

The Stanislaus Farm News

The *voice* of Stanislaus County Agriculture

STANISLAUS COUNTY



For the good of your food.



**Official Publication of Stanislaus County Farm Bureau
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Abby, Roger and Deanna van Klaveren are proud of the podocarpus — a genus of fast-growing hardy evergreens — they grow in their shade houses.

Read their story on page 10

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**WE WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND
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**This program will honor farmworker nominees
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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 California Farm Bureau

Rep. Doug LaMalfa Dies

Rep. Doug LaMalfa died earlier this week. The Republican congressman had represented California's 1st District since first elected in 2012 and served in the state Senate and Assembly prior to that. California Farm Bureau issued a press release outlining his long-time support of the agricultural industry. As a fourth-generation farmer, LaMalfa was able to provide significant personal experience on issues supporting farmers, ranchers and rural communities across the country. A special election date has not yet been announced.

California DMV Ceases Issuing Nondomiciled CLPs/CDLs

There is significant confusion about the current state of commercial driver's licenses for non-domiciled persons in California and whether commercial driver's licenses are being canceled. The California Department of Motor Vehicles says the extension given is valid, and the U.S. Department of Transportation is arguing otherwise. On Sept. 26, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration issued a preliminary determination of noncompliance letter to DMV relating to the issuance of nondomiciled commercial learner's permits and commercial driver's licenses. In accordance with the direction provided by the FMCSA, the DMV has ceased issuing nondomiciled commercial learner's permits and commer-

cial driver's licenses. If your commercial learner's permits or commercial driver's license status changes, you will receive a letter and/or email advising of one of the following:

- Nondomiciled commercial learner's permits and pending nondomiciled commercial driver's license applications will be canceled.
- Nondomiciled commercial driver's licenses issued out of compliance with state law and federal regulations at the time of issuance will be canceled.
- Valid/unexpired nondomiciled commercial driver's licenses issued in compliance with state law and federal regulations at the time of issuance will remain valid until the expiration date.

See 'Advocacy' on page 24



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Congress passes bill allowing whole milk in schools

Whole milk may soon return to public school cafeterias thanks to a bipartisan bill that has passed both chambers of Congress and now requires only the president's signature to become law. Since 2012, schools have been restricted to offering fat-free or 1% fat milk. Should the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act be signed into law, schools would have the option to serve 2% fat and whole milk. California could see the largest impact from the change, as the Golden State produces more milk than any other state, and it also has the most school-aged children. Daniel Munch, economist at the American Farm Bureau Federation, said procurement of whole milk by public schools would likely boost prices for dairy

farmers by increasing demand for butterfat, a natural component in milk that determines much of the dairy product's value. "We are really excited to get this across the finish line," Munch said in a recent podcast episode. "This is something Farm Bureau has been pushing for since these changes were made to school lunch programs."

California to conduct wolf collaring efforts

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife plans to begin new efforts to collar and track gray wolves in the state. CDFW's capture teams will target uncollared packs or groups of wolves in Modoc, Shasta and Plumas counties, the department announced last week. CDFW captures wolves by helicopter before placing collars on the animals and returning them to the nearest suitable habitat. The collars enable the state to track the wolves for up to three years. "CDFW will share animal location information with cattle and sheep producers with the goal of reducing negative interactions," the department said in a statement, adding that the GPS tracking collars do not transmit real-time data but provide locations daily to CDFW scientists. In October, CDFW euthanized four wolves in the Beyem Seyo pack in the Sierra Valley after months of failed attempts to address "an unprecedented level" of livestock kills by wolves in the region.

December storms boost California water supplies

After a dry start to December, a series

of recent storms brought rain and snow to much of California, deepening the snowpack in the Sierra Nevada and bolstering water supplies for the state. As of last week, the statewide snowpack had risen to 71% of average, according to an announcement by the California Department of Water Resources. "The dry conditions and warmer temperatures in early December delayed our snow-building season, but the return of storm activity, especially in the last week, helped to build a solid base for this year's snowpack," said Angelique Fabbiani-Leon, hydrometeorologist for DWR. "Thankfully, the recent storms that reached the state were cold enough to provide necessary benefits for the snowpack and our water supply. While California is in a better position now, it is still early in the season and our state's water supply for this year will ultimately depend on a continued cadence of storms throughout winter and early spring."

Winter riceland flooding provides crucial bird habitat

New research by the U.S. Geological Survey found that Central Valley rice farmers who flooded their fields after harvest provided winter habitat for more than 50 different species of waterbirds from 2021 through 2023. The research, which evaluated fields enrolled in the California Winter Rice Habitat Incentive Program, also identified ways the program could maximize its habitat benefits for birds. USGS biologists found that water depth consistently determined which bird species were attracted to which rice fields, with shallow depths seeing a greater abundance of shorebirds, wading birds and geese, and deeper water seeing more dabbling ducks. The researchers also found that fields saw the highest density of birds about eight days after the onset of postharvest flooding. "Prioritizing rice fields that could be flooded early in the enrollment period, when fewer alternative flooded habitats are available in the Central Valley, could increase bird use of rice fields enrolled in the California Winter Rice Habitat Incentive Program," the researchers said.

