

The Stanislaus Farm News

The *voice* of Stanislaus County Agriculture

STANISLAUS COUNTY



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**Official Publication of Stanislaus County Farm Bureau
Vol.77 No.2 February 6, 2026**

Ca Farm Bureau Photo Contests Winners, pages 3, 11, 12 & 18

California Agriculture Takes Center Stage at the American Farm Bureau Convention, page 19

Published Fridays by the
Stanislaus County Farm Bureau

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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, CA 95354. Stanislaus County Farm Bureau does not assume responsibility for statements by advertisers or for products advertised in the Stanislaus Farm News. Farm Bureau does not assume responsibility for statements or expressions of opinion other than in editorials or in articles showing authorship by an officer of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau.

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Stanislaus County Farm Bureau Foundation

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AND WINS IN 2025**



A Little History:

We recognized the need to expand agricultural education in our community, so we organized our efforts into three pillars: Youth Education, Consumer Education, and Grower Education. Our staff is dedicated to sharing their passion for agriculture through innovative programs that highlight the importance of agriculture in Stanislaus County.

What is our vision?

Our Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, committed to ensuring that everyone in the community values, understands and appreciates agriculture.



What have we been up to this past year?



In the Works:

- Planning Summer 2026 Library Ag Literacy Program
 - Bringing agriculture to ALL libraries in the county
- Expanding AgAdventure COUNTYWIDE!
 - Teaching 7,500 3rd graders about agriculture
- Building a volunteer database
 - Allowing us to reach more people through community involvement



Accomplishments:

- ✓ Established Board Mission, Vision and Values
- ✓ Hosted the first annual Foundation Fundraiser
- ✓ Participated in LEAF planning, expanding Ag Internships
- ✓ Unveiled Agricultural Mural at Vintage Faire Mall
- ✓ Increased MJC student scholarship awards
- ✓ Hosted AgAdventure Day for 1,300 students



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.



First Place - Joelle Naphan, Butte County Farm Bureau

Joelle Naphan has been surrounded by agriculture her whole life, raising commercial steers and quarter horses on her family's ranch. Her roots grew into a passion for photography.

Eager to capture Western-inspired images, Naphan came up with the idea for a silhouette photo. As the sun set over the ranch, her brother practiced with his lasso while Naphan framed the shot, capturing the moment against the colorful sky.

"Agriculture is an art that has been refined by multiple generations, just as this particular loop my brother was throwing has been refined by hours of practice," she said.



Second Place - Michelle Foster, San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau

Harvest season always draws Michelle Foster back to the vineyards, where she joins her husband with her camera at the ready. "It's a reminder that there are real hands and hard work behind the grapes that eventually end up in your glass of wine," she said. With a background in the wine industry, Foster loves capturing its spirit through her photos. "It represents the generations of care and dedication that go into every vine," she said.



Third Place - Sean Long, Nevada County Farm Bureau

Sean Long, who raises horses, goats, sheep and chickens, relies on his dog Rosie, an Australian heeler, to keep the family ranch safe at night from predators. But she also makes a great photo subject. He said he was wandering his yard with a camera in early March when he saw his photo opportunity. "I was looking for some birds to take photos of when I spotted Rosie in the distance," he said. "I got pretty lucky when she paused for a second. She usually comes running when she sees me trying to take her picture."

Food and Farm News

Farms find success in vertical integration

Trends in the food supply chain and changes in consumer behavior could incentivize farmers to vertically integrate their businesses, according to experts. For decades, farmers selling raw commodities have seen a declining share of the money consumers spend on food. Since 1950, that figure declined from around 40 cents of every food dollar to around 9 cents, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, with the value of farm products increasingly captured by processors, retailers and food service. “Everyone essentially puts their hand in the cookie jar,” said Kristin Kiesel, an agricultural and resource economics professor at the University of California, Davis, who added that consolidation in the processing and retail sectors in recent years has further disadvantaged farmers. “The increased concentration further downstream is an incentive for farms to vertically integrate—to capture some of that added value,” Kiesel said.

Spread of invasive mussels threatens irrigation systems

Since the non-native golden mussel was first discovered in October 2024 in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the potentially pipe-clogging mollusk has spread as far south as Riverside County. Invasive pest management experts acknowledge eradication is likely impossible. They say the goal now should be to protect noninfested water bodies from mussel introductions. But it won't be easy. “Preventing spread to areas that receive delta water via the California Aqueduct is a large challenge,” said Tanya Veldhuizen, program lead for the State Water Project Aquatic Nuisance Species Program. “Currently available technology to prevent the transfer of mussels is very limited and applicable to only very small volumes of water.” Already, the golden mussel has disrupted maintenance activities at the Port of Stockton and a handful of water providers, and its impact is only expected to grow.

Del Monte cannery closure devastates California fruit growers

California farmers who grow fruit for canned products suffered a major setback this month as Del Monte Foods announced plans to close its only remaining cannery in the state. The cannery's closure will reportedly affect roughly 600 employees and 1,200 seasonal workers in Modesto. The closure ends Del Monte's more than 100-year history as a processor of California-grown fruits and vegetables, potentially leaving scores of farmers without a buyer for their produce. “It's difficult,” said Ranjit Davit, who grows cling peaches in Sutter County and chairs the California Canning Peach Association's board of directors. “Growers are very upset about the situation.” In recent years, Del Monte contracted about 35% of California's cling peaches. Farmers who planted fruit orchards under long-term contracts with Del Monte said they were weighing their options and bracing for steep losses.

