

# The Stanislaus Farm News

The *voice* of Stanislaus County Agriculture

STANISLAUS COUNTY



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**Official Publication of Stanislaus  
County Farm Bureau  
Vol.76 No.1 January 17, 2025**

Pictured above: Horticulture program interns MacKenzie Phillips (left) and Elainna Dulcich check the root system of a potted coleus plant.  
See full story on page 3

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  
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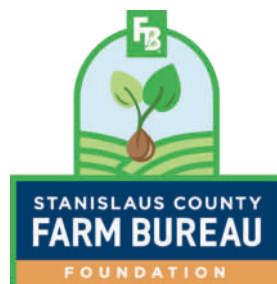
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# AGRICULTURE *matters*

## Stanislaus County Farm Bureau Launches Foundation to Support Agriculture

Modesto, CA — The Stanislaus County Farm Bureau is proud to announce the launch of its 501(c)(3) Foundation, a transformative initiative dedicated to strengthening the agricultural community through education, training, and consumer outreach.

The Foundation will focus on three main pillars:

- **Cultivate:** Supporting the next generation of agricultural leaders by providing youth education programs and scholarships for students pursuing careers in agriculture.
- **Elevate:** Offering training and educational opportunities designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of growers and elevate the agricultural industry in Stanislaus County.
- **Educate:** Promoting consumer awareness about the origins of their food and the value of buying local products.

“We are already doing impactful work in these areas, but the establishment of this Foundation will make it even easier for our community to contribute to projects they are passionate about,” said Anna Genasci, Director of Education and Communication.

“Stanislaus County is consistently ranked among the top 10 agricultural counties in the state. This Foundation will provide the support needed in our county to have educational opportunities focusing on three pillars: OUR STUDENTS in learning about agriculture and the opportunities for careers; OUR AGRICULTURALIST to support their growth and understanding of producing quality products and resources they are stewards of; and OUR COMMUNITY so they can understand this vital part of the culture of Stanislaus County. Education about agriculture, for agriculture, and expanding the understanding of opportunities in agriculture is the focus of this Foundation,” said Deanna van Klaveren, Foundation Board Member.

The Foundation, which was established at the end of 2023, is set to host its first major fundraiser in the spring of 2025. Funds raised will go directly toward programs and initiatives that support the agricultural community.

With this initiative, the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau aims to create lasting change and ensure the agricultural industry thrives for generations to come.

For more information about the Foundation or how to get involved, please contact Anna Genasci, 209-522-7278 or [annag@stanfarmbureau.org](mailto:annag@stanfarmbureau.org).

About the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau

Our mission is 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 of agriculture.

## 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.

## Modesto Junior College Environmental Horticulture

By Vicky Boyd

With nearly 10,000 square feet of space under glass, the Modesto Junior College greenhouse this time of year is just beginning to fill with potted plants. Adjacent to it is an outdoor nursery that's home to ornamental trees and shrubs as well as grape vines and fruit trees.

Their resemblance to a commercial nursery operation is intentional as they're designed to give students enrolled in MJC Environmental Horticulture classes hands-on experience in plant identification, propagation, potting and nursery operation.

In December, the greenhouse was awash with colorful poinsettias grown for the annual MJC Christmas sale. While the event garners strong community support, it's not

the program's largest.

That honor goes to the annual MJC spring plant sale scheduled for Saturday, April 5, at the East Campus nursery off College and Coldwell avenues.

"The spring one is definitely larger than this one, but this one is still pretty substantial," said MJC Environmental Horticulture Professor Kattie Schmidig-Sanchez, referring to the poinsettia sale. "In spring, we have lots of perennials and landscape plants and trees and vegetables. We get (the trees) in as bare root in January, and the students learn about bare root, pot them and sell them as No. 5s." The number refers to what loosely used to be called a 5-gallon container.

In addition to the two large sales, gardeners and homeowners can purchase plants year-round at the MJC Nursery and Country Store on the main campus during regular weekday hours. Proceeds from plant sales

are reinvested into the Environmental Horticulture program.

Many of the nursery's offerings are class lab projects that range from propagation to planting and potting, Schmidig-Sanchez said.

The program's greenhouse in which many of the plants are grown on the East Campus serves as a kind of living laboratory for students. The adjacent outdoor nursery provides them experience with perennials as well as hardening greenhouse plants, transplanting and grafting. Together, they're home to more than 400 different varieties. Each semester, Schmidig-Sanchez teaches two classes that use the nursery for lab exercises. In the spring, for example, they are Plant Identification and Usage 1 and Plant Propagation.

On a recent greenhouse visit, trays filled with pots of colorful coleus were prominent. That's because they're relatively easy for students to grow from cuttings, Schmidig-Sanchez said. Propagating hardwoods is much more difficult.

The nursery also is used for general education courses that don't have lab requirements such as Introduction to Plant Science or for related programs like soil science. In the works is a tissue culture laboratory, where students will learn first-hand how plants are clonally propagated under near-sterile conditions using meristem cells.

Setting up such a facility involves installing tissue culture incubators, HEPA filters and a new climate-control system, Schmidig-Sanchez said. She hoped to have it up and running in a corner of the greenhouse by the beginning of the 2025-26 school year.