See 'Updates' on page 21



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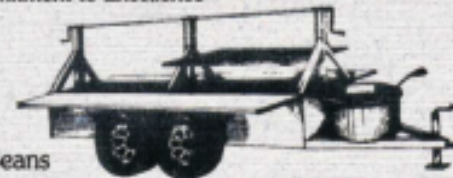
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 6:00pm - Dinner with guest speaker to follow
Guest Speaker - Chance Condit
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EASTSIDE REGIONAL MEETING
Wednesday, February 18, 2026
 6:00pm - Dinner and Guest Speaker to follow
Guest Speaker - FSD Update
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SOUTHERN REGIONAL MEETING
Tuesday, February 24, 2026
 7:30AM Breakfast
*Guest Speaker - Kai Kang with San Joaquin A**
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SCAN HERE

Growing Community Roots ~ How Nurseries in Modesto and Stanislaus County Thrive Through Digital Marketing

Written by Kathryn Kim Ramos, Sisbro Innovation Website and Digital Marketing Consultant

In Modesto and across Stanislaus County, nurseries do far more than sell plants, they help shape the look, food supply, and environmental health of the Central Valley. From backyard gardeners planting fruit trees to landscapers sourcing drought-tolerant options, local horticulture businesses keep our communities growing, literally. And as consumer behavior shifts online, digital marketing has become one of the most important tools helping these nurseries stay visible, competitive, and connected to the people they serve.

A standout example is the MJC Nursery in Modesto, a retail nursery operated through Modesto Junior College's agriculture and environmental horticulture programs. It's a living classroom where students learn real-world nursery operations, and the public benefits from access to affordable plants and seasonal sales, while supporting the next generation of agriculture and green-industry talent.

Stanislaus County's nursery community also includes businesses engaged with agriculture at a deeper level, many of whom support local advocacy and education by being members of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau. Farm Bureau business member lists include horticulture and nursery-related organizations such as Blumen Flower Farm (Modesto) and Zaiger's Genetics (Modesto), along with other county nursery partners like Duarte Nursery (Hughson).

These operations serve the community in practical ways ev-

ery day:

- Supplying bedding plants, trees, and shrubs that beautify neighborhoods and expand home food gardens.
- Supporting growers and landscapers with dependable local inventory.
- Contributing to local jobs and seasonal employment.
- Strengthening agricultural identity in Stanislaus County through partnerships, education, and events.

Where digital marketing makes the biggest difference is in helping nurseries translate that real-world value into online visibility. When someone searches "best nursery in Modesto," "fruit trees Central Valley," or "native plants Stanislaus County," the businesses that show up, and look trustworthy, win the click and the customer.

For nurseries, smart digital marketing often means:

- Google Business Profile optimization (photos, product highlights, Q&A, reviews, and consistent hours).
- Local SEO content like short blog posts or landing pages for seasonal needs (spring planting, drought-tolerant landscaping, pollinator gardens).
- Social media that showcases new arrivals, weekly availability, how-to tips, and behind-the-scenes greenhouse life.
- Email/text updates for plant drops and weekend sales (simple, effective, and inexpensive).
- Reputation-building through review requests and fast, friendly responses.

In a community as agriculture-rooted as Stanislaus County, nurseries thrive when local families can find them quickly, trust them instantly, and visit them confidently. Digital marketing helps make that connection, so the Central Valley can keep growing, one search (and one plant) at a time.

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Rooted in Growth: Six Generations of Nursery Leadership at Generation Growers

Story & Photos by Vicky Boyd

Deanna van Klaveren likes to joke that they have chlorophyll in their veins. Together with husband Roger, they co-own and operate Generation Growers wholesale plant nursery just west of Modesto.

Daughter Abby joined them slightly more than a year ago after she graduated from Oregon State University's horticulture program, marking the sixth generation of van Klaveren nursery producers. This year they will celebrate 70 years in the Northern California nursery business, with 50 of those in Modesto.

Throughout their tenure, the van Klaverens have valued education as well as remaining active in and supporting the nursery industry and agriculture as a whole.

ROOTED IN THE NURSERY BUSINESS

Roger and Deanna met in a horticulture class while attending Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. Originally a chemistry major, Deanna said a horticulture class opened her eyes, and she fell in love with plants. Roger, fresh out of the Army, came from a long line of nursery producers with roots in the Netherlands.

After graduation, Roger joined his father, Abe, in the Modesto nursery business in 1992, and Deanna joined them in 1997.

Growing up in the nursery, Abby said there was never any question that she wouldn't remain in the industry. Starting as a 4-year-old, Deanna said, Abby could differentiate between thrips and aphids, and not long afterward she began propagating her own plants.

Abby put those skills to use in 2020, when she won the national FFA Agricultural Proficiency Award in the nursery operations category at the annual convention.

A FOCUS ON NICHE VARIETIES

As a smaller, family owned operation, Generation Growers isn't out to compete with the big box stores. Instead, they sell containerized shrubs, bushes, trees and other plants wholesale to independent retail garden centers from the Bay Area to Modesto, many of which they've done business with for decades.

