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The *voice* of Stanislaus County Agriculture

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Agriculture

Happy National Ag Week!

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Advocacy Updates

House Agriculture Committee Advances "Skinny" Farm Bill

Last week, the House Agriculture Committee passed the Farm, Food and National Security Act of 2026. A "skinny" farm bill, the legislation would provide a much-needed boost for agricultural producers across the country. The bill includes new and direct benefits to the specialty crop industry while adding new funding for additional market access, forestry and wildfire mitigation programs, risk management tools and others. It still awaits a full vote in the House before heading over to the Senate. View additional information here.

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

California Farm Bureau Files Amicus in U.S. Supreme Court case on Pesticide Labeling and Roundup

On Monday, California Farm Bureau, along with 12 other state Farm Bureaus, submitted an amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in *Monsanto Co. v. John L. Durnell*. The state Farm Bureaus urged the court that the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act prevents states from imposing additional or different labeling requirements on pesticides. If the court upholds the decision by the Missouri Court of Appeals, states would be allowed to require different labeling requirements, causing harm to the nation's farmers. The U.S. Supreme Court will hold oral arguments on April 27.

Staff contact: Kari Fisher, kfisher@cfbf.com.

that are central to the research mission of demonstration forests. Sites such as Jackson Demonstration State Forest have long served as living laboratories for redwood ecology and climate resilience research, conducted in partnership with institutions such as the University of California, Berkeley, and UC Cooperative Extension.

In addition, decades of research show that active forest management helps reduce wildfire risk and supports long-term carbon storage. Studies from Blodgett Forest and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Pacific Southwest Research Station demonstrate that thinning and sustainable harvest reduce fuel loads and prevent catastrophic fires, while responsibly harvested wood products continue to store carbon. Taken together, these changes could undermine both the financial stability and scientific mission of California's demonstration forest system.

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

Tricolored Blackbird RCPP Update

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service has announced that the payment rate for harvest delay (Practice 645 Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, Scenario #46 – Delayed Harvest, Silage-Corn Rotation) under this year's Tricolored Blackbird Regional Conservation Partnership Program will be \$945.70 per acre. While this figure is shy of the EverAg estimated impact rate of \$1,019, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife may supplement this rate depending on current costs for replacement grain.

CDFW will determine any supplemental rate based on current year's costs by mid-April. NRCS and CDFW pay compensation directly to farmers, and payments may be received within three to four weeks after completion of contract requirements. To ensure this payment timeline, it is important for landowners to call and/or visit their local NRCS field office as soon as they learn about the program. As a reminder, harvest delay is needed only on the portion of the field with tricolored blackbirds, including a

See 'Advocacy' on page 4



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Concerns Raised with AB 2494 and Demonstration Forest Management

Assembly Bill 2494 would redirect revenue generated from forest products and recreation away from the Forest Resources Improvement Fund, where it currently supports demonstration forest operations, and into a broader statewide fund. This change could create uncertainty for forest management, research programs, infrastructure and wildfire mitigation work that these forests rely on to remain largely self-sustaining.

The bill would also significantly restrict timber harvest and silvicultural tools

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small buffer zone of approximately 100 feet.

Audubon began conducting road surveys two weeks ago, and surveys are ongoing. Very little breeding activity has been detected other than two sites. However, it will likely accelerate with the onset of warmer weather.

Staff contact: Richard Filgas, rfilgas@cfbf.com.

Trade and Fuel Disruptions Amid Iran Conflict

Ongoing conflict involving Iran is creating uncertainty for global energy markets and trade. Oil prices, which had declined to about \$60 per barrel in December, have climbed to nearly \$100 per barrel since the conflict began.

Fuel prices are also rising domestically. According to AAA data, the average price of diesel in California has increased to \$6.20 per gallon, up from \$5.03 one month ago. Much of the concern centers around the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway along Iran's southern border that connects the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean. Roughly one-third of global oil shipments pass through this corridor, where several vessels have reportedly been attacked in recent days.

In response to the disruptions, the International Energy Agency announced Wednesday that it will release 400 million barrels of oil from its strategic reserves. The release is intended to stabilize markets and ease supply disruptions across its 32 member countries, which include nations in Europe, the Americas and parts of Asia. Staff contact: Matthew Viohl, mviohl@cfbf.com.