A love of plants

See MJC on page 4

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*From MJC on page 3*

For Elainna Dulcich, a sophomore majoring in environmental horticulture science, ag science and plant science, being around plants literally changed her life. Having grown up near Mariposa and been involved in FFA for four years, she had always planned to become a veterinarian.

While in high school, "I took a vet science class and thought, this definitely isn't for me," said Dulcich, also an MJC horticulture intern. "I took a horticulture class and I just absolutely fell in love with the environment."

Attending the high school senior day at MJC just reinforced her adoration of the field.

"This is exactly where I needed to be," Dulcich said.



MJC Environmental Horticulture Professor Kattie Schmidig-Sanchez (left) and student intern MacKenzie Phillips pose in front of perennial landscape plants in the college's outdoor nursery.

Once she completes her MJC requirements, she plans to transfer to California State University, Fresno, to seek ag teaching credentials. Dulcich also hopes to obtain a master's degree so she can teach at the college level, following in the footsteps of Schmidig-Sanchez.

A resident of Oakdale, Schmidig-Sanchez received her bachelor's and master's degrees from CSU Chico. She then taught at Hughson High School for nine years before moving to MJC more than a year ago.

Schmidig-Sanchez's minor is animal science, but she taught both plant and animal science in high school.

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“The hands-on experience with plant science was great, and I just connected with it,” she said. “Now, I wouldn’t trade it for anything. I love teaching horticulture and this side of it.”

Growing up in Woodland, freshman MacKenzie Phillips knew she wanted a career in agriculture at a young age.

“I grew up around ag,” said Phillips, an ag business major and a horticulture intern.

“There were a lot of seed companies near us. In high school I started in FFA, and it took me more into the ag department.”

Many of the Yolo County seed companies also had greenhouses, but Phillips said she

didn’t know much about the structures until she attended MJC.

“So it’s been super interesting to see,” Phillips said.

### Trends in plants

Environmental horticulture isn’t just about producing plants. Fashion, societal, business and financial trends also go into it. Dulcich, for example, said she learned about price increases from last year to this year for the foil wrappers put around poinsettia pots.

The demand for house plants also has exploded, Schmidig-Sanchez said. The growth began about seven years ago before COVID and has continued.

Young people, in particular, are interested in plants. In California, the recent droughts have driven sales of drought-tolerant landscape plants, she said.

Fashion plays a role, particularly with colors. This year, the MJC greenhouse was home to eight poinsettia colors ranging from traditional red to pinks and even the red-and-white-striped “Candy

Cane” variety.

“Last year, pink and Candy Cane both sold out before red,” Schmidig-Sanchez said. “They like those variety in colors. I think it parallels with home décor trends — it’s not just green and red.”

For Dulcich and Phillips, propagating poinsettias was definitely a learning experience. “We had no idea that poinsettias started out green and then grew into colors,” Dulcich said.

Edible landscaping also has become popular, whether it’s patio-grown vegetables, potted herbs or fruit and nut trees, Schmidig-Sanchez said. Because more urban dwellers are doing their own landscaping and lawn care, she said low-maintenance plants have grown more popular. And the demand for native plants has enjoyed an uptick.

“We’d like to bring in more natives — that’s an area we’d like to grow,” said Nick Tobin, horticulture program specialist who helps manage the greenhouse and a former MJC student.

One of the challenges is many are difficult to propagate, he said. For every 10 plants successfully propagated, they typically start with 100 and most won’t make it.

Tobin, who was born on an Iowa hog farm, said the challenge of keeping plants alive year-round and managing for the different needs of individual species is what makes his job interesting.

“My thinking was I wanted to try to teach something, fix something and grow something,” he said of his motivation.



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## California Farm Bureau responds to state budget plan

*California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass commented on the budget plan announced today by Gov. Gavin Newsom:*

"Fees, taxes and increasing labor costs continue to negatively impact California food producers. The latest data shows that the state lost more than 7,000 farms and fallowed nearly 1.5 million acres of productive lands in the past five years, all while costs increased more than \$150,000 per farm in the same timeframe. These are family farms and businesses disappearing from Califor-

nia at an alarming pace, preventing opportunities for beginning farmers and underserved populations from any pathway to launch agricultural businesses.

"We've heard promises from legislative leaders about focusing on California's affordability, and we hope that every regulation and law that the governor and Legislature propose keeps affordability top of mind. It's clear that any action on key issues such as Cap-and-Trade reauthorization, the insurance crisis and agricultural overtime laws must work for farmers and ranchers and, importantly, the employees who put food on our tables. Only with

agriculture as a partner will the governor's goals to advance economic development in rural communities find success. The future of California's rural economies depends on it."

The California Farm Bureau works to protect family farms and ranches on behalf of more than 26,000 members statewide and as part of a nationwide network of 5.8 million Farm Bureau members.

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# Parabug Brings Innovation to Pest Management

By: Anna Genasci

## Jaclyn Bennett Shares the Journey of Combining Drones and Beneficial Insects

At the 2024 California Farm Bureau Annual Meeting in beautiful Monterey, California, agricultural innovators and leaders gathered to discuss solutions to modern farming challenges. One such innovator, Jaclyn Bennett, General Manager of Parabug, took center stage to share her company's story and its groundbreaking approach to integrated pest management (IPM).