The van Klaverens also seek out plant niches that other nurseries may not be in and then produce the best possible shrubs,

bushes and trees.

For example, they grow 31 different citrus varieties in a 3-acre screen house. The protection is required under state and federal quarantine to exclude Asian citrus psyllid, which spread the lethal citrus disease Huanglongbing or citrus greening.

Among their more unique citrus cultivars are giant Dekopon mandarins, sweet merlot or Maltese blood oranges, Australian finger limes, Buddha's hand citron and New Zealand lemonade lemons.



Abby van Klaveren stands among potted ferns that Generation Growers has picked up as some nurseries closed their doors.

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Under Abby's oversight, the operation also is trying to build its selection of rhododendrons which include azaleas and camellias. The van Klaveren family has historically grown rhododendrons, and Deanna said rekindling the varieties is sentimental.

Though still in its infancy, Generation Growers has begun a new drought-tolerant California native plant program that features particularly hard-to-find varieties. Because of the time needed to propagate and grow the plants, Abby said it will take about two years before customers begin to see product.

CONTINUED INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT

From their beginning, Roger and Deanna believed it was important to stay involved in the industry.

Deanna is a California Ag Leadership Program Class 32 graduate; was involved with the Ag Leadership foundation, program and Alumni Council; was an Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers board member; and was a California community colleges horticulture advisor, to name a few.

"I gained so much from that program that any opportunity I have to stay connected and give back, I want to do that," she said about Ag Leadership.

Last year, Deanna joined the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau Foundation Board of Directors and was on the ground floor when the Farm Bureau created the new nonprofit.

"We were willing to roll up our sleeves and figure out how to put together this foundation," she said. "It's been really fun to see what we can do in Stanislaus County to

support ag outreach and education through the foundation."

EDUCATING CUSTOMERS

As a former Tracy high school ag teacher and FFA advisor, Deanna said education is near and dear to their hearts. Throughout dealings with their garden center customers, they try to educate them about the plants they produce, plant care and potential other uses. This way, garden center employees can pass the knowledge onto homeowners.

The citrus tasting is one example. Each year, the van Klaverens put on about a dozen two-hour educational sessions at their customers' garden centers. Depending on the location, the tasting may attract 100 to 150 people each.

Not only does the session talk about citrus care, but Deanna said they've added a foodie element.

"The citrus tasting becomes more than just meeting with the grower — they get to learn all about the fruit," she said. "We bring in fruit, goodies and recipe hand outs."

Generation Growers also has produced brochures describing the 31 citrus varieties they grow as well as the reasons behind their citrus greenhouse.

INDUSTRY SHIFTS

During their tenure in the industry, Deanna and Roger have witnessed significant changes, such as consolidation and shifts in consumer purchasing habits. When people were housebound during the COVID pandemic, gardening took off and homeowners frequently redid their yards. As a result, Roger said business thrived.

As activities slowly reopened after

See 'GEN' on page 12



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From 'GEN' on page 11

COVID, he said homeowners left their yards to travel, putting a damper on nursery sales. Rather than re-landscaping entire yards, Roger said they're seeing many homeowners instead replanting only a small portion or creating a small Instagram-worthy English tea garden.

Patio gardens also are gaining popularity for both apartment dwellers as well as homeowners who don't want to tend large plots. In addition, Abby said they're seeing increased interest in multi-functional plants, like curry leaf, a small aromatic evergreen known for its aromatic lemongrass-like flavors as well as medicinal qualities.

The drought-tolerant California native program is in response to homeowners removing lawns and moving toward less water-intensive — but still attractive — landscaping.

"Hopefully as long as (gardening) continues to stay the No. 1 hobby, we'll continue to grow the plants for it," Deanna said.

TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION

Asked about one of the biggest challenges she sees, Abby said it was "people."

"There's not enough people who are coming into (the nursery business), but there's also not the transfer of knowledge happening from the older generation to the new one."

Deanna agreed and said they've noticed growing knowledge gaps as the older generation retires or passes away but the next generation doesn't yet have the experience or background needed by the industry.

To that end, the van Klaverens are big supporters of horticultural education at both the junior college and university levels.

"We want the students to have the opportunities to learn about the industry and we want the industry as a whole to flourish," Deanna said. "(Internships) give them exposure to what the industry looks like and what opportunities look like."

Generation Growers participates in an internship program with Modesto Junior College that involves two horticulture students per semester. Some of their current em-

ployees, like plant specialist Andy Wallen, were MJC interns.

Generation Growers also is working with Abby's alma mater, Oregon State University, to secure an intern position this summer. The university requires an internship as part of graduation requirements, but opportunities are limited because there are only a handful of nearby nurseries.

Deanna said their nursery has on-site housing, and working in a different geographic region may expand the intern's learning and experiences.

With the seeds planted to help train the next generation of nursery professionals, Abby said she's optimistic about the future. "I'd like to see us celebrate our 100th year, because that's only 30 years away," she said.



As part of their citrus offerings, Deanna and Roger van Klaveren produce lemons in 5-, 10- and 25-gallon containers.







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partnerships, as well as equipping growers with practical tools and resources.”