American Farm Bureau Federation adopts policies vital to California

California delegates to the American Farm Bureau Federation succeeded in advancing several changes to the organization's policy on water use and table wine. AFBF adopted all four of the policy changes that California Farm Bureau submitted through the delegate process during the 107th AFBF Annual Convention in Anaheim Jan. 9-14. The policies approved at the meeting will direct the nation's largest general farm

organization in its legislative and regulatory efforts in 2026. California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass, who is an AFBF voting delegate, praised the months of work by Farm Bureau members and staff to identify policy areas that needed discussion and change at the national level. “Our members' participation influences policy on key issues that affect their businesses and livelihood,” Douglass said.

Citrus growers assess risk of new virus

A new citrus disease that so far remains confined to residential trees has industry leaders taking what they describe as a measured approach because of the unknown risks it poses. Caused by the citrus yellow vein clearing virus, the disease was confirmed in residential citrus trees during multipest citrus surveys in Tulare County in 2022 and in residential trees in Hacienda Heights near Los Angeles in 2023. The discoveries marked the first time CYVCV had been confirmed in the Americas. “It's something that's still relatively new,” said



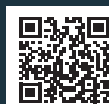
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Casey Creamer, president and CEO of California Citrus Mutual. “I think the way we try to approach things is to put the appropriate amount of concern around it based on the level of risk it poses.”

4-H'er turns a handful of chicks into a thriving business

When Nathan Hutchison was 9 years old, starting a business was the last thing on his mind. The young bird enthusiast just wanted to raise a few backyard chickens. But what began as a childhood hobby grew into Nate's Chicks—a thriving, solar-powered poultry operation in Madera County with more than 600 chickens and customers statewide. Now 19, Hutchison raises heritage turkeys for the Thanksgiving season and more than 50 breeds of chickens, sell-

ing day-old chicks, chicken and turkey meat and anywhere from 2,500 to 5,000 eggs a month. He also brokers chickens from other farms and leads workshops on food sustainability, raising poultry and hands-on processing.

Researchers make breakthroughs in preventing pistachio hull split

When pistachio hulls split open before harvest, the nuts can be exposed to fungal or insect damage, which reduces profits for farmers. About 4% of California's pistachio crop experiences hull split, but the figure can rise to as much as 40% for some cultivars in certain conditions. New research at the University of California, Davis, revealed how the hull is built and how cell walls in certain layers break down, along with the genes and corresponding

mechanisms that spark and control those changes. “This is the first time anyone has studied the pistachio hull at the anatomical and cellular level while also looking at gene expression and physiological data,” said Georgia Drakakaki, a professor at the UC Davis Department of Plant Sciences. The research will help breeders select for traits that will make the hulls less vulnerable to tearing and cracking.

Milk replacement heifers at lowest level in nearly 50 years

Record-high beef prices are impacting how dairy farmers manage their herds, leading many to breed more of their herd with beef genetics instead of breeding replacement heifers that will become milking cows. Those decisions, incentivized by short-term profits from the beef market, have caused the replacement heifer population to fall to its lowest point since 1978. Meanwhile, dairy farmers are culling fewer milking cows, causing milk output to reach its highest levels since 1993. “U.S. milk production is setting records, but those volumes are sending increasingly misleading signals about the health of the dairy sector,” American Farm Bureau Federation economist Daniel Munch said last month in a market report. He added that the trend has “inflated milk supply and dampened farm-level milk prices, worsening returns on the milk side of the business even as total farm revenue appears more resilient.”



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As another membership service, Farm Bureau members are offered FREE classified advertising in the Stanislaus Farm News. Ads must be 18 words or less and only one ad per month per membership (membership number required.) Ads may be MAILED to the Stanislaus Farm News, or BROUGHT to the SCFB office, 1201 L Street, Downtown Modesto. NO PHONE-IN OR FAX free ads will be accepted. Free ads are restricted to farm machinery or equipment or unprocessed farm products. Farm jobs wanted or offered will also be accepted. No real estate ads and no commercial items or services will be accepted. 209-522-7278

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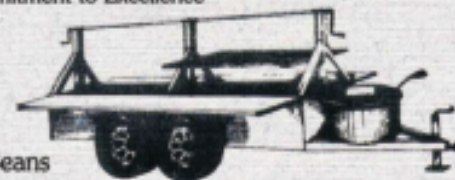
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Our upcoming Stanislaus County Farm Bureau Regional Meetings are a great opportunity to connect with fellow members, enjoy a meal together, and help shape the future of our organization.


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- ~ Elect your regional officers to serve on the County Board
- ~ Hear from engaging guest speakers
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**WESTSIDE
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MEETING**
Thursday, February 26, 2026
 6:00pm - Dinner with
 guest speaker to follow
Guest Speaker -
Chance Condit
Almond Wood
 2985 Renzo Ln
 Suite E,
 Patterson




**EASTSIDE
REGIONAL
MEETING**
Wednesday, February 18, 2026
 6:00pm - Dinner and
 Guest Speaker to follow
Guest Speaker - FSD Update
Fruit Yard
 7948 Yosemite
 Blvd, Modesto




**SOUTHERN
REGIONAL
MEETING**
Tuesday, February 24, 2026
 7:30AM Breakfast
Guest Speaker - Kai Kang
with San Joaquin Ar
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 Blvd, Turlock




**NORTHEAST
REGIONAL
MEETING**
Monday, February 23, 2026
 6:00pm - Dinner and
 speaker to follow
Guest Speaker - Steve Modlen
**Dying Breed
Brewing**
 963 Shepard Ct
 Suite B, Oakdale

SWRCB's Second Statewide Agricultural Expert Panel Continues to Meet on Nitrogen Requirements

The California State Water Resources Control Board's second statewide agricultural expert panel continues to meet to discuss nitrates leaching to groundwater from irrigated agriculture and possible statewide nitrogen-related regulatory limits on nitrogen application and nitrogen discharge. The panel's recommendations will be compiled into a draft report, which will soon be released for a 30-day public comment period. The expert panel will next meet on Feb. 11 and again on March 11. Farmers and ranchers are encouraged to attend and provide public comment on current on-farm nitrogen-related practices. More information can be found here.