## From College Experiment to Industry Innovation

The idea for Parabug began back in 2013 when Bennett and her husband, Chandler, were still students at Cal Poly. Jaclyn, who holds a degree in Horticulture Science with a minor in Plant Protection, explained how Chandler combined his passion for drone technology with agriculture. While experimenting in an IPM class, he wondered why beneficial insects, often applied by hand, couldn't be distributed by drones.

"Drones need a light payload, and beneficial insects are super light," Bennett explained. Using a 3D printer, Chandler began prototyping his idea, which evolved into the Parabug



system we see today. The first commercial tests happened on Chandler's own ranch after he became a production manager post-graduation.

## What is Parabug?

Parabug uses drones to apply beneficial insects in outdoor cropping systems, offering precision, efficiency, and significant cost savings compared to traditional hand applications. IPM, or Integrated Pest Management, relies on combining different tools to effectively manage pests while minimizing chemical use. Parabug enhances this strategy by providing targeted and uniform distribution of beneficial insects, directly where they are needed most.

"With hand crews, everyone walks at a different speed and releases insects inconsistently," Bennett noted. "With drones, we can uniformly distribute beneficials, even

to the tops of trees where infestations often start."

This method not only reduces labor costs but also allows growers to apply biological controls more effectively. Bennett highlighted that growers have reported cost savings of 50 to 75 percent on application expenses.

## Responding to Regulatory Challenges

In an era of increasing regulatory pressure on chemical pest control, Parabug offers a timely and innovative alternative. Bennett referenced the California Department of Pesticide Regulation's (DPR) sustainable pest management (SPM) initiatives, which encourage farmers to exhaust non-chemical pest control options before turning to traditional pesticides.

"Some of our biggest pushes into new crops have come from the loss of chemical

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controls,” Bennett shared, citing the ban on chlorpyrifos in California as a turning point. “The regulatory landscape is definitely driving interest in alternatives like Parabug.”

However, she emphasized that beneficial insects are not a replacement for chemical tools but rather an addition to the farmer’s toolbox. “It’s about using biological controls preventatively and pesticides more selectively. Sustainability is about more than environmental impact; it’s also about

economic sustainability for growers.”

### Expanding Horizons

Parabug is rapidly expanding its reach and impact. In addition to servicing major California crops like grapes, almonds, melons, strawberries, and mixed vegetables, the company has seen growing interest in agronomic crops such as corn and soybeans. Internationally, Parabug now operates in Australia and Canada, working with insectaries across Europe, Israel, Mexico, and Africa.

Bennett also highlighted Parabug’s close relationships with insectaries—facilities that breed beneficial insects—allowing growers to choose their own vendors and customize their IPM programs.

“It’s like farming bugs,” Bennett joked. “Growers can work directly with insectaries to get the beneficials they need, and we ensure they’re applied efficiently.”

### Looking to the Future

As Parabug continues to grow, research and innova-

tion remain at the forefront. New crops, new insects, and expanding global operations are key focus areas for the company moving forward.

“We’re excited to see the adoption of this technology in crops like hops, apples, and pears in the Pacific Northwest, as well as corn and other agronomic crops,” Bennett said.

Based in Salinas, California—the heart of the “salad bowl”—Parabug is perfectly positioned to serve a wide range of crops, from leafy greens to berries and artichokes.

### The Road Ahead

With a combination of technological innovation and a commitment to sustainability, Parabug is helping farmers adapt to modern challenges while staying productive and profitable. Bennett’s final message to the audience underscored the company’s mission: “This isn’t about replacing tools—it’s about adding new ones. By integrating biological controls into modern farming systems, we’re creating solutions that are sustainable both environmentally and economically.”

As agriculture navigates tighter regulations and higher expectations, companies like Parabug are paving the way for a more efficient and sustainable future.



## Advocacy in Action

### President Signs Proclamations on Two New National Monuments in CA

On January 7th, President Biden's administration announced they would be designating two California areas for conservation protection through national monument proclamations. The designated areas are the Chuckwalla National Monument in the northern part of the state and the Sattitla National Monument in Eastern Coachella Valley. Together, the proclamations will cover nearly 850,000 acres. Chuckwalla will be managed by the Department of the Interior, while Sattitla will be managed by the U.S. Forest Service. While hailed by conservation groups, these designations can make it substantially harder to conduct wildfire mitigation, grazing, and other activities critical to forest and public lands management. Staff Contact: Matthew Viohl; mviohl@cfbf.com

### Forest Service Withdraws Draft National Old Growth Amendment

In a surprising turn, the US Forest Service announced last week that they would be withdrawing their planned National Old Growth Amendment. The proposal could have led to added protections for so-called "old growth" forests and a different management structure than previously exists. CAFB submitted comments this past fall, essentially urging the Forest Service to reconsider their efforts, or at least work closely with local experts (including those from ag communities). The agency's announcement noted the difficulties in having a national approach that does not fit well region to region.