Reminder: Acreage Reporting Deadline is This Afternoon for Specialty Crop Farmers Program

Today at 2 p.m. is the deadline for farmers to report acreage for the Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers Program. The program will distribute \$1 billion in economic

assistance to producers of specialty crops, sugar and other commodities as part of the broader \$12 billion Farmer Bridge Assistance Program.

Producers who may be eligible are encouraged to review program requirements and report their 2025 acreage to their local U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency office before the deadline. Acreage reporting is the first step required to participate in the program. Staff contact: Matthew Viohl, mviohl@cfbf.com.

Senate Agriculture Committee Holds Hearing on Boosting US-Grown Farm Products

Earlier this week, the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry held a hearing focused on strengthening domestic demand for U.S.-grown agricultural products. Witnesses included American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall and several other agricultural leaders.

In his written testimony, Duvall emphasized that expanding domestic markets could provide greater stability for producers, particularly as global trade disruptions continue to create new costs and uncertainties for the agricultural industry.

The hearing covered a range of issues impacting U.S. agriculture, including the farm bill, agricultural research, year-round E15 fuel access, conservation programs and additional policies affecting producers and rural communities.

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

USDA Announces Grant Programs Under Local Ag Mar-

ket Program

On Tuesday, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced more than \$26 million in grant projects through the Local Agriculture Market Program. The program historically aims to boost local and regional food purchasing through several initiatives. The announcement includes a handful of projects selected in California under the Farmers Market Promotion Program and Local Food Promotion Program. More details can be found here.

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

Growing Demand for American Grown Agriculture

By: Zippy Duvall, American Farm Bureau President

On my family farm in Georgia, every season begins with the same basic question: will the numbers work? Like farmers across the country, my family looks at the cost of seed, fertilizer, feed, fuel, and labor before we plant a crop or expand the herd. Farming has never been easy, but lately, it's been harder to make those numbers work.

This week, I had the opportunity to testify before the Senate Agriculture Committee about the challenges farmers and ranchers are facing and what it will take to keep American agriculture strong in the years

ahead.

As I shared with lawmakers, the story of today's farm economy is one of incredible productivity paired with increasingly tight margins. Farmers today are producing more than ever. Innovation and technology have helped us grow more food, fiber, and fuel using fewer resources than ever before. But productivity alone does not pay the bills.

Across the countryside, farmers are facing a squeeze on their balance sheets. Input costs remain historically high while prices for many commodities have fallen significantly. At the same time, recent disruptions to global fertilizer markets and shipping routes are creating even more uncertainty around one of farmers' most essential inputs.

All of this is adding to the financial pressure farmers are facing. USDA projects farm income in 2026 to be \$48 billion below the highs we saw just a few years ago. Farmers are doing what they have always done. They are working harder, becoming more efficient, and adapting to change. Yet many are still struggling to stay ahead.

This challenge is bigger than a single tough year. It reflects deeper changes in the farm economy. If production continues to rise but demand doesn't keep up, prices fall and margins shrink. This is why strengthening demand for American grown agricul-

ture products must be part of the conversation about the future of agriculture.

Strengthening Demand for American Grown Products

Exports will always be critical to American agriculture. Farmers depend on global markets, and we must continue working to expand fair and reliable trade opportunities around the world. But global markets can also be unpredictable. Global competition is increasing, trade relationships can shift quickly, and supply chain disruptions can send ripple effects through the farm economy. That's why growing demand here at home is so important. When American families choose food, fuel, and fiber produced by our farmers and ranchers, it strengthens rural economies and supports the people who work every day to feed and fuel our nation.

Biofuels are one example of how strong domestic demand can benefit agriculture. Ethanol and biodiesel have created major markets for crops like corn and soybeans while helping strengthen America's energy security. Expanding year-round access to E15 and supporting new markets like sustainable aviation fuel can help create more demand for farm products while supporting rural economies.

Another way to strengthen domestic demand is by ensuring that American-grown food is prioritized in programs that serve families across the country. Millions of meals are served every day through the National School Lunch Program and meals served to our men and women in uniform. When those meals include food grown by American farmers, they provide dependable markets for farmers while supporting the nutrition of families and service members. Ensuring strong enforcement of Buy American provisions can help make sure these programs support American agriculture whenever possible.