Staff contact: Kari Fisher at kfisher@cbbf.com.

Final Consideration of Petition to List Southern California/Central Coast Mountain Lions

On Feb. 11-12, the California Fish and Game Commission will hold its final consideration of the petition to list the Southern California/Central Coast evolutionarily significant unit of mountain lion as a threatened or endangered species under the California Endangered Species Act. The commission is expected to take up the petition Feb. 12 in Sacramento. California Farm Bureau submitted a formal comment letter opposing the proposed listing and invited county Farm Bureaus to join on the letter. California Farm Bureau also has issued a FarmTeam Alert to allow members to send in their own comments against the listing. Members of the public may observe or participate in the meeting in person or via webinar/teleconference.

Staff contact: Abby Carlson, acarlson@cbbf.com.

State Sen. Grove Reintroduces Ag Overtime Tax Credit Bill

State Sen. Shannon Grove (R-Bakersfield) introduced Senate Bill 921 on Jan. 28, allowing agricultural employers to claim a credit against payroll tax remittances to offset the overtime premium portion ("the half" in time and a half). Grove was joined by state Sen. Melissa Hurtado (D-Fresno).

SB 921 is nearly identical to Grove's 2025 bill, Senate Bill 628, which failed to advance out of the Senate Labor, Public Employment, and Retirement Committee in April 2025. SB 921 is expected to be referred to the Senate Labor Committee, with potential hearing dates of March 25 or April 7.

Staff contact: Bryan Little, blittle@cbbf.com.

State Sen. Grove Introduces SB 899 Sponsored by CAFWA

State Sen. Shannon Grove (R-Bakersfield) introduced Senate Bill 899, which mandates that by July 1, 2028, the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force will create and update a strategy for implementing the goals of California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan to assess the health impacts and costs of severe wildfire smoke in collaboration with the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment and the California Department of Public Health. This assessment should include developing a model to estimate health benefits from achieving the action plan's goals and provide recommendations to enhance these benefits. Farm Bureau belongs to the California Forest Watershed Alliance with The Nature Conservancy, Rural County Representatives of California, Association of California Water Agencies and CalForests.

Staff contact: Peter Ansel, pansel@cbbf.com.

Spending Package in Flux, Shutdown Possible

The Senate voted down a spending package this week, putting the federal government at risk of a shutdown. Eight Republicans joined all Democrats in a 45-55 vote against the package, which included funding for the Department of Homeland Security. Following recent events in Minnesota, Democrats stated they would not support any package funding DHS without commitments from the Trump administration to reform certain tactics and measures used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The six-bill package would fund roughly three-quarters of the federal government. Some Republican opposition was tied to calls for deeper spending cuts elsewhere. As of this writing, a short-term shutdown over the weekend appears likely.

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

Reminder: National Wildlife Refuge System Stakeholders Survey

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking feedback through a National Wildlife Refuge System survey to improve refuge interactions and efficiency and better align goals with missions. Agricultural cooperators are encouraged to respond by Feb. 6. The survey is intended to help the service better understand stakeholder ideas on how the NWRS can improve interactions, efficiencies and consistency. The service is also looking at each refuge's original purpose compared to its current focus and goals as well as seeking to identify practical opportunities to better align resources, structures and processes to further the mission of the service. Members, especially those who are current agricultural cooperators on refuges, may have a particular interest in responding. The deadline for response is Feb. 6.

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



STANISLAUS COUNTY
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SCAN HERE

From Field to Kickoff: Where Super Bowl Foods Begin

Source: American Farm Bureau

Key Takeaways:

- Super Bowl abundance reflects the scale of U.S. agriculture. From chicken wings and cheese to chips, pizza and guacamole, farmers and ranchers from the 50 states and Puerto Rico supply the ingredients for one of the largest single-day food events of the year.
- Strong consumer demand does not guarantee strong farm margins. Across livestock, field crops and specialty crops, rising costs for labor, energy, inputs and financing have outpaced prices paid to farmers, leaving many producers facing tight or negative margins even as grocery shelves remain full.
- Super Bowl demand highlights how production constraints shape food sourcing. Exports help support farm prices for commodities like dairy, corn and wheat, while the spike in Super Bowl demand for foods like salsa and guacamole exposes the cost, seasonal, labor and regulatory pressures that limit U.S. tomato and avocado production and increase reliance on imports during peak consumption periods.

Americans will once again come together this Super Bowl Sunday, not just to cheer on their teams, but to enjoy classic game day foods. From buffalo wings and pizza to chips, queso, guacamole and salsa, farmers and ranchers across the country supply the ingredients that end up on millions of watch party tables.

For consumers, the Super Bowl represents the abundance of the U.S. food system. For farmers, it highlights the scale and coordination required to supply a single day of peak food demand, even as many farmers face rising costs, tight margins and growing uncertainty. Here's a closer look at where some Super Bowl favorites come from and the challenges facing the farmers behind them.