Newly elected Chairman of the Congressional Western Caucus, Rep. Doug LaMalfa (CA-01), released the following remarks, "The Forest Service's decision to withdraw the National Old Growth Amendment proposal is great news for proper forest management, Western Caucus members have been leading the opposition to this misguided plan that would have been detrimental to maintaining healthy forests and led to greater wildfire risks." Staff Contact:

Matthew Viohl; mviohl@cfbf.com

### New Congress Settles In, Speaker Elected

With 2025 now upon us, so too is the 119th Congress. Republicans maintained their slim majority in the House and now find themselves in control of the Senate as well. Following their swearing-in, House Republicans received their first real test of how they might operate with such a slim majority when Rep. Mike Johnson (R-LA) seemingly failed to receive enough votes in his bid for the Speaker's gavel. However, before the vote officially closed, he received enough support to win the Speakership.

Between now and the presidential inauguration, both chambers and parties are preparing their priorities for the new session. In addition, the Senate is working through incoming President Trump's Cabinet nominees. The president has been hopeful those would be confirmed quickly, but hearings likely won't start until at least this week. The "First 100 Days" is often seen as a critical time for the party in power to not just set an agenda but move quickly on key priorities. Staff Contact: Matthew Viohl; mviohl@cfbf.com

### Potential Major Port Strike Averted

Last week, the US Maritime Alliance and the International Longshoremen's Associa-

tion (ILA) reached a tentative agreement to avoid port strikes across Gulf and East coast ports. This follows a temporary agreement that has been in place since the fall, similarly avoiding significant supply chain disruptions. While the deal has yet to be voted on by union groups, ILA's comments suggest that the port workers are happy with the increased pay rates they've secured, as well as added protections against automation in the industry. AFBF economist Danny Munch released a Market Intel piece covering the issue last week, detailing the impacts a strike could have had on the US. Of note, many West coast ports rank



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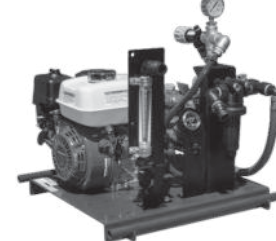
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amongst the most inefficient in the world. Staff Contact: Matthew Viohl; mviohl@cbbf.com

### **MASC Program Receives Additional Funds**

Last week, USDA added an additional \$650 million towards the Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops (MASC) program. Launched last month, the program originally was given \$2 billion to serve as direct payments to specialty crop producers for expanded market opportunities and for managing higher costs. Additionally, while the deadline closed this past Friday, the payment limit for applicants increased from \$125,000 to \$900,000. Staff Contact: Matthew Viohl; mviohl@cbbf.com

### **CDEA Bans Poultry and Dairy at Fairs**

As of Tuesday, California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) State Veterinarian-Director, Dr. Annette Jones, has implemented a ban on all California Poultry and Dairy Exhibitions at Fairs and Shows effective January 7, 2025, until further notice. This action aims to minimize

the danger of exposing people and non-infected birds and cows to disease. Please refer to the attachment for details of the ban.

Dairy cattle are defined as follows in (3 CCR §830) (9): "Dairy cattle" means all cattle, regardless of age or sex or current use, that are of a breed(s) or offspring of a breed used to produce milk or other dairy products for human consumption, including, but not limited to, Ayrshire, Brown Swiss, Holstein, Jersey, Guernsey, Milking Shorthorn, and Red and Whites.

In positive news, 100 dairies have recovered and been released from quarantine. Staff Contact: Steven Fenaroli; sfenaroli@cbbf.com

### **Fish and Wildlife Releases New Wolf Depredation Reports**

Fourteen new depredation determinations have been added for October and November 2024. Four of the confirmed determinations involve a new pair of wolves in Lassen County. The group is currently

represented as an Area of Wolf Activity on the agency's current Approximate Area of Gray Wolf Activity map. Staff Contact: Steven Fenaroli; sfenaroli@cbbf.com

### **Biden Administration Approves California's Vehicle Emissions Waiver**

On December 18, the EPA under the Biden Administration approved the federal waiver for the Advanced Clean Cars program which would require auto-

makers to sell more electric vehicles, before banning the sale of new gas-powered cars in 2035. Incoming President Trump is expected to roll back that waiver in addition to others. Staff Contact: Steven Fenaroli; sfenaroli@cbbf.com

### **Mountain Lion Research**

Utah State University will begin research to look at non-lethal deterrents for reducing livestock depredation from mountain lions. Their study will cover Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Nevada, Placer, Sierra and Yuba Counties. They will test turbo fladry, pursuit with dogs, fencing and other motion activated devices. If you are interested in participating, contact April Wood, april.wood@usu.edu or your local ag commissioner. Staff Contact: Steven Fenaroli; sfenaroli@cbbf.com

### **Regenerative Agriculture**

On January 7, after an over two year-long public process, the California State Board of Food and Agriculture unanimously approved a definition for 'Regenerative Agriculture' for use by State of California policies and programs. CDFA set out to define the term as the concept of regenerative agriculture has been increasingly referenced in legislation and has fostered a funding focus in government programs. Throughout the process, Farm Bureau staff provided several comments and recommendations to the State Board to ensure the effort best served the entire agricultural community and Farm Bureau members in this state and that the definition not include specific terms and references in the event of a future legislative interest in codifying the definition.