That same principle applies beyond food. Policies like the Buying American Cotton



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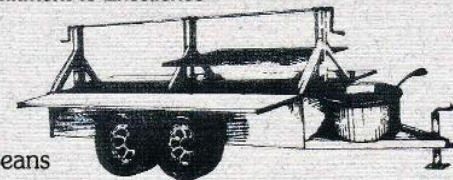
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From 'ZIPPY' on page 5

Act are another way Congress can support demand for products grown by American farmers while also supporting domestic manufacturing. When we prioritize American-grown products, we strengthen the entire supply chain.

Preserving Farmland for the Future of



American Grown Agriculture

At the same time, we must protect the foundation of American agriculture itself. Farmland is more than just land. It is a strategic national asset. Once farmland is converted to other uses, it rarely comes back into production. According to USDA, we lost 20.1 million acres of farmland between 2017 and 2022, along with more than 175,000 farms since 2017.

Keeping farmland economically viable is critical for food security, rural communities, and the future of agriculture. That's why getting a new, modernized farm bill across the finish line remains essential. The farm bill provides the risk management tools, conservation programs, and research investments that help farmers navigate uncertainty and keep land in production for the next generation.

Keeping American Grown Products Competitive

Farmers don't want to rely on short-term assistance. What we want are strong markets and policies that allow us to compete and succeed.

As I said in my testimony this week, farmers are ready to innovate, adapt, and meet the needs of consumers here at home and around the world. But keeping American agriculture strong will require policies that support growing demand, fair trade opportunities, and reliable farm safety net programs.

Farmers and ranchers are producing at historic levels. Now we must ensure strong market opportunities here at home to keep family farms in business.



"Keeping farmland economically viable is critical for food security, rural communities, and the future of agriculture."



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California Water, SGMA, and the Future of Farming

Source: AgNet West

California agriculture has always depended on one critical resource: water. But understanding today's water debates requires looking back at how the state's complex water system was built—and how policy decisions over the past several decades have changed the landscape for farmers.

In a recent Ag Meter podcast interview, host Nick Papagni sat down with Geoffrey Vanden Heuvel of the Milk Producers Council to discuss the history of California water infrastructure, the impact of environmental regulations, and what the future may hold for the San Joaquin Valley and the state's farming communities.

How California Built an Agricultural Powerhouse

California's agricultural success didn't happen by accident. In the early days of the state, farming depended heavily on unpredictable rainfall and natural river flows. The state's Mediterranean climate created extreme swings between wet and dry years, leaving farmers vulnerable to both flooding and drought.

To solve this problem, massive water infrastructure projects were developed during the 20th century. The Central Valley Project, launched during the Great Depression, built major dams like Shasta and a network of canals to move water from Northern California south to farms throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

Later, the State Water Project expanded the system further, constructing Oroville Dam and the 444-mile California Aqueduct, delivering water to agriculture and growing urban populations across the state.

Together, these systems helped transform California into one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world. Today, more than seven million acres of irrigated farmland produce hundreds of crops that feed the nation and much of the world.

Environmental Regulations and Changing Water Policy

Beginning in the 1970s, environmental regulations started to reshape how California's water projects operate. Laws like the Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act introduced new requirements designed to protect ecosystems and fish populations, particularly in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

According to Vanden Heuvel, restrictions implemented over the past three decades have

significantly reduced the amount of water that can be moved from Northern California through the Delta to farms in the Central Valley.

The assumption behind many of those restrictions was that sending more water through rivers and out to the ocean would help restore declining fish populations such as delta smelt and salmon.

However, Vanden Heuvel says the results have been mixed at best. Despite decades of increased environmental flows, the delta smelt population has nearly disappeared and salmon runs continue to face challenges.

This has prompted increased research and discussion about whether current strategies are the most effective approach.

Groundwater and the Impact of SGMA

Another major shift came in 2014 when California passed the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).

The law requires regions across the state to bring groundwater pumping into balance with natural recharge, forcing local agencies



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to develop groundwater sustainability plans.

For decades, farmers relied on groundwater during dry periods when surface water supplies were limited. But as restrictions increased and groundwater pumping expanded, some areas of the San Joaquin Valley experienced severe overdraft and land subsidence.

SGMA aims to correct those imbalances, but the transition is not without consequences. Studies show that if groundwater pumping is reduced without new water supplies, up to one million acres of farmland could be fallowed in the San Joaquin Valley.

The economic implications are significant, potentially costing the region billions of dollars in economic activity and tens of thousands of jobs.

A Plan to Close the Water Gap

To address these challenges, agricultural leaders, water districts, and local governments are working together through the Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley and the Unified Valley Water Plan.