From the Farm to the Watch Party

Chicken Wings

Few foods are more strongly associated with the Super Bowl than chicken wings. Americans are expected to eat well over a billion wings during Super Bowl weekend, supplied by poultry farmers concentrated across the Southeast and parts of the Midwest. States including Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas and North Carolina consistently rank among the nation's top chicken-producing states. In 2024, farm-level poultry receipts totaled about \$45.4 billion, making poultry one of the most valuable segments of U.S. agriculture.

While demand for wings remains strong, poultry growers operate in a highly consolidated, contract based system. Most farmers do not own the birds they raise and receive a set payment for growing them, limiting their ability to benefit when wholesale or retail prices rise. At the same time, growers typically finance and own their own poultry houses, often investing \$1 million or more in specialized buildings and equipment, while also shouldering ongoing costs for energy, labor, biosecurity and disease management. Even on one of the biggest food consumption days of the year, strong consumer demand does not necessarily translate into stronger margins at the farm level.

Cheddar Cheese & Queso (Milk)

Cheese, from mozzarella for pizza to queso dip and cheddar slices, is a quiet workhorse of Super Bowl spreads. All of it starts with milk, produced by dairy farmers across the country, with California, Wisconsin, Idaho, Texas and New York leading the way.

U.S. milk production is currently at record levels, helping keep cheese plentiful and affordable for consumers. But those volumes can be misleading. Much of today's production reflects farmers keeping cows in the herd longer and breeding more cows for beef calves to help offset low milk prices, rather than expanding herds for milk production over the long term.

That dynamic has contributed to lower milk prices at the farm level, even as it has made U.S. dairy products highly competitive abroad and supported strong export volumes. For farmers, elevated feed additive, labor, fuel and interest costs mean lower prices translate directly into tighter margins, leaving many dairy operations under financial pressure even as cheese remains a Super Bowl staple. That pressure has reshaped the industry over time: as of 2024, the U.S. had roughly 24,800 dairy farms, down more than 60% from over 64,000 operations in 2005.

See 'SUPER' on page 13

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Honorable Mentions

(Left) Jacob Balakian, Tulare County Farm Bureau

(Bottom Left) Doug Phillips, Tulare County Farm Bureau

(Below) Brittany Lambert, Butte County Farm Bureau





People's Choice - Laura McGrath, Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau

At DePalma Orchards in Marysville, agriculture is a family affair for Laura and Tony McGrath, a third-generation farmer who grows prunes, peaches and almonds. The family also operates a commercial prune dehydrator. One morning, their 1-year-old granddaughter, Rylie Bird, was “helping Nonna” at the dehydrator when Laura McGrath decided to snap a few photos. Sitting in a bin of freshly harvested fruit, Rylie seemed right at home. “I feel the photo depicts how early the love of agriculture can be instilled in kids,” Laura McGrath said.



First Place - Lily Wirz, age 12, San Benito County Farm Bureau

On her family’s ranch in San Benito County’s Cienega Valley, Lily Wirz spends her days surrounded by winegrapes, cattle and walnuts. When her teacher wanted pet photos for a classroom game, she immediately thought of her rooster, Chick-a-Boom. “He was very gentle with people and his hens,” Lily said. Taken one morning in her backyard, the photo captures her fondness for the rooster and the rural life she’s grown up in as the fourth generation on her family’s ranch.



Second Place - Grady Rocca, age 12, Fresno County Farm Bureau

When Grady Rocca set out with his dad to take photos near their home in Easton, he didn’t have to look far for inspiration. Agriculture runs deep in his family. Both of his grandfathers were lifelong farmers, and his dad teaches agriculture at California State University, Fresno. Using the family’s Nikon camera, Grady captured a late-afternoon shot of Thompson Seedless grapes in a neighbor’s vineyard just before harvest. “There used to be a lot of raisin grapes in our area,” he said. “Raisins are still an important crop in California and a great snack.”

Corn

Corn tortilla chips and other corn-based snacks start with field (dent) corn — the most widely planted crop in the United States. Each year, farmers plant roughly 90 million acres of corn, with production concentrated in the Midwest, where states like Iowa, Illinois and Nebraska consistently rank among the top producers.

Corn's role on Super Bowl Sunday reflects just one part of a much larger picture. About 40% of U.S. corn is used for livestock feed, supporting meat, dairy and poultry production. Roughly 33% is used for ethanol that helps Americans get to their Super Bowl watch party. On average, about 18% of this year's U.S. corn production will be exported, connecting American corn farmers to global markets. The remaining corn is used for food and seed.

Only a small share of corn ends up directly on snack tables as corn flour for chips, but that versatility is exactly what makes corn such a cornerstone of U.S. agriculture. However, despite strong consumer demand for corn-based foods, fuels and exports, corn farmers are projected to lose an aver-

age of \$173 per acre in crop year 2026, as elevated production costs continue to outpace market prices. From 2023 to 2026, corn farmers are estimated to lose \$49.8 billion before the farm safety net takes effect. Even after receiving assistance, corn farmers are still expected to operate at a loss. From fueling vehicles to feeding livestock — and, on Super Bowl Sunday, filling chip bowls — corn farmers remain central to supplying both food and fuel markets, even as tight margins persist.

Wheat

Pizza crusts, crackers and other baked Super Bowl favorites all start with wheat — one of the most widely grown crops in the United States. Wheat is produced across much of the country, with North Dakota, Kansas and Montana among the top wheat-producing states, each specializing in different types suited for specific food uses. Wheat plays a uniquely global role in U.S. agriculture. The United States exports roughly 45% of its wheat production on average, making foreign demand a critical driver of farm prices. The remaining wheat is used domestically, mostly for food products like bread, pizza crusts, crackers and

pasta.