Ultimately, the adopted definition centers around the concept that regenerative agriculture is an integrated approach to farming and ranching rooted in principles of soil health, biodiversity and ecosystem resiliency, leading to improved target outcomes. The definition also reflects that this practice is not an endpoint but rather a continuous implementation of practices that over time minimize inputs and environmental impacts. The finalized definition will be avail-

See ACTION on page 12

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**From ACTION on page 11**

able on the State Board of Food and Agriculture's website in the coming weeks. Staff contact: Richard Filgas; rfilgas@cbbf.com

**Announcements: Major Cannabis Regulatory Deadline Approaching**

You must transition to an annual license before your provisional license expires in 2025.

After January 1, 2025, the Department of Cannabis Control (DCC) can no longer renew provisional licenses except for locally verified equity retail licenses with valid provisional licenses who may be eligible for provisional license renewal. Please be advised: DCC offices will be closed on January 1. If you plan to pay your license fee by cash, please schedule your payment appointment during regular business hours. Failure to comply with applicable laws or resolve outstanding deficiencies and meet requirements for annual licensure can result in suspension or revocation of the provisional license and denial of the annual license application.

For information and guidance, please visit FAQ: Transitioning a provisional license to an annual license before it expires in 2025.

*Commissioner Lara Issues Landmark Regulation To Expand Insurance Access for Californians Amid Growing Climate Risks*  
Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara announced the final major step

in his Sustainable Insurance Strategy, issuing a historic regulation aimed at restoring stability to California's insurance market while addressing the growing risks of wildfires and climate change. The new Net Cost of Reinsurance in Ratemaking Regulation requires insurance companies -- for the first time -- to increase coverage in high-risk areas, ensuring more options for Californians while limiting the costs passed on to consumers. The regulation works hand-in-hand with other reforms that Commissioner Lara has spearheaded that will have the effect of increasing insurance coverage options for Californians across the state.

Reinsurance is a financial tool that is part of how insurance companies manage their risk portfolios associated with the policies they write to homeowners and business owners. Its roots date back to the 14th century, when merchants and traders sought ways to spread the risks of perilous ocean voyages, often relying on multiple insurers to cover their ventures. Today, as climate risks escalate across the nation, rein-

insurance has become an even more imperative component of insurance companies operating in high-risk and distressed areas, including California. Modernizing regulations around reinsurance will enable insurance companies to expand coverage and write more policies in communities across the state facing greater risk, ensuring stability and resilience in our insurance market.

All other states except California allow for costs of reinsurance in rates and, in 2023, the first systematic review of climate risk strategies by Ceres and the California Department of Insurance revealed that reinsurance is the primary strategy most insurance companies use to continue to write and expand coverage in higher risk parts of California and across the country.



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## Finding Solutions for Farmers and Ranchers in 2025

By Joby Young, American Farm Bureau

This past year marked my second full year serving as executive vice president at the American Farm Bureau Federation and it has been inspiring to see our organization flourish as we serve farmers and ranchers.

Although our grassroots leaders have been key to the federation for more than 100 years, in 2024, we put a special spotlight on them as we celebrated “The Year of the County President.” I was fortunate to travel to several state Farm Bureau annual meetings as well as conferences and summits on behalf of Farm Bureau and enjoyed meeting many of the grassroots leaders knocking it

out of the park. Through it all, I’ve had a front row seat to all that our staff and our farmer and rancher members have accomplished this year.

A big 2024 victory came in the 11th hour, as nearly 12,000 of our grassroots members engaged in calling on Congress to include much-needed support for farmers and ranchers in the year-end continuing resolution. This groundswell of grassroots engagement ensured aid would be delivered to farmers and rural communities impacted by hurricanes, wildfires and floods, as well as those struggling through these difficult economic times. This funding is a short-term solution to help farmers and ranchers stay afloat as we urge Congress to modernize the farm bill.

We also saw the U.S. Supreme Court rule in favor of farmers and ranchers once again by striking down Chevron deference. Chevron deference threw out the balance of power between the three branches of government. The Court’s ruling will allow that balance to be restored and should help reduce the regulatory back and forth farmers are often subject to.

Importantly, we were also proud to join together with many of our friends across the industry, including the Farm Foundation, 4-H, Farm Credit, CoBank, Land O’Lakes and more, as the Farm Family Wellness Alliance, to bring Togetherall to our farm families. Togetherall is an online, completely anonymous peer-to-peer support network that revolutionizes mental health and wellbeing services. If you’re not yet signed



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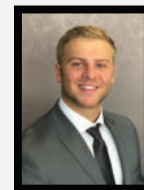
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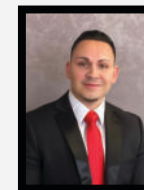
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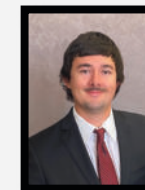
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up for Togetherall, I encourage you to do so today.