Signs of Rebound

That forward-thinking vision comes at a pivotal time in the industry, as the market begins to show signs of recovery amid ongoing economic pressures. According to UC Davis’s Dr. Brittany Goodrich, in the last five years, operating costs have increased between 27 and 40%, who discussed these findings in detail earlier this year on the The Almond Journey podcast.

Encouragingly, the supply and demand balance within the California almond industry is returning to a point of equilibrium, prompting a market rebound. Total almond acreage has decreased for the fourth consecutive year, along with new plantings. Even with a reduced supply, the industry recorded its third-largest shipping year, signifying a healthy market.

“Average grower returns have improved from the \$1.60s in the 2023 crop (average all varieties), to the \$2.30s per pound in the 2024 crop (average all varieties),” said Bob Silveira, chair of the Board of Directors. “That’s roughly a 40% increase.”

While this improvement indicates good progress, it underscores the importance of having accurate data to back market fluctuations.

In July, market frustrations came to a head when the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Objective Measurement Report was released. Although this year’s crop size has yet to be fully determined, industry members are reporting that the measurement is off by a sizeable margin this season and improving the estimate is also not feasible, Silveira explained.

“With the size of the industry, getting a truly representative sample was just impractical, not to mention cost ineffective,” he said.

After much deliberation and discussion with several stakeholders, on December 9, the decision was made by the Board of Directors who voted to cease funding for the Objective Measurement. The Subjective Forecast, however, will continue to be produced and released in May.

2025 State of the Almond Industry: A Year of Resilience

Source Almond Board of California

After years of challenges, the California almond industry is finally catching its breath. At this year’s 53rd Annual Almond Conference, the mood amongst growers, handlers, industry partners, and allied supporters felt cautiously optimistic that a market rebound is on its way.

The conference theme, “Cultivating a Healthier Future,” was a reminder that with innovation, stewardship, and expanded global demand, there is a promising outlook ahead. The conference also provided a moment to reflect on the past, as this year marked the 75th Anniversary of the Almond Board of California (ABC).

“Over the last 75 years, the industry truly evolved,” said Clarice Turner, CEO at ABC, during the State of the Industry session. “We remain focused on growing demand for California almonds, both domestically and globally, with new products, new markets, new innovations, and new



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Economic Outlook: What's Driving Consumer Behavior

The challenges faced by almond growers over the last several years have not siloed to the almond industry alone. Across all sectors, farmers are facing hardships as a result of the broader economic landscape.

Scott Clemons, partner and chief investment strategist at Brown Brothers Harriman, explained that over the past several months, a slow labor market has weighed on consumer sentiment, a key driver of spending, which accounts for 68% of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP).

He attributes the decline in sentiment to three factors: expectations that the labor market will continue to weaken, rising inflation concerns among consumers and the increasing stress of household debt.

Positively, consumer spending remains rela-

tively healthy, and it is expected that the Federal Reserve will gradually reduce interest rates by 1% over the next year. While a slowdown in the economy can be expected, Clemons does not anticipate a recession, though consumer sentiment will ultimately be the deciding factor.

Driving Demand: ABC's Marketing Priorities

Global market development remains top of mind for ABC's strategy, accounting for 64% of the overall budget. This year was no different, with marketing efforts focused on four key areas: ingredient innovation, global bakery, emerging markets and healthy foods.

With 14 forms and uses, almonds continue to demonstrate exceptional versatility. This adaptability has performed well in the U.S. and Europe, where 50% of almond volume goes into ingredients used in manufactured products.

Efforts to inspire new applications of almonds among food scientists, chefs and culinary students have also expanded. As a result, almonds remain the number one nut included in new

products, appearing in over 9,000 new products throughout the last year.

Earlier this year, the Almond Board unveiled a partnership with Smoothie King, the largest smoothie chain in the world, where they encouraged customers to add almonds to their drinks. The campaign was very successful, resulting in almonds being added to 70% more smoothies and creating a lasting impact.

"Five months later, almonds have continued to be added to smoothies even after the promotion ended," Turner reported. "We changed behavior, and that's really hard to do."

Global bakery remains another key focus, with a projected category growth of 40% by 2030. ABC initiatives in this area have accelerated in emerging markets like China, Mexico, Turkey, and Morocco, promoting the use of almond ingredients in traditional baked goods. Momentum in Turkey and Morocco have also picked up significantly, thanks to a newly secured

See 'ABC' on page 29



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2025 in Review: How Agriculture Persevered Through Challenges This Year

It's fair to say that 2025 has been a year of meaningful progress for agriculture, on top of some very big challenges. Farm Bureau helped farmers and ranchers across the country navigate the roller coaster ride. From policy wins that strengthen farm families to initiatives that support rural communities—our members, leaders and Farm Bureau staff rallied to ensure farmers and ranchers could hold on through the ups and downs. Here's a look at some of the key victories and steps forward that shaped the year.