Hard red winter wheat — commonly grown in the central and southern Plains — is especially well suited for pizza dough due to its protein content and baking qualities. While wheat is a staple ingredient for many Super Bowl foods, producers continue to face financial pressure. Wheat farmers are projected to lose an average of \$136 per acre in crop year 2026, as market prices remain below elevated production costs. From 2023 to 2026, wheat farmers are estimated to lose \$20 billion before the farm safety net takes effect. Like other producers, even after assistance, wheat farmers are still expected to operate at a loss.

Potatoes

Potato chips, fries and baked potatoes are Super Bowl staples, supported by potato farmers concentrated in top states including Idaho, Washington, Wisconsin and North Dakota. Potatoes are among the most economically significant specialty crops in the United States, supplying nearly \$5 billion in fresh and processed markets tied closely to snack food demand.

Behind that demand, many potato growers face rising costs for labor, energy, storage and other inputs that have outpaced what the market is paying. While some potatoes are sold under contracts that offer more predictable prices, growers with uncontracted potatoes have been especially exposed to price swings. Recent estimates suggest full production costs average around \$12 per hundredweight, while market prices for uncontracted potatoes have often fallen short.

As a result, the potato sector is estimated to face roughly \$700 million in losses, about \$800 per acre, even as consumer demand for potato products remains strong. It's a clear example of how popular foods can fill Super Bowl tables while farmers struggle to cover rising costs.

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From 'SUPER' on page 13

Tomatoes

Tomatoes are a key ingredient in salsa, pizza sauce and condiments that show up on Super Bowl tables nationwide. U.S. tomato production is concentrated primarily in California and Florida, though imports, especially from Mexico, now account for about 70% of tomatoes consumed in the United States.

For domestic growers, strong consumer demand has not translated into strong farm margins. In Florida, for example, tomato producers face production costs near \$37,000 per hectare (roughly \$15,000 per acre) but earn only about \$33,400 in revenue, resulting in an implied loss of roughly \$3,600 per hectare (\$1,460 per acre). Labor alone accounts for 30%–40% of total production costs, and growers typically capture only about one-third of the retail tomato price. Rising labor expenses, regulatory compliance costs and competition from lower-cost imports continue to pressure U.S. producers, even as tomato-based foods remain a Super



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Bowl staple.

Avocados

Guacamole is a Super Bowl staple, driving one of the highest avocado consumption weeks of the year. While about \$537 million of avocados are grown on over 5,500 farms domestically, primarily in California, with smaller volumes in Florida, Puerto Rico and Hawaii, U.S. production supplies only about 8% of domestic demand.

Unlike annual crops, avocados are a long-term, capital-intensive investment that can take years to reach full production. Geographic limitations, rising land and labor costs, and exposure to weather and disease add risk for growers, while specialty crop producers often have fewer risk management tools to offset losses. These factors

make rapid domestic expansion difficult, even as demand continues to grow.

As a result, imports, largely from Mexico, help fill seasonal gaps and ensure consistent availability during high-demand periods like the Super Bowl. For U.S. growers, the challenge is not demand, but the structural and cost barriers that limit expansion at home.

Conclusion

Super Bowl Sunday offers a snapshot of the strength and reach of U.S. agriculture — a food system capable of delivering abundance, variety and affordability at an enormous scale. From wings and cheese to chips, salsa and guacamole, farmers and ranchers across the country supply the raw ingredients behind one of the biggest food

consumption days of the year.

But beneath that abundance is a more fragile reality. Across commodities, many farmers face rising labor, energy, input and financing costs that market prices do not keep pace with. Strong consumer demand and full grocery shelves do not automatically translate into financial stability at the farm level. In many cases, the opposite is true: popular foods mask tight margins and structural pressures across U.S. agriculture.

As fans gather around their TVs this Super Bowl Sunday, it's worth remembering that every bite reflects far more than what's on the plate. It reflects a highly coordinated agricultural system and the farmers and ranchers working every day to keep it running, even as economic pressures continue to mount well beyond game day.



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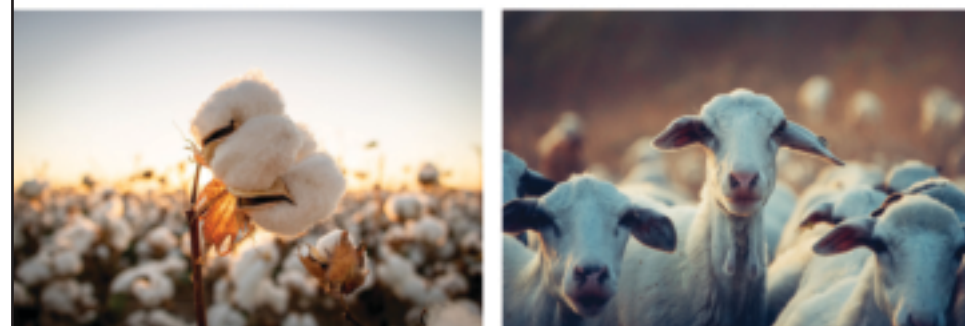


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Renewed! Lawmakers extended key provisions for the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, saving **farmers over \$5,000 per year in taxes.**

Approved! Proposition 4 funding for agriculture in the 2025–26 budget package totals **\$3.5 billion** representing more than one-third of the total allocations. Of this amount, **\$38 million** is allocated to the **State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program**, **\$91 million** to the **Forest Health Program**, and **\$30 million** to **groundwater management efforts.**

Success! Thanks to Farm Bureau's successful advocacy, the Tricolored Blackbird program secured nearly **\$5.4 million** in renewed funding through 2028—ensuring **\$4.1 million** in direct payments to landowners, including **\$1,133 per acre** for growers who delayed harvest to protect nesting birds.