As we gear up for 2025, let's take a look at some of the key priorities, opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

### Farm bill

For the third consecutive year, the farm bill will be a top priority for Farm Bureau, and it should be a priority for every American. The farm bill is a critical tool to ensure our nation's food and farm security. The legislation helps agriculture to meet new challenges, continue innovating and advance sustainability goals. While Congress passed an extension of the 2018 farm bill as part of the end-of-year Continuing Resolution, that bill is now seven years old—well past the lifespan of legislation that's meant to be

renewed every five years. We call on lawmakers to get to work as soon as possible in 2025 pass a new, bipartisan, modernized farm bill.

### Taxes

The upcoming year will be a big one for taxes. Farmers and ranchers are headed for a tax cliff in 2025. Legislation passed in 2017 that gave agriculture some much-needed tax relief is set to expire this year, and there could be big consequences if it does. The 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act allows for bonus depreciation of capital investments, lowered individual tax rates and doubled the standard deduction, among many other beneficial provisions. All of which will disappear without Congressional action.

### Ag labor

Time and time again, I hear from our members that meeting their labor needs remains one of their most pressing issues. There simply aren't enough domestic workers to meet agriculture's needs, and the H-2A visa program falls short, too. Not to mention the flawed wage calculation system that makes it difficult for many farmers to afford help. AFBF has long called for bipartisan, workable solutions to meet our labor challenges and we made progress in 2024 helping elected leaders understand how serious the situation is for farmers, but the clock ran out. We'll redouble our efforts in 2025.

### Trade

Trade will be another significant issue this year. While we saw a big win last year

See 2025 on page 16



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*From 2025 on page 15*

when a U.S.-Mexico-Canada dispute settlement panel sided with American corn growers, there's more work to do when it comes to USMCA. This year is a review year for the agreement, which means we could see a renegotiation with two of our top trading partners. Our farmers and ranchers deserve a fair deal when it comes to our neighbors north and south of the border.

We remain concerned that the U.S. is falling behind other ag exporting countries in forming new trade agreements. For the third fiscal year in a row, the U.S. has seen an ag trade deficit. Trade leaders must refo-

cus on finding new markets and rebuilding relationships with former trading partners in order for the U.S. to be competitive in the global marketplace.

**Modernizing dairy policy**

Dairy policy has been a big topic throughout my time at Farm Bureau. We began work on reforming the Federal Milk Marketing Orders in 2022, and this year that work will finally come to fruition. We kept our boots on the ground throughout the entire months-long hearing process, and final results of that vote will be announced at some point in 2025. We stand ready help dairy farmers understand the changes and we are hopeful that our years of work will

result in fairer, more transparent milk pricing.

Clearly, there are many challenges and opportunities ahead in 2025. Last year, we saw just how effective we can be when the Farm Bureau family comes together to raise our unified voice. I'm confident we'll succeed in advancing our priorities in 2025 as we work together to build a brighter future for farmers and ranchers, rural communities, and our nation as a whole.

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

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Third Place - Jacob Rix, Sacramento County Farm Bureau

A 5 a.m. wakeup call, a Nikon D3400 with a tripod and a specific Oakdale hillcrest nevertheless resulted in “complete awe of the unexpected result” for Jacob Rix, a fieldman irrigation systems designer. A Nebraska native, Rix says he feels compelled to share the beauty he finds in Central Valley nut orchards. “Almond orchards in full bloom in every direction each season have given me the opportunity to bring California agricultural awareness back East with my photography,” Rix says. He says he hopes his image communicates “hope and faith for better days on the horizon.”





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# Caring for the land

*Award finalists showcase personalized approaches to conservation*

*Story by Caitlin Fillmore*

Meaningful conservation relies on consistent, measured actions sustained over time. This year’s finalists for the Leopold Conservation Award exemplify the rewards of long-term conservation in their daily practices.

The award in California is made possible by Sand County Foundation, American Farmland Trust, California Farm Bureau, Sustainable Conservation, The Harvey L. & Maud C. Sorensen Foundation, Farm Credit, USDA Natural Resources Conservation

Service, McDonald’s and alumni recipients of the California Leopold Conservation Award.

Bowles Farming Co.  
Merced County

For 166 years, the Bowles and Lawrence families have nurtured the land and ecosystem of Bowles Farming Co. in Los Banos. The thoughtful management practices established by farm founder Henry Miller in 1858 continue today as the company enters its seventh generation of operations—a milestone with deep significance.

“Caring for the same land for over a century ties us to it in ways that don’t happen overnight,” says CEO Cannon Michael. “Most family businesses don’t survive past three generations,

and we don’t assume that future generations are guaranteed. We are fortunate to have a family that understands the ups and downs of agriculture and the importance of investing annually in improving all aspects of the business.”

Bowles Farming Co.’s sustainability efforts earned it the 2024 Leopold Conservation Award, which honors farmers and ranchers who practice outstanding environmental stewardship. Named for renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the award recognizes those who consistently work to enhance the land under their care. This year, Hat Creek Grown in Shasta County, owned by Henry and Pam Giacomini, and Stemple Creek Ranch in Marin County, owned by Loren and Lisa Poncia, were finalists.