The goal is to identify infrastructure projects, recharge opportunities, and water management strategies that could help offset groundwater reductions required under SGMA.

At the same time, the California Legislature recently directed the Department of Water Resources to begin planning for nine million acre-feet of additional water supply statewide.

If successful, these efforts could help protect both California agriculture and the state's broader economy.

Telling Agriculture's Story

Vanden Heuvel also emphasized the importance of educating the public about farming.

Many urban residents simply

don't understand where their food comes from or how policies affect the farmers who grow it. Yet when people hear directly from farmers, they often become more engaged and supportive.

He believes farmers must continue sharing their stories, building connections with urban communities, and holding policymakers accountable for water decisions that affect the state's food supply.

California agriculture, he says, still has tremendous potential—but solving the state's water challenges will require collaboration, smart investments, and stronger communication.

The graphic design features a green header with the stylized text "j ' Đ Á c ' š • Š ĩ ? Đ Á". Below this, on a dark grey background, are two large white "Ù" characters. Further down, there are smaller "Ù" characters and a blue "< Đ" symbol. The central element is the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau logo, which includes a green square with a white "FB" and a leaf, followed by the text "STANISLAUS COUNTY FARM BUREAU". Below the logo is a green line-art illustration of a basket filled with various fruits and vegetables. Underneath the basket is a block of text: "Ù \$+, (+ (#+++ /+(5 .) !) !./". Below that is another "Ù" character followed by a line of text: "+ % (+1. !) !. / .!0 . !/\$+ 0! ' %**!." Below that is another line of text: "\$+.0 !!0%*# .+#.) Ī (%"+.*%". At the bottom, there is a line of text: "İ % = Ù % = + .!/.2! 0% '10/ ((, - %/%0 0\$! 3! /%0! +. / * \$". In the bottom right corner, there is a QR code.

California Ag Leadership Program Continues to Cultivate Future Leaders

Farm Credit proud to support the program, now in its 55th year, which is recognized as one of the top leadership development programs in the nation.

Kevin Voorhees is a mid-career ag lending professional who felt ready for a next-level leadership development program at a time when California agriculture is facing significant economic, regulatory and generational challenges.

Out of nearly 40 programs he could choose from, it quickly became clear that the best program for him would be the California Agricultural Leadership Program. Launched in 1970 by the California Agricultural Leadership Foundation (CALF), the program has now trained over 1,500 leaders in agriculture and related fields.

Voorhees, a vice president for AgWest Farm Credit in Paso Robles, said he was talking one day to a colleague who had participated in the program and was encouraged to look into it.

“I’d always heard of it, but I wasn’t aware of the focus. So I researched it and talked to a ton of alums and everyone spoke highly of it – each person said it was a life-changing program. That was enough to make it my No. 1 choice,” he said.

After an intense application process, he was accepted into Class 55 of the program and is immersed in the 17-month program designed to provide leadership development to up-and-coming professionals in the state’s agricultural sector.

The goal is to build a powerful network to keep agriculture a viable and important part of the state’s economy, said Lesa Eidman, a member of the Program’s Class 49 who became CALF’s president and CEO in February 2025.

“We’re one of the premier leadership development programs in the U.S.,” Eidman said. “Our mission

is ‘growing leaders who make a difference’ by providing sessions in leadership theory, communications, motivation and change management. But most importantly, it is focused on self-analysis and self-reflection to help participants learn about themselves.”

CALF partners with Cal Poly Pomona, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Fresno State, Chico State, and UC Davis to deliver an integrated curriculum throughout the program’s seminars in collaboration

Ag Leadership Class 55



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with CALF’s education team, led by the Director of Education Dane White. Participants learn from top educators, subject-matter experts and leaders from diverse fields who challenge them to think differently and grow as influential voices in agriculture. AgWest Farm Credit California President Kevin Ralph said the program has made a major difference since it was launched in 1970.

“Farm Credit is proud to support the program because participants become lifelong leaders who individually and collectively make a significant difference in the agricultural industry, their businesses, communities and families,” Ralph said.

“We’re also pleased that while CALF focuses on up-and-coming leaders in the production side of agriculture, they also select participants who are ag-adjacent, like our own team member Kevin this year. Lenders, processors, advisors and suppliers play an important role in ag’s future as well.”

Farm Credit associations supporting CALF are AgWest Farm Credit, American AgCredit, CoBank, Golden State Farm Credit and Yosemite Farm Credit. These organizations are part of the nationwide Farm Credit System – the largest provider of credit to U.S. agriculture.