Passed! The Farm Bill provisions in the reconciliation package included **\$2.8 billion** for disaster assistance, **\$1.6 billion** for agricultural research, and **\$333 million** for horticulture programs, extended the Farm Bill to prevent program expirations, and positions Farm Bureau to continue its advocacy for additional grower-focused policies and reforms.

Participation! Through legal proceedings and negotiations related to utility cost and water user fees, CAFB legal advocacy efforts saved members **\$2,047,032.**

Protecting! CAFB's action protected the Williamson Act by stopping legislation that would have risked turning over **5 million acres** of prime farmland, and eliminated up to **\$7 million** from land conservation programs funded by Williamson Act contract cancellations.

Wolf-Livestock Compensation Program

Through advocacy and partnership with California Cattlemen's Association, Farm Bureau helped **secure \$2 million in Wolf-Livestock Compensation Program** funding, ensuring support for wolf-related livestock losses.

Lowering Utility Rates

Farm Bureau's legal team participated in proceedings to ensure lower utility rates for agriculture ratepayers, resulting in savings ranging from **\$500 to \$1,100 per meter per year** on farms.

Safeguarding Pesticide Access

Farm Bureau, working with the state Legislature, ensured continued access to generic pesticides in California, providing direct **savings of \$18,666 per year per farm.**



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Assembly Committee on Insurance Hosts FAIR Plan Informational Hearing

On Jan. 28, the Assembly Committee on Insurance held an informational hearing. Executives from the California FAIR Plan, an insurer of last resort, testified that while the policy growth has slowed over the past year, the financial risk exposure of the FAIR Plan has ballooned to an unsustainable level of more than \$700 billion. FAIR Plan leaders stated that the FAIR Plan clearinghouses (the pathway back to the admitted market) does not work and suggested changes so that brokers are not tied to a policy from a contractual stance after a certain amount of time that a policy has been in the FAIR Plan.

Staff contact: Peter Ansel, pansel@cbbf.com.

EPA Blocks California Clean Truck Check for Out-of-State Trucks

On Jan. 27, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued a final decision denying California's heavy-duty inspection and maintenance regulation, or HD I/M, as it applies to vehicles registered out of state or out of the country.

The agency determined that California's Clean Truck Check program, which required all heavy-duty trucks entering the state to undergo periodic emissions testing and pay compliance fees, likely violated the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution by interfering with interstate trade. While EPA's ruling allows California to continue enforcing these requirements for in-state vehicles, it prevents the state from counting emissions reductions from out-of-state trucks toward federal air quality goals.

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

Predator Hearing in Sacramento

On Jan. 27, the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee held an informational hearing on human-predator conflict. During the hearing, Farm Bureau reiterated a joint request for \$31 million to fully fund the Wolf-Livestock Compensation Program, including the pay-for-presence component and additional research by the California Wolf Project at the University of California, Berkeley, and UC Cooperative Extension.

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

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Honorable Mentions

(Right) Robin Lynde, Solano County Farm Bureau

(Bottom Left) Lisa Branco, Monterey County Farm Bureau

(Bottom Right) Mackenzie Yerian, Stanislaus County Farm Bureau



California Agriculture Takes Center Stage at the American Farm Bureau Convention

Source: AgNet West

California agriculture took the national spotlight at the American Farm Bureau Federation Convention in Anaheim, where Ag Meter sat down with Shannon Douglas, President of the California Farm Bureau, for a wide-ranging and candid conversation. The interview highlighted both the scale of California agriculture and the growing list of challenges facing farmers and ranchers

across the state.

Douglas emphasized that many visitors were surprised to learn California agriculture is a \$62 billion annual industry. While the state is often associated with beaches and entertainment, convention tours and discussions revealed how deeply agriculture drives California's economy. For many attendees, it was their first opportunity to see the size and diversity of specialty crop production firsthand.

Regulations, Resilience, and National Concerns

Throughout the interview, Douglas addressed the perception that California is one of the most difficult places in the country to farm. Farmers from other states frequently express concern that California's regulatory policies could spread nationwide. While acknowledging those concerns, Douglas stressed that California farmers are exceptionally resilient—adapting, innovating, and surviving under conditions few others face.

That resilience is increasingly tested by high production standards that raise costs, while imported products produced under lower standards compete in the same markets. Douglas described this imbalance as one of the most frustrating realities for California growers.

Federal Attention and

Specialty Crop Advocacy

Douglas welcomed the strong federal presence at the convention, including USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins and leadership from both the House and Senate Agriculture Committees. She said hearing direct recognition of California crops—especially specialty crops—was encouraging for producers who often feel overlooked.

During a specialty crops session Douglas moderated, USDA, RMA, and NRCS officials discussed practical improvements to insurance and conservation programs. She noted a strong interest in targeted rule fixes that could make federal programs more workable for specialty crop farmers.

Predators, Water, and Technology Barriers

Predator pressure remains a growing concern, particularly as wolf activity increases across parts of California. Douglas cited recent incidents involving livestock and horses near homes, underscoring the disconnect between public perception and on-the-ground agricultural realities.

Water challenges also remain unresolved. Despite multiple wet years and reports that California may be out of drought, Douglas stressed that long-term water reliability for farmers is still uncertain. She pointed to renewed interest in storage projects like Sites Reservoir and a rare window of opportunity with federal engagement.