*See LAND on page 22*





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**From LAND on page 21****A commitment to conservation**

The present-day Bowles Farming Co. was formed in 1965 when the Bowles and Lawrence families united to preserve the original farm's footprint.

The company's wide reach includes 640 acres of natural wetlands, providing an ideal forage habitat for native pollinators and migratory birds. Bowles Farming Co. manages these areas in partnership with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, maintaining a high standard of conservation performance. Bowles also works to restore key river ecosystems, maintain its Bee Friendly Farming status and meet rigorous certification standards for the farm's crops, including tomatoes, corn, herbs, garlic and cotton.

The key to managing such a sprawling yet responsible enterprise is "thinking systemically," says Executive Vice President Derek Azevedo. He explains that decisions, such as switching to drip irrigation, are analyzed from all angles, considering factors ranging from water use to energy consumption. "We went solar to address this issue and reduce our long-run energy bills," he says. "We generate 2 million kilowatt-

hours annually, which is enough zero-carbon electricity for an electric vehicle to travel 6.7 million miles."

**Scaling up sustainably**

This systemic approach has positioned Bowles Farming Co. as a leader in regenerative practices. Nearly 10% of its farmland is certified organic, Azevedo says, compared to 2% of farmland across the U.S. As an early adopter of composting, Bowles established a full-scale composting center on the farm that converts 1,800 truckloads of green waste per year from nearby communities into a high-quality soil amendment.

Recognizing the limited supply of native plants crucial for habitat improve-

ment in agricultural settings, the company launched Great Valley Seed to address this gap. "We aim to help solve that supply problem across the whole of the San Joaquin Valley by using our farming expertise to scale up the production of cost-effective, farmer-friendly, locally sourced native plants," Azevedo says.

Great Valley Seed focuses on the unique needs of central and southern San Joaquin Valley, preserving and propagating local ecotypes of native plants essential for restoration. The company has collected more than 70 ecotypes of California native plant



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species and is currently cultivating a variety of grasses and flowering plants on more than 200 acres of land previously used for

row crops. To produce the seeds, Bowles Farming Co. must experiment with growing plant species without a documented

history of commercial propagation, Michael says.

As a startup within this century-plus farm enterprise, Great Valley Seed has experienced an uphill climb and has currently paused its independent operations, he adds. "There are many na-

tive species that are extremely valuable for the pollinator species that are essential for productive agriculture," Michael says, "but the sales cycles are much different than standard commercial crops."

Despite these obstacles, the company remains committed to this innovative conservation concept. Under the umbrella of Bowles Farming Co., the effort to grow and produce native seeds continues with partners, Michael says.

#### Investment in plants and people

Bowles Farming Co. includes its workforce in its sustainability initiatives, providing immigration support and funding scholarship programs. Azevedo recalls that before becoming CEO, Michael worked alongside field teams, observing how managers sought and respected the insights of their farm employees.

As the Leopold Conservation Award-winning company reflects on its legacy, Azevedo considers the Seventh Generation Principle. This indigenous concept encourages decision-makers to think about the impact on future generations.

"We believe a farm is more than a place to grow food and fiber. Yes, we grow stuff to eat and wear, but we also use our influence to grow people, habitat, wildlife and soil, doing our best to educate and inform consumers along the way," Azevedo says. "As the farm approaches its seventh generation, this principle is in full bloom."



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## *Upcoming Webinar*

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# 2025 Regulatory Updates

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January 23, 2025

10:00AM - 11:00AM

Presented by FELS

## *Free Webinar!*

### Topics Include:

- Indoor Heat Illness
- Workplace Violence
- Autonomous Tractors
- Overtime
- Minimum Wage

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Join us for a **FREE** Farm Bureau meeting to hear  
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Free to Members and Non-Members, so please  
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**Thursday, January 30, 2025**

5:30PM

Sheriff's Department, 250 Hackett Rd, Modesto





# 2025 TRAININGS



Register here:

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

## February 25, 2025 Food Safety - FSMA

9:00-10:30am - Spanish  
10:30-12:00pm - English

What is FSMA? Who does it apply to?  
How do I comply? What should I expect during  
an inspection?

Pricing: Member \$50/Nonmember \$60

## June 5, 2025 CPR & First Aid

8:00-12:00pm - Spanish  
1:00-5:00pm - English

CalOSHA requires that at least 1 employee for  
every 20 employees be trained.

Pricing: Member \$100/Nonmember \$125

## March 6, 2025 Pesticide Handler & Fit Testing

9:00-12:00pm - Spanish  
1:00-4:00pm - English

This is an annual training required by the  
Department of Pesticide Regulation.

Pricing: Member \$60/Nonmember \$75

## July 31, 2025 Tractor Safety

9:00-10:00am - Spanish  
10:00-11:00am - English

CalOSHA requires that employees who  
operate equipment be trained annually.

Pricing: Member \$40/Nonmember \$50

## May 1, 2025 Indoor&Outdoor Heat Illness Prevention

9:00-10:00am - Spanish  
10:00-11:00am - English

CalOSHA requires this training annually for  
employees.