The foundation was created in 1962 by the Council of California Growers, and the program was launched after a group of Michigan farmers visited California in the late 1960s as part of an ag leadership program sponsored by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The CCG leaders and staff agreed a similar program would be tremendously beneficial for the state’s ag industry.

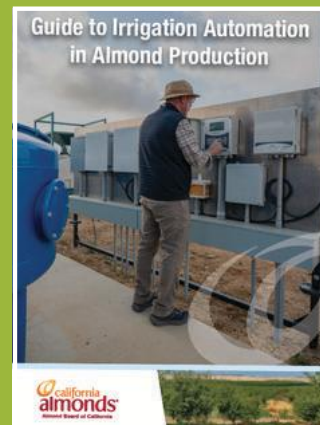
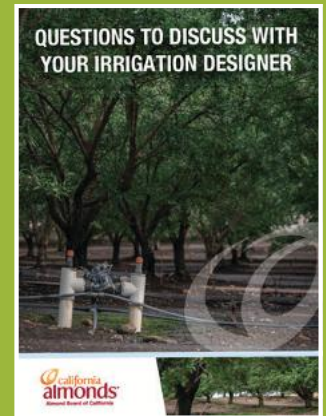
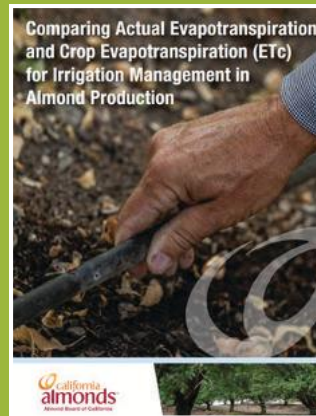
Applications open in January and program alums are very involved in the three-series application process. A total of 24 participants are selected each year out of more than 100 applicants. Multiple-day sessions are held at each of the five participating universities, where participants build enhanced critical thinking skills

See 'Leader' on page 13

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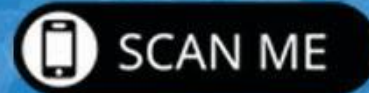


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From 'Leader' on page 11

that will help graduates develop creative solutions.

Eidman added that participants engage in learning experiences grounded in the program's Diamond Model approach that expand their thinking and perspective. These experiences encourage openness to diverse viewpoints and strengthen participants' ability to listen and learn from others, while naturally building strong camaraderie within the cohort.

The program also includes a trip within the U.S. – this year to Chicago and Washington, DC – and an overseas visit to broaden their horizons. Last year's overseas trip was to southern Africa.

Jacob DeBoer, a senior regional marketing manager with American AgCredit said the program is unique because participants engage in situations and discussions focused on complex social and cultural issues.

"For example, key questions for the current class in their first seminar were 'Who are we?' and 'What does it mean to belong?'"

See 'Leader' on page 14



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From 'Leader' on page 13

Outside-the-box thinking like this helps shape effective leadership and as importantly helps participants grow as individuals," De-Boer said.

CALF invests around \$70,000 in each participant. The applicants pay a \$1,000 fee but money raised by foundations, alums and supporters, and organizations like Farm Credit provide the bulk of the funding

Voorhees said the investment is well worth it. "The program is very well run. I don't think a minute of the sessions have been wasted," he said.

"I'm going to get all the leadership skills you can think of, but the bigger aspect will be my growth as a person. I'm being forced out of my comfort zone but that's like on an airplane – you have to have your mask on before you can help someone else. I want to learn to be confident that I can lead and be authentic and give back and have an impact on people's lives."

Applications are now being accepted for the Class 56. The deadline for phase one of the three-phase application process must be completed by March 27. Information and the application form are available at <https://www.agleaders.org/class56apply/>

###

About Farm Credit:

AgWest Farm Credit, American AgCredit, CoBank, Golden State Farm Credit and Yosemite Farm Credit are cooperatively owned lending institutions providing agriculture and rural communities with a dependable source of credit. For more than 100 years, the Farm Credit System has specialized in financing farmers, ranchers, farmer-owned cooperatives, rural utilities and agribusinesses. Farm Credit offers a broad range of loan products and financial services, including long-term real estate loans, operating lines of credit, equipment and facility loans, cash management and appraisal and leasing services...everything a "growing" business needs. For more information, visit www.farmcreditalliance.com

About the California Agricultural Leadership Foundation

The California Agricultural Leadership Foundation (CALF) is dedicated to cultivating leaders who have the vision and capacity to advance, benefit, and promote California's agricultural community. Since its founding in 1970, more than 1,500 fellows of the California Agricultural Leadership Program have become lifelong leaders, serving as catalysts for a vibrant agricultural industry and making lasting contributions to their businesses, communities, and families. CALF delivers a comprehensive and diverse leadership curriculum in collaboration with its five partner universities: UC Davis, Cal Poly Pomona, Fresno State, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and Chico State.



