and southern coastal areas. In 2022, California's persimmon crop was valued at \$35 million. "It's a growing commodity," said Dillon Lual-len, sales representative at Sierra Sun Fruit Marketing in Fresno County. "It's relatively easy to farm, and it seems like consumption of persimmons has been going up year after year."

New Clean Water Act rule provides clarity for farms

A new rule by the Trump administration is expected to narrow the scope of federal oversight on the nation's wetlands and other waterways. The proposed rule clarifies what "waters of the United States" means and carries out directives from a 2023 U.S. Supreme Court ruling about how the Clean Water Act applies to working farmland. It aims to ensure that only relatively permanent, standing or continuously flowing bodies of water—such as streams, oceans, rivers and lakes—and wetlands that are connected to and indistinguishable from such water bodies are federally regulated. Farm advocates say the rule could save farmers time and money by reducing permitting requirements for activities on their land. "The Supreme Court clearly ruled several years ago that the government overreached in its interpretation of what fell under federal guidelines," American Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall said, adding that the new rule "protects critical water sources while respecting the efforts of farmers to protect the natural resources they've been entrusted with."

Specialty crop growers face more risks and fewer tools

For specialty crop farmers, 2025 has offered little relief from mounting financial pressures. Markets that once promised stable margins are now defined by volatility, with production expenses outpacing price gains and exports at risk under global trade uncertainties. Despite contributing more than \$75 billion in farm-gate value—over a third of all U.S. crop sales—growers of specialty crops such as fruits, nuts and vegetables have fewer risk-management and safety-net options to help weather these challenges. The result is a widening gap between cost and revenue that threatens profitability across much of the farm economy. The diversity that defines the sector also amplifies its vulnerability.

Each crop relies on distinct production systems, marketing channels and labor demands, making it difficult to design one-size-fits-all safety nets or risk-management tools.

On the record: Rhodesia Ransom talks serving the Central Valley

California Assemblymember Rhodesia Ransom, D-Tracy, spoke with Ag Alert® about representing Central Valley constituents in Sacramento, engaging with farmers in her district and her observations following her first year in the Assembly.

"Some industries are really hurting. Cherries had a bad year. Folks aren't purchasing winegrapes as much as they were. Farmers and the agricultural industry are facing very real challenges," said Ransom, whose district encompasses much of San Joaquin County and part of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. She is among a handful of state lawmakers who reincarnated an unofficial Central Valley Caucus. "It's a bipartisan group of legislators who decided we are going to work together regardless of our political differences to make sure the Central Valley and the ag and rural communities have a voice," Ransom said. "That way, we have a little bit more power than we would have individually."



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State's olive oil production still has room for growth

California's production of olives for oil has expanded in recent years, and experts expect the sector will continue to grow. The state produces about 2 million to 4 million gallons of olive oil annually, or about 5% to 8% of domestic consumption, meaning there is room in the market for additional production. The crop also has advantages for farmers in the Golden State. It is drought tolerant, requiring less water than other tree crops, and it does not bring high labor costs, as the fruit is harvested by machine. "This industry is in its infancy for California and the U.S., so we're still seeing where we're going with it, but I do

feel there's potential," said Aaron Barcellos, who grows olives in Fresno County. Barcellos said he planted blocks of olive trees several years ago because of the crop's profitability and its ability to withstand reduced irrigation.

Strong demand for all meat lifts lamb prices higher

Increasing demand for lamb, possibly driven in part by consumers seeking alternatives to beef amid record-high prices, has led to higher earnings this fall for lamb producers. The national lamb-slaughter value—or the price that producers receive for a lamb before processing—topped \$2.25 per pound in the third quarter compared to about \$1.70 in the first half of 2025. "When beef becomes expensive, some consumers switch to lamb, boosting its demand and, in turn, its price," said Megan Wortman, executive director of the Colorado-based American Lamb Board. "However, lamb

Purple sweet potato varieties gain interest, acreage

Most sweet potatoes are yellow or orange, but purple varieties are gaining in popularity. Five years ago, a few growers were dabbling in the purple root vegetable. Now about 1,000 acres are being grown in the Golden State, according to Scott Stoddard, University of California Cooperative Extension farm adviser in Merced County. California produces about 25% of U.S.-grown sweet potatoes, with most of them grown in Merced, Stanislaus and Kern counties. During the past five years, California plantings shrank from more than 21,000 acres to about 18,000 acres as sweet potato sales slumped, prices stagnated and production costs climbed for the labor-intensive crop.

There is hope that improved varieties could turn the sector around.

Kaweah Subbasin taken off groundwater probation list

The Kaweah Subbasin was formally taken off the list of California groundwater basins slated for state intervention following a unanimous vote Dec. 2 by the California State Water Resources Control Board. Farmers and communities in the subbasin, which lies primarily in Tulare County, faced the possibility of state regulators imposing measures to curtail groundwater pumping in the region. But recent efforts by local farmers and water managers to work toward groundwater sustainability—detailed earlier this year in Ag Alert®—convinced the water board to leave the Kaweah Subbasin under local control. "Kaweah's groundwater agencies embraced transparent collaboration with the board, their communities, groundwater pumpers and each other to work out a path to planned sustainability," board chair E. Joaquin Esquivel said in a press release. "This approach made all the difference for their subbasin in this process."



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