Pricing: Member \$40/Nonmember \$50

## October 23, 2025 Hazardous Ag Materials (HAM)

9:00-10:30am - Spanish  
10:30-12:00pm - English

Everyone operating a class C vehicle carrying  
hazardous material must be trained.

Pricing: Member \$40/Nonmember \$50

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*This program is brought to you by Stanislaus County Farm  
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*Scan to nominate!*



## Meet the Winners of the 2024 Photo Contest

First Place - Rachel Ramey, Kern County Farm Bureau

"It was a beautiful moment," Rachel Ramey remembers about the birth she unexpectedly witnessed while visiting AdamsCows Dairy in Laton for a practice dairy-judging session with her Frontier FFA team. Ramey says she advocates being a "light to shine on ag wherever you go" and uses her smartphone to capture farming moments. This experience inspired not only this first-place image, but also a reminder that through all the work, unexpected instances of wonder make farming worth it. "People outside of the agriculture community don't get to experience moments like these. I wanted to capture (them) to show why agriculturalists do what we do."



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***Kaweah farms find balance under SGMA***  
In November, water managers and farmers in the Kaweah Subbasin in Tulare County won a unique victory when their revised plan for groundwater sustainability convinced state regulators to cancel their consideration of probation for the subbasin under California's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. In the first edition of Ag Alert's® new Q&A series, On the Record, published by the California Farm Bureau, water manager Aaron Fukuda talks about navigating SGMA in the Kaweah Subbasin.

#### ***Kern County immigration sweep halts citrus harvest***

Scores of farmworkers stayed home last week amid an immigration enforcement operation conducted in Kern County by U.S. Border Patrol. "The crew didn't show up," said Peter Belluomini, who grows and packs lemons, mandarins and navel oranges east of Bakersfield, and is in the middle of harvesting all three crops. "Instead of 30 people, there were like five," said Belluomini, referring to workers hired through a farm labor contractor for his citrus harvest. "The rest were hiding at home."

#### ***State water board readopts drought flows for Siskiyou County***

Even though hydrologic conditions point to a more positive water outlook for the Scott River and Shasta River in Siskiyou County, state water officials last week readopted drought emergency regulations that curtail water rights in the region, affecting farmers and ranchers. The regulation first took effect in 2021. Readopted for the Scott River and Shasta River watersheds every year since, the order limits surface-water diversions and groundwater pumping.

#### ***California Bountiful TV tours San Diego County***

In its latest episode, California Bountiful TV explores agricultural and culinary landmarks in San Diego County. Host Aubrey Aquino visits the nation's only producer of avocado oil, a family-owned and -operated egg ranch and a mushroom farm that's tucked into the hills of Escondido. Aquino also enjoys a multi-course fine dining experience in a San Diego backyard with a wait-

ing list that's a year long. The weekly show produced by the California Farm Bureau is up for three Taste Awards this year, with voting taking place through Feb. 7.

#### ***New Year marks start of new laws and regulations***

The start of another year has brought with it new laws and regulations that affect agricultural production in California. As of Jan. 1, new policies related to water, labor, air quality, endangered species and other issues that impact farmers have taken effect.

#### ***Photo contest winners capture the magic of agriculture***

Photographers who submitted their images to the 43rd annual California Farm Bureau Photo Contest captured inspiring moments last year on California farms, such as the birth of a calf, the beauty of almond bloom and the dedication of an overnight harvest crew. Rachel Ramey of Kern County took first place for her photo of a newborn calf at Adamscows Dairy in Laton.

#### ***Leopold Conservation Award finalists show personalized approaches to conservation***

For 166 years, the Bowles and Lawrence families have nurtured the land and ecosystem of Bowles Farming Co. in Los Banos. Bowles Farming Co.'s sustainability efforts earned it the 2024 Leopold Conservation Award, which honors farmers and ranchers who practice outstanding environmental stewardship. The company's wide reach includes 640 acres of natural wetlands, providing an ideal forage habitat for native pollinators and migratory birds.

#### ***Field report offers insight on California chestnut crop***

Stanislaus County chestnut farmer Joe Avila told Ag Alert earlier this month about the chestnut crop he harvested in the fall. "The crop was a little bit light," Avila said. "We had a hot summer. The beginning of October was so hot in Modesto that it dried a lot of the chestnuts on the tree. When we picked them up mechanically, we were cracking a lot of them because they were so dry."

## Meet the Winners of the 2024 Photo Contest

Second Place - Maddy Nissen,  
Glenn County Farm Bureau

“What is so unique about this photo is that it was not posed,” Maddy Nissen says.

“There are not many photos of my grandpa. When I saw him leaning on the gate, I knew this was a memory I wanted to capture.” For Nissen, her image represents the strength of farmers like her grandpa, Jack Bucke, a feed store owner and rice farmer. He was watching his cattle graze when she took the shot. “This photo serves as a testament to the people who work so tirelessly for not only California agriculture but to feed the world,” Nissen says.



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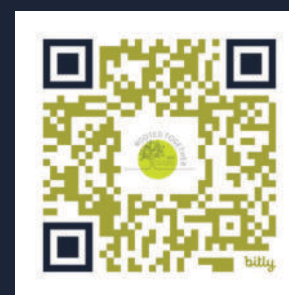
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