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Nominating Committee Report

Notice to Members: Recommended Slate of Officers (2026-2028)

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California Farm Bureau celebrates bipartisan committee passage of the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026

California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass commented today on the House Agriculture Committee’s bipartisan passage of H.R. 7567, the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026. She said:

“California Farm Bureau applauds the House Agriculture Committee’s bipartisan passage of the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026. We greatly appreciate Chairman G.T. Thompson’s ongoing dedication to advancing the farm bill process and including key provisions that will modernize farm policy, increase certainty

and enhance the competitiveness of California farms and ranches. We especially thank California Reps. Jim Costa and Adam Gray for their support of the bill and their ongoing support for California farmers and ranchers.

“Farmers and ranchers have been without certainty of a new farm bill since it first expired in 2023, and have been grappling with low commodity prices, rising supply costs, inflation and uncertain international trade dynamics. While there is still more work to be done, passage of the Farm, Food, and National Security Act would provide California producers with assurance of a full five-year farm bill, thus strengthening America’s rural communities. We urge House leaders to move swiftly and bring H.R. 7567 to a vote on the floor.”

The California Farm Bureau works to protect family farms and ranches as part of a nationwide network representing more than 5 million Farm Bureau members. Learn more at www.cfbf.com or follow @cafarmbureau on Instagram, LinkedIn, X or Facebook.



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GRAY SECURES MAJOR WINS FOR CENTRAL VALLEY FARMERS, BUSINESSES, AND RURAL COMMUNITIES IN 2026 FARM BILL

WASHINGTON, DC — Congressman Adam Gray (CA-13) used his position on the House Committee on Agriculture this week to push for and secure important priorities for Central Valley farmers, businesses, and rural communities in the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026. Commonly referred to as the Farm Bill, this is the major multiyear law that governs an array of agricultural and food programs that are essential to Valley growers and producers.

"I am proud to represent one of the world's largest agricultural regions," said Congressman Gray. "That's why I am committed to delivering bipartisan results for Valley farmers, ranchers, dairymen, and their families. Committee passage of this Farm

Bill is an important first step to ensure that our agricultural communities have the resources, support, and certainty they need to continue to feed families across the country."

The Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 would expand risk management tools for farmers, protect American-grown commodities, and support precision agriculture and new technology. Specifically, the legislation supports specialty crop growers by strengthening research and development, doubling funding for the Market Access Program (MAP), the Foreign Market Development Program (FMD), and the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC) programs. Additionally, it establishes a specialty crop advisory committee for policy development and expansion, expands procurement programs, and improves the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

During markup of the legislation, the Committee unanimously passed two of Congressman Gray's amendments offered on behalf of Central Valley farmers that would:

- Require the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to report to Congress how changes to or expiration of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement will affect the agriculture industry; and
- Provide states with the flexibility to allocate up to 20% of their Emergency Food Assistance Program funding towards the USDA Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. This program allows states to use their resources on locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables. Additionally, Congressman Gray was also able to secure a commitment from Committee Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson (R-PA) to secure billions of dollars in long-overdue economic assistance for specialty crop growers through a future government

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funding bill. Valley specialty crops have been hit particularly hard over the past year due to trade uncertainty, rising input costs, and weakened market competition.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING:

California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass: "Farmers and ranchers have been without certainty of a new farm bill since it first expired in 2023, and have been grappling with low commodity prices, rising supply costs, inflation and uncertain international trade dynamics. California Farm Bureau thanks Rep. Adam Gray for his support on the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026. Passing an updated farm bill is critical to managing risk on the farm, keeping rural communities thriving and feeding our nation and the world." Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance: "The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance appreci-

ates Rep. Gray for his support of the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026. The bill aligns with the Alliance's priorities, and Representative Gray's amendment – expanding government procurement to encompass a broader selection of fruits and vegetables – further enhances its impact, benefiting a greater number of growers. We thank him for his work on behalf of specialty crop producers in California and across the United States."