Douglas also criticized regulations that prevent California farmers from using autonomous farm equipment already legal in most other states, warning that the state risks falling behind technologically.

Why the Full Interview Matters

This interview dives deeper into labor reform, market fairness, water storage, predator management, and how farmers can engage directly with the California Farm Bureau. Hearing these issues discussed in real time provides critical context for anyone invested in California agriculture.

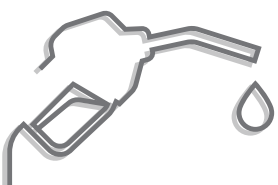


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New legislation aims to boost farmworker pay and support agricultural employers

Source: California Farm Bureau

State Sen. Shannon Grove, R-Bakersfield, and state Sen. Melissa Hurtado, D-Bakersfield, have introduced legislation to create a tax credit for agricultural employers to help cover the cost of paying overtime wages to farmworkers.

Senate Bill 921, co-sponsored by the California Farm Bureau and the California Association of Winegrape Growers, aims to ensure farmworkers have more opportunities to earn overtime pay while also providing relief to struggling agricultural businesses.

"I'm proud to introduce SB 921, a straightforward bill that gives California's farm employers a payroll tax credit to help cover the extra cost of overtime pay for our hard-working farmworkers," Grove said. "This means more overtime hours and better take-home pay for the folks who put food on America's tables. This is a win-win solution for both the business and our farmworkers who want to work more hours during their peak season. A huge thank-you to my friends at the California Farm Bureau and the California Association of Winegrape Growers for partnering with me on this common-sense solution."

Hurtado added, "Behind every meal is a story of love, sacrifice and hard work in the fields. SB 921 honors the sweat and sacrifice behind our food with a modern, fair approach to wages — because in agriculture, farms, workers and families rise or fall together."

The bill addresses concerns farmworkers themselves raised with lawmakers in Sacramento last year in support of SB 628, a similar agricultural overtime tax credit that Grove introduced.

SB 921 would:

- Establish a payroll tax credit to offset the cost to employers of paying overtime wages to their agricultural employees. "Overtime wages" are defined as the difference between an employees' overtime rate of pay and their regular rate of pay.
- Increase overtime hours for farmworkers, boosting their take-home pay and providing much-needed financial stability in rural communities.

Farmworkers have experienced reduced work hours and earnings since the Phase-In Overtime for Agricultural Workers Act of 2016 became law, according to research by Dr. Alexandra Hill, an assistant professor of cooperative extension at the University of California, Berkeley, who researches agricultural economics and farmworker well-being. Beginning in 2019, the law phased in a requirement that farmworkers be paid time and a half when they work more than 40 hours a week. Previously, farmworkers worked up to 60 hours a week before they were entitled to overtime pay. According to national surveys Hill analyzed, California farmworkers reported working between 4.2 and 4.7 fewer hours per week in 2022 than in 2012. The National Agricultural Workers Survey found that farmworkers reported reduced average weekly earnings of \$120 per week during that timeframe, while the American Community Survey found farmworkers' annual earnings declined by \$2,800 from 2012 to 2023.

Shannon Douglass, president of the California Farm Bureau, said, "Farmers warned the Legislature a decade ago that changes to the agricultural overtime law would reduce work hours and cost farmworkers wages, and those concerns have proven true. Many farmworker families have seen hours and earnings decline, a reality farmworkers themselves shared with lawmakers in Sacramento last year in support of Senator Grove's ag overtime tax credit bill. Meanwhile, family farms operating on thin margins have been forced to make hard choices just to avoid operating at a

loss. This tax credit is a practical solution that puts money directly into the hands of farmworkers, helps farms remain viable employers and strengthens the rural communities that grow our food. It's an investment in California's food security and the people who make it possible."

Natalie Collins, president of the California Association of Winegrape Growers, said, "California lawmakers need to come together in a bipartisan manner, just as leaders have done in Oregon, Massachusetts and New York, to ensure farmworkers can earn overtime pay while keeping farms viable. Last year, California found \$420 million to expand a tax credit for the entertainment industry. California invests in what it values, and agriculture is asking to be valued. CAWG thanks Senators Grove and Hurtado for their leadership on this important issue."

SB 921 is modeled on California's Film and

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Television Tax Credit Program, which increased by \$420 million annually in 2025. In the most recent allocation, 52 film projects were selected, which will employ an estimated 8,900 cast and crew and 46,400 background performers statewide. By comparison, a tax credit for agricultural overtime could improve earnings for roughly 415,000 California farmworkers.

Other states have taken bipartisan action to address unintended consequences of agricultural overtime laws:

- Oregon offers a refundable personal or corporate income tax credit for employers based on overtime wages paid to agricultural workers through 2028.
- New York offers a similar tax credit through 2032 that is based on the eligible overtime agricultural businesses pay.
- In Massachusetts, Adam Gómez,

D-Springfield, is pursuing a tax credit to reimburse farmers for the cost of overtime wages.

As other states act to address the real-world impacts of agricultural overtime laws, California faces a clear choice: Update its policy or risk continued unintended consequences. SB 921 offers a path forward that increases farmworker earnings, supports agricultural employers and helps ensure policies intended to benefit farmworkers do not inadvertently reduce their wages.

The California Farm Bureau works to protect family farms and ranches as part of a nationwide network representing more than 5 mil-

lion Farm Bureau members. Learn more at www.cfbf.com or follow @cafarmbureau on Instagram, LinkedIn, X or Facebook.

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Serving as a Food and Farm News provided media connections with 200 updates across 50 weekly editions highlighting key developments in California agriculture.

Engaging Media

Farm Bureau elevated its position on priority issues by fielding 314 media inquiries, hosting press conferences and issuing 24 press releases to more than 1,000 media contacts, earning coverage from international, national and local outlets while strengthening relationships with reporters to ensure agriculture's voice remains part of the public conversation.

Growing Digital Engagement

Farm Bureau expanded its digital reach by sharing 3,536 social media posts with 87,451 followers that generated over 7.8 million impressions and 229,209 interactions, distributing 392 email updates to more than 3.6 million recipients, and drawing 637,699 visits across its websites.



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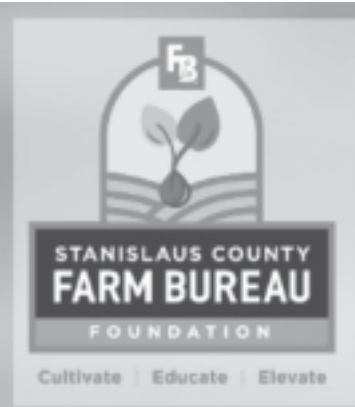
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Bringing Farmers' Stories to the Table

By: Zippy Duvall, American Farm Bureau President

One of the things I've learned over my years in Farm Bureau is that policy doesn't move forward on its own. It moves because people show up, build relationships, and take the time to share their stories. That's especially true for agriculture, where many decisions are made by folks who can't see firsthand the realities farmers and ranchers face every day.

That's why engagement matters. And it's why I've made it a priority to take your stories directly to leaders who are shaping the future of our country.

Engagement Begins with Real Conversations

Last week, I had the opportunity to sit down for a dinner meeting with Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. It was a candid conversation where I shared who we are as Farm Bureau, what farmers and ranchers care about and how deeply connected agriculture is to the health of our nation. Secretary Kennedy shared his interest in agriculture and his concerns around health. This meeting was a meaningful opportunity to share how seriously farmers take our responsibility to produce safe, healthy food, and why agriculture must be part of any conversation about the health of our nation. I've also had the opportunity to share that sentiment through similar conversations in the Oval Office with the President, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin and several other cabinet officials.

Conversations like that don't happen by accident. They happen because Farm Bureau has earned a reputation as a trusted voice. We are the national Voice of Agriculture, and leaders and lawmakers count on us to bring facts, experience and real-world per-

spective to the table. When we engage, we help ensure agriculture is part of the conversation from the start, not an afterthought once decisions are already made.

That same spirit of engagement was present during our time at the 107th American Farm Bureau Convention in Anaheim, California, where I met with Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins. With Secretary Rollins, I had the opportunity to share the challenges farmers are facing right now and the importance of USDA policies that provide real support for the farmers and ranchers producing America's food, fiber and renewable fuel supply.

I also had the opportunity to engage with the leaders of the Senate and House Agriculture Committees: Chairman John Boozman, Ranking Member Amy Klobuchar, Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson and Ranking Member Angie Craig. These are the men and women who will help shape the next farm bill and influence agriculture policy for years to come. This was the first time they were on stage together, and they came together for the AFBF Convention because they understand the power of our federation and our grassroots.

Every meeting and conversation, like each one of these, matters because relationships matter. When tough decisions come up, leaders remember who showed up, who listened and who spoke honestly about the challenges on the ground.

Grassroots Engagement Opens Doors

None of these opportunities exist without the credibility Farm Bureau has built over more than a century. Our influence is built on the steady, consistent engagement of grassroots leaders in every county and every state. I know that I have these opportunities and conversations because of our grassroots strength, and I carry the voices of our Farm Bureau family into every room.

When you share your story at a county meeting, invite a lawmaker to your farm or

speak up about how a policy affects your operation, you're doing more than advocating for yourself. You're reinforcing the reputation that opens doors for conversations like the ones I've had this year.

Those doors open because policymakers know Farm Bureau represents real farmers and ranchers, with real experience and real solutions.

Showing Up Makes the Difference

Engagement isn't always easy, and it doesn't always deliver instant results. But it's essential. If we want agriculture to be understood, respected and supported, we have to be willing to show up and speak up for our families, our farms and our communities. If this resonates with you, I encourage you to take the next step—get involved at the county level, invite a policymaker to your farm or learn more about how Farm Bureau members advocate for agriculture and their communities here.

I'm proud of the opportunities we've had already this year, and even more proud of the grassroots foundation that makes them possible. Together, we'll keep telling agriculture's story—clearly, honestly and with the strength that comes from generations of farmers and ranchers standing together.



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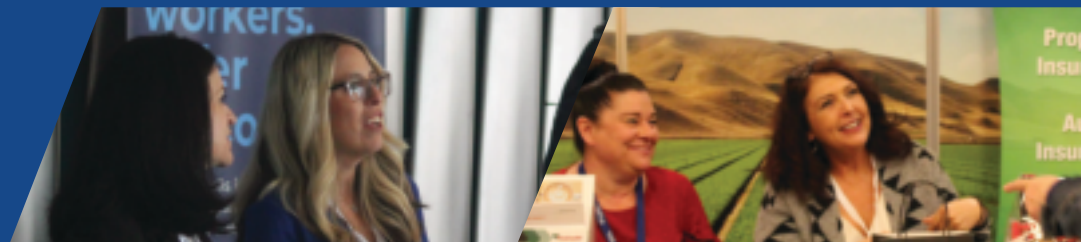
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