Weathering an Economic Storm

Congress took some big steps to provide certainty for farmers with the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. It extends critical tax provisions that farm and ranch families rely on to keep their businesses running. It also improves access to and affordability of critical risk management programs like crop insurance and commodity support pro-

grams, increases funding for conservation programs, and enhances risk management support for dairy farmers. However, the farm bill program changes don't take effect until next year. That's why the recently authorized \$12 billion aid package was so important. It will help bridge the gap so farmers can pay bills, maintain their machinery and plan for the next season with greater certainty. But this is just one piece of what farmers and ranchers will need to turn the corner.

They've been hard hit from every direction during an economic storm that includes higher operating costs and historically low prices for most major crops. Major crops combined will lose more than \$34 billion this year—that's on top of \$55 billion in combined losses from the two previous years. How many of us could survive by losing money year after year in our jobs? A spike in farm bankruptcies is a warning flare for all of us who rely on farmers to feed our families.

See '2025 Review' on page 18



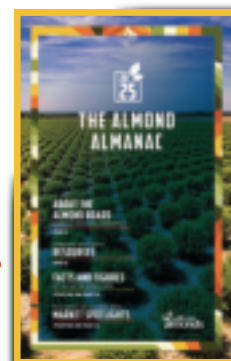
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California budget underscores agriculture's role in wildfire and water solutions — but gaps remain

Gov. Gavin Newsom's proposed budget highlights California's continued focus on wildfire response, climate resilience and water infrastructure but leaves gaps in direct support and regulatory alignment for agriculture and rural communities, according to California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass. She said:

"The budget invests heavily in wildfire response, but funding for proactive strategies on working lands remains limited. California farmers and ranchers are part of the solution. Grazing, vegetation management and stewardship reduce fuel loads and protect rural communities. Expanding these strategies statewide would strengthen long-term resilience.

"Water reliability is foundational to agriculture. Investments in flood protection, groundwater recharge and drought resilience are critical, but infrastructure alone is not enough. Projects must be paired with regulatory efficiency so they can move forward and

deliver real, on-the-ground benefits for farms and ranches.

"Agriculture is increasingly relied upon for wildfire mitigation, water resilience and climate solutions, yet it is not recognized as critical infrastructure. Aligning investments, regulations and expectations will enable farmers and ranchers to continue producing food, protecting the environment and supporting rural communities.

"Farmers and ranchers stand ready to partner with the state. With the right funding and regulatory support, we can continue producing food, safeguard the environment and strengthen California's rural economy."

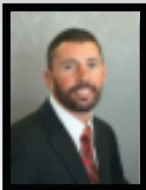
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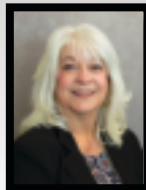


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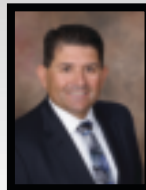
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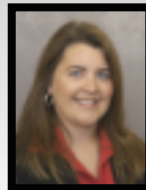
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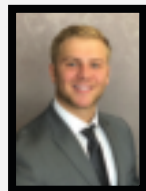
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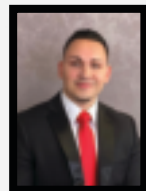
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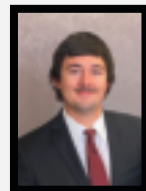
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From '2025 Review' on page 16

Thankfully, members of Congress are already working to fill in the gaps. Consider that many fruit, vegetable, tree nut and nursery growers are facing the same sharp rise in costs and the same instability in the marketplace—yet received less than 10% of the bridge support. Farm Bureau is committed to ensuring our elected leaders deliver additional aid to close the gap.

Financial relief is an essential lifeline, but it's just one piece of the puzzle to help farmers and ranchers navigate these challenging times.

Labor Reform and Fair Wages

Farm Bureau has long advocated for changes to the antiquated wage rate formula, called the Adverse Effect Wage Rate, for agricultural guestworkers in the H-2A program. This year we achieved a new wage rate rule that brings wages into balance, so they are fair to both workers and farmers. Labor costs can be nearly half the cost of production, making it hard for farmers to break even and more expensive to grow food domestically. More labor reforms are needed to avoid increased dependence on imported foods.

Earlier in the year, the Department of Labor also pulled back a far-reaching regulation after

several successful lawsuits, one of which was co-led by AFBF. This marked a significant win for farmers and ranchers because elements of this egregious rule placed new regulatory burdens on farmers whom Congress had explicitly exempted. Farmers appreciate and depend upon the men and women who choose to work on their farms, so fair labor standards are important to them.

Clarity on Clean Water Rules


The proposed 2025 Waters of the United States rule, from the Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers, is welcome news for agriculture. Clean water is essential for farmers and ranchers: it's the foundation of everything they do. The new rule strikes an important balance by protecting critical water sources while

respecting the stewardship farmers practice every day to safeguard natural resources.

Several years ago, the Supreme Court made it clear that the government had overreached in its interpretation of what fell under federal jurisdiction. This proposal finally addresses those concerns and takes steps toward providing much-needed clarity. AFBF will share feedback with EPA to ensure farmers can continue protecting the environment while growing the food America's families rely on.

Expanding Mental Health Support

Farmers and ranchers face economic uncertainty unlike anything seen in a generation, putting enormous pressure on them to sup-



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port their families and make ends meet. This makes Farm Bureau's work to deliver mental health resources through our Farm State of Mind program critically important.