Alexi Rodriguez, CEO of Almond Alliance: "On behalf of the Almond Alliance, I commend Congressman Gray for his vote to advance the Farm Bill, a decision that directly supports thousands of jobs up and down California's Central Valley. By backing a bill that strengthens export promotion, improves disaster and risk management tools for tree crops, invests in research, conservation, and precision agriculture, Congressman Gray is helping safeguard paychecks for farmworkers, growers, processors, and transportation workers who all depend on a competitive, resilient almond industry."


Caitie Diemel, Executive Director, Stanislaus County Farm Bureau: "Stanislaus County Farm Bureau appreciates Congressman Adam Gray's leadership and support on including our farmers and ranchers' needs in the Farm Bill. These programs lead to a more effective and sustainable agriculture system and ultimately support our local communities."

Breanne Vandenberg, Executive Director, Merced County Farm Bureau: "Merced County Farm Bureau appreciate Congressman Adam Gray's leadership and support on including our farmers and ranchers needs in the Farm Bill as agriculture is the heart of Congressional District 13. These programs lead to more effective and sustainable agriculture systems and ultimately support our local communities. Our organizations stand ready to work with Congressman Gray in realizing a clear path forward, ensuring agriculture remains a vibrant economic driver."


Dave Puglia, Western Growers President and CEO: "Specialty crop growers in the San Joaquin Valley thank Rep. Gray for his leadership on the Farm Bill, and his acknowledgement that this legislation is necessary to provide long-lasting solutions for the challenges facing American agriculture."

Ian LeMay, California Table Grape Commission President: "The California Table Grape Commission appreciates Congressman Adam Gray's leadership and engagement in supporting the Farm Bill process and strengthening the competitiveness of specialty crop producers, including California's table grape growers. As specialty crop producers face significant economic pressures, continued representation of the specialty crop community by Congressman Gray is critical to supporting the long-term vitality of the industry."

Michael M. Delbar, CEO, California Rangeland Trust: "The California Rangeland Trust commends Representative Adam Gray for supporting the House Farm Bill,



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particularly the strengthened Conservation Title. Conserving working lands protects vital environmental benefits — including water resources, wildlife habitat, climate resilience, and natural wildfire buffers — while also strengthening America’s food security and national security. These improvements will help more producers steward the lands that sustain our environment and the nation’s long-term stability.”

Todd Sanders, California Apple Commission Executive Director: “As the fifth-largest apple-producing state in the nation, California plays a vital role in American agriculture. The California Apple Commission supports continued progress on the Farm Bill and appreciates Congressman Gray and our Central Valley representatives for their leadership in advancing policies that strengthen California agriculture — particularly the specialty crop industries.”

Michelle Borges, California Blueberry Commission Director of Technical Affairs and Operations: “As one of the nation’s leading producers of fresh blueberries, California plays an important role in supplying high-quality fruit to consumers across the country and around the world. The California Blueberry Commission urges Congress to advance and complete a strong, forward-looking Farm Bill. We appreciate Congressman Gray and California’s congressional delegation for their leadership in supporting policies that promote innovation, sustainability, and the long-term success of specialty crop agriculture.”

Jackie Kennedy, Chair of the Olive Oil Commission of California: As a grower and Chair

of the Olive Oil Commission of California, I appreciate the dedication of California’s congressional delegation, including Congressman Gray, in advancing a strong and effective Farm Bill. An improved Farm Bill is essential to supporting the continued growth, competitiveness, and long-term success of California’s expanding extra-virgin olive oil industry.

Galen Pfeiffer, Chairman of the Olive Growers Council of California: As a California table olive grower for more than 30 years, I rely on our congressional delegation to represent and support our industry in Washington, D.C. I urge California’s representatives, including Congressman

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Gray, to advance the next Farm Bill without delay. A strong and improved Farm Bill is critical to the continued success of California's Black and Green Ripe olive industry and the farming families who sustain it.

Michael Dykes, D.V.M., International Dairy Food Association President and CEO: "The House Farm Bill would expand SNAP dairy incentives to include additional nutritious dairy products and provide certainty to core federal dairy programs, ensuring low-income families have greater access to affordable, wholesome dairy foods while

giving farmers and processors the certainty they need to continue delivering for America. IDFA is grateful to Representative Gray for working to pass this Farm Bill."