In 2025, AFBF took a big step to expand its Farm State of Mind initiative by partnering with the Farm Family Wellness Alliance to launch the Farm State of Mind Alliance. This collaboration brings together resources and messaging to make an even greater impact on rural mental health.

The Alliance builds on work started in 2020 and expanded in 2023 to offer tools like Togetherall and Personal Assistance Services to farm families nationwide. Now, under Farm State of Mind, these lifechanging efforts will be centralized and amplified.

Looking Forward to 2026

With the 2025 roller coaster nearly in the books, I stand in awe of the women and men we serve. Farmers and ranchers are some of the most resilient, optimistic people I've ever met. They have to be in order to continue planting a crop every spring with no idea whether they'll see a return on their investment in the fall. Their noble work makes it gratifying to be part of the Farm Bureau team helping to clear the hurdles in their way and open doors to new opportunities. Investing in the people who work every day to ensure a safe, healthy and affordable food supply is a win every time—the benefits of which are visible on every dinner table in America.

Joby Young is executive vice president at the American Farm Bureau Federation.

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Pear farmers seek to limit Argentine fruit in US market

California pear growers are seeking relief from Argentine imports that they say have displaced their fruit in U.S. markets and driven down prices for growers in the state. During the past decade, the volume of Argentine pears sold in the U.S. more than doubled, last year rising to 1.3 million boxes and for the first time surpassing the amount of California-grown Bartlett pears sold to the fresh market. "It's one of the

biggest headwinds that the California pear industry has faced," Ryan Elliot, a sixth-generation pear grower from Sacramento County, said of surging imports from Argentina. "If we don't figure something out soon, we won't be around." Pressure from imports has already contributed to a decline in California's pear production, with acreage falling from 10,610 in 2000 to 4,500 in 2024.

Farm Bureau photo award celebrates California agriculture

County, whose photo of winegrape harvest in front of rolling hills was awarded second place.

Advocates seek \$30 million to compensate ranchers for wolf attacks

The California Farm Bureau and other advocacy organizations representing ranchers and rural residents joined in a letter to ask for \$30 million in the 2026-27 state budget to fund the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Wolf Program. The program was created to ensure livestock production is not jeopardized by California's recovering gray wolf population. California Farm Bureau and others have been successful in pushing to fund the Wolf-Livestock Compensation Program at \$5.3 million since 2021. There are currently 10 recognized wolf packs in the state and additional areas of wolf activity. Last year, ranchers saw a significant increase in livestock depredations by the apex predators, which are protected under state and federal endangered species acts.

English language program helps farms, employees

The National Immigration Forum has partnered with agricultural organizations including Farm Employers Labor Service, a California Farm Bureau-affiliated company, to provide English language instruction for farmworkers. The English Advance program teaches language skills related to farm operations; employee safety; hygiene and food safety; team leadership and communication; and other areas of communication that are important in agricultural settings. Interested California agricultural businesses, county Farm Bureaus and other organizations supporting the workforce can offer and cover the cost of training any time—and through April 1, businesses can leverage existing funding through the Employment Training Panel to access the training program at no charge.

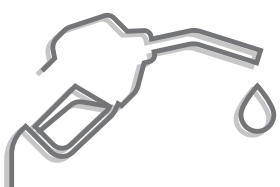


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A silhouette of a cattle rancher practicing with a lasso at sunset, captured by the rancher's sister Joelle Naphan of Butte County, was awarded first place in the 44th annual California Farm Bureau Photo Contest. "Agriculture is an art that has been refined by multiple generations, just as this particular loop my brother was throwing has been refined by hours of practice," Naphan said. The photo contest seeks to celebrate the family traditions that make California's farms and ranches unique, and to bring attention to the unseen work that fuels the state's agriculture. "It's a reminder that there are real hands and hard work behind the grapes that eventually end up in your glass of wine," said Michelle Foster of San Luis Obispo

Farmers Set the Course for 2026 Policy

Zippy Duvall, American Farm Bureau President

When farmers and ranchers come together, they don't just talk about challenges—they get to work finding solutions. That's exactly what happened at our 107th American Farm Bureau Convention in Anaheim, California, where farmers from across the country gathered to set Farm Bureau's policy for the year ahead. That policy was shaped by real conversations about tight margins, rising costs, labor shortages and the uncertainty many farm families are facing right now.

As a farmer myself, I don't have to imagine those challenges. I see them firsthand. And I hear the same concerns everywhere I go. That's why Farm Bureau's 2026 policy is focused on making sure farmers have the tools, certainty and support they need to keep going—today and for generations to come.

2026 Policy and the FARM 250 Vision

This year's policy discussions come at a significant moment as our nation approaches its 250th anniversary. This milestone also provides an opportunity to reflect on agriculture's role in building our country. Agriculture remains just as essential to America's strength today as it was at our founding.

Yet farmers continue to face mounting challenges that make long-term planning difficult. That's why Farm Bureau is launching FARM 250, an effort grounded in four pillars that reflect both our history and our future: Feeding families, Advancing innovation, Rural resilience, and Mindful stewardship. The policy adopted in Anaheim aligns with those pillars and reflects a commitment to long-term stability, not short-term fixes.


Farm Bureau's 2026 Policy, Set by Farmers Right now, the farm economy is under real pressure. Low margins, high input costs, and lingering losses from weather

and market disruptions have pushed many farm families to the edge. In Anaheim, farmers made it clear that short-term relief is still needed, especially for those whose losses haven't been fully addressed. That's why a top priority is working with Congress and the administration to deliver additional bridge support for farmers who are still struggling.

But we also know that stability doesn't come from temporary fixes alone. We need a new, multi-year farm bill to address outdated loan limits, invest in research and advance conservation and rural development programs, among many other critical priorities.


Labor remains one of the most pressing challenges facing agriculture. It's what I hear most often when I meet with farmers across the country. No matter the region or the crop, farmers are feeling the strain of an outdated system that doesn't reflect the

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realities of modern agriculture. Our 2026 policy calls for meaningful reforms that modernize agriculture labor programs. Trade is just as essential to farm viability. Expanding market access and enforcing existing trade commitments are critical for long-term growth. Farmers depend on strong export markets, and Farm Bureau will continue urging the administration to finalize market-opening trade agreements, challenge unfair trade barriers and ensure American agriculture remains competitive on the global stage.

Farmers are also clear about what they need from Washington when it comes to regulation: clarity, consistency and policies grounded in science. Farmers care deeply about the land, water and resources they steward every day. Regulations should support both environmental stewardship and economic sustainability.

That same clarity matters when discus-

sions turn to food and health policy. Farmers want a seat at the table to share how our food is grown, safely and sustainably. Our policy supports transparency, science-based standards and a food system that values both farmer livelihoods and consumer well-being.

Strong farms also depend on strong rural infrastructure. That includes expanded broadband access and continued investment in agricultural research through land-grant universities. Farmers also emphasized the importance of strengthening the supply chain—from processing capacity to market transparency—while promoting greater use of U.S.-grown biofuels, including year-round E15.

Conservation remains a core value for farmers, and it works best when it's voluntary, incentive-based and farmer-led. Farmers are already leaders in conservation, and our policy reinforces that environmental

sustainability must go hand-in-hand with economic viability. Farm Bureau will continue advocating for conservation programs that are grounded in sound science, flexible enough to work across diverse operations and supportive of farmers who are committed to caring for their land.

Grassroots Voices Driving Farm Bureau's 2026 Advocacy

At the end of the day, our policy reflects the voices of farmers and ranchers who understand what's at stake. It is shaped by grassroots delegates who step up, speak out and help chart the course for the year ahead.

That grassroots foundation will guide our advocacy in 2026 as we work to ensure America's farmers can continue producing the food, fiber and renewable fuel our country depends on. I'm proud to stand with farmers and ranchers who are shaping the policies that will define the future of agriculture.



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60 Day Extension for Approximately 17,000 Nondomiciled CDLs

On Dec. 30, the DMV extended the cancellation date for approximately 17,000 nondomiciled commercial driver's licenses by an additional 60 days while the state continues to work with representatives of the FMCSA to resolve concerns with the commercial driver's licensing process prior to March 6. This extension provides additional time for the DMV and FMCSA to identify a solution that allows affected drivers to continue working and serving California communities. Impacted drivers will receive letters shortly informing them of the extension. More information is available at CADMV. Staff contact: Steven Fenaroli, sfenaroli@cbbf.com.

CDFA Lifts Statewide Ban on California Poultry and Dairy Cattle Exhibitions at Fairs and Shows

The California Department of Food and Agriculture has lifted the ban on exhibitions at fairs and shows. The cooperation from producers to adhere to biosecurity measures and herd immunity acquisition led to this action. CDFA will continue to ensure that biosecurity practices are met. CDFA strives to protect animal and public health. CDFA Letter Addressing Lifting the Statewide Ban Staff contact: Steven Fenaroli, sfenaroli@cbbf.com.

FCC Announces Ban on All Foreign-Made Drones

On Dec. 22, the Federal Communications Commission announced a ban on new foreign-made drones and drone parts from entering the United States. The action stems from two executive orders issued by President Trump related to unmanned aircraft systems.

The FCC's determination followed a White House-convened review involving an executive branch interagency body with national security expertise. That review concluded that certain foreign-produced unmanned aircraft systems, or UAS, and

critical component parts pose "unacceptable risks to the national security of the United States and to the safety and security of U.S. persons."

The decision does not affect consumers' ability to continue using drones they already own, nor does it prevent retailers from selling, importing or marketing drone models previously approved through the FCC's equipment authorization process. However, with foreign-based suppliers making up a significant portion of the UAS market, there are concerns the ban could disrupt agricultural operations that increasingly rely on drones for applications and other uses.

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

Early Legislative Activity in 2026 Session

Less than one week into the 2026 legislative session, several lawmakers are already updating their bill packages. Notably, state Sen. Kelly Seyarto (R-Murrieta) has introduced two measures of interest. Senate Bill 288 is a gut-and-amend bill that clarifies the interaction between Proposition 19 and the probate process to protect family members from unintended property tax reassessments. The bill ensures that individuals who inherit a family home through probate are not penalized for delays beyond their control by specifying that the one-year occupancy clock does not begin until the probate process is complete.