Mollie Van Lieu, Vice President, Nutrition and Health, International Fresh Produce Association: "The International Fresh Produce Association thanks Congressman Gray for voting to advance the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 and for supporting provisions that address the unique needs of specialty crop producers. The bill delivers certainty and fairness for

growers while taking steps to strengthen America's nutrition secu-

ity. We especially appreciate Rep. Gray's successful amendment to allow states' food bank networks to reserve up to 20% of their USDA Foods allotment on fresh produce. This common-sense but groundbreaking policy will significantly expand the ability of growers to provide their full bounty of U.S. grown fresh produce to nourish those in need."

Krysta Harden, President and CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council: "U.S. dairy farmers and exporters rely on common-sense policies that preserve and expand their global market presence. We thank Congressman Gray for his leadership in supporting a bipartisan Farm Bill this week that invests in critical agricultural export

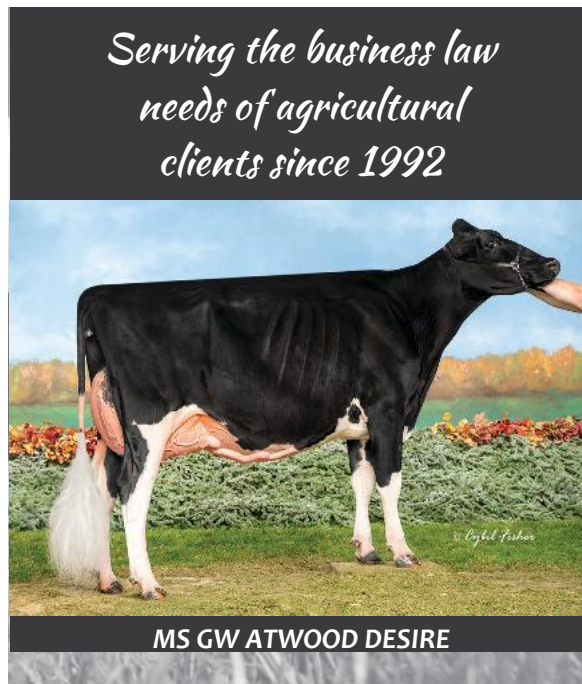
promotions, preserves our right to use common cheese names in global markets, and continues funding for lifesaving international food aid programs that incorporate dairy."

The Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 passed out of the House Committee on Agriculture with bipartisan support, 34-17, and will now proceed to full consideration by the U.S. House of Representatives.

###

Rep. Adam Gray represents California's 13th Congressional District, spanning the San Joaquin Valley.

Visit gray.house.gov for more information on his work in Washington and follow him on X, Facebook and Instagram.



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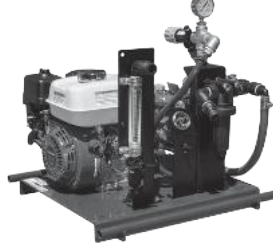
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Iran war strands California farm exports

The U.S.-Israeli war with Iran, now in its third week, is taking a toll on California's high-value agriculture sector. In addition to causing sharp increases in fuel and fertilizer costs, the war has disrupted access to key export markets. Since the war began on Feb. 28, Iran has responded to U.S. attacks by effectively closing the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial shipping route, and paralyzing commercial ports in nearby countries that host U.S. military bases. Robert Verloop, CEO of the California Walnut Board and Commission, said 70,000 tons of walnuts, or about 10% of the billion-dollar sector's yearly production, were either en route to the Middle East or scheduled to be shipped there this month. "That certainly is at risk," Verloop said. Tulare County nut exporter Bikram Hundal said one vessel carrying a shipment of his was diverted to the Netherlands, while another was rerouted to Algeria. "It's going to be a loss," Hundal said.

Could tea be California's next cash crop?

Aside from water, tea is the most widely consumed beverage in the world. It can be

found in almost 80% of U.S. households, according to the Tea Association of the USA Inc. More than 160 million Americans drink tea, yet tea isn't grown domestically. Atef Swelam, director of the University of California Kearney Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Fresno County, would like to see California farmers capitalize on this untapped market. "We import about 120 million pounds of tea into the U.S. annually, spending about \$6 billion," Swelam said. He added that as San Joaquin Valley farmland is retired to comply with California's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, the niche crop could give growers a way to maximize profit per acre. This week, farmers are invited to the Kearney Agricultural Research and Extension Center to learn about opportunities for growing and marketing the crop.

Tomato agreement aims to manage parasitic weed