Seyarto also gutted and amended Senate Bill 523, which would allow insurers to distinguish fire coverage within homeowner insurance policies by separating internal and external fires. The measure differentiates between fires originating on the insured property and fires originating off-site, such as wildfires. Staff contact: Peter Ansel, pansel@cbbf.com.

Agricultural and Rural Groups Seek \$30 Million for California's Wolf Program

California Farm Bureau and other organizations that represent California farmers, ranchers and rural residents—including the California Cattlemen's Association, Office of Kat Taylor and Rural County Representatives of California—are asking for \$30 million in the 2026-27 state budget to fund the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Wolf Program. Read the request here.

This funding is essential to ensure that California's recovering gray wolf population continues to thrive without jeopardizing livestock production, which stewards one-third of the state's lands and forms the backbone of the state's rural economies. California Farm Bureau and others have been successful in funding the Wolf-Livestock Compensation Program at \$5.3

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million since 2021. The program is recognized as being one of the national leaders in compensation for livestock loss from predators. There are currently 10 recognized wolf packs in the state and additional areas of wolf activity.

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

Updated Dietary Guidelines Announced On Wednesday, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture released the updated Dietary Guidelines for Americans,

2025–2030. The guidelines provide recommendations on foods and beverages to support better health and are used to shape several federal nutrition and feeding programs.

According to the announcement, HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said the updated guidelines represent a return to basics, urging Americans to prioritize whole, nutrient-dense foods—including protein, dairy, fruits, vegetables, healthy fats and whole grains—while significantly reducing highly processed foods.

and healthy fats near the top, while emphasizing the need to limit highly processed foods, added sugars and artificial additives. A fact sheet released alongside the guidelines provides additional detail on the changes, which have drawn significant media attention given their scope. Health and nutrition remain a top priority for the Trump administration, which has frequently cited rising healthcare costs—particularly those tied to chronic disease—as a major national challenge.

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

USDA Announces New 2026 Priorities for Research and Development

U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins issues a memorandum at the end of 2025, outlining some of the

department’s priorities relating to research and development. The priorities include increasing profitability for farmers and ranchers; expanding markets and creating new uses of U.S.-made agricultural products; protecting the industry from invasive species; promoting soil health and long-term farmland productivity; and improving health and nutrition through precision nutrition and food quality. The latter of the priorities line up with the Make America Healthy Again efforts, which have stressed the importance of U.S. agriculture in achieving these goals. A link to the memo can be found here.

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

The update includes a redesigned food pyramid that places red meat protein, fruits, vegetables



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USDA grant awarding at least \$13 million to bolster these initiatives.

Healthy snacking, while still a top priority, has softened as consumers respond to higher prices.

"All nuts are down (in the U.S.), including almonds at 8.7%, but the whole category is down by 6.2%," explained Emily Fleischmann, ABC vice president, global market development.

To remain competitive, ABC partnered with Deion "Coach Prime" Sanders for the third year in a row. His presence packed a bigger punch for California almonds, delivering "a 90% higher return on investment versus previous campaigns," Fleischmann said.

Looking ahead, a new, modern campaign is set to launch this spring in India, ABC's top performing market which receives 400 million pounds of almonds annually.

ABC also continues to capitalize on the health benefits of almonds. A recent partnership with BrightSeed identified 530 health-promoting compounds in almonds, four times more than previously known, and ABC's newly launched nutrition affairs program will help elevate almond's nutritional profile and influence scientific stakeholders.

Alliance on the Regulatory Front

Beyond marketing, ABC continues to supply the Almond Alliance with the data they need to ensure grower voices are represented on policy issues affecting almond production in California.

Just recently, the administration announced \$12 billion in farm aid for tariff relief, including \$1 billion designated for specialty crops such as almonds. The Almond Alliance remains actively engaged to ensure

almonds are included in these discussions and receives a fair share of the funds.

Ongoing efforts also focus on strengthening relationships with trade partners to promote fair and stable trade and to minimize tariff impacts across the specialty crop sector.

"We are working very closely with the administration and utilizing ABC data to ensure that our needs are heard, and growers get the support that they need," said Alexi Rodriguez, CEO of the Almond Alliance. "We are working to ensure policymakers understand the real-world impacts of their decisions before rules are finalized."


A Call for Engagement

A consistent message that resonated loud and clear throughout the conference was that progress depends on participation and strategic action from all players, including the 7,600 California growers that represent the industry.

"As a grower, our work does not end by just producing a crop and paying our assessment," said Dinesh Bajaj, director of sales marketing at Select Harvest USA. "The Board does not work in isolation. We have to do our part and be constructive."


That shared responsibility complements ABC's forward-thinking focus to create long-term value for California almonds.

"Whether you're a grower, supplier, handler or a buyer, our shared commitment to cultivating a healthier future remains essential," Turner concluded. "Success in our industry depends on collaboration, on innovation and on a clear focus on our goals of: driving global demand, supporting a favorable trade and regulatory environment and maximizing our industry's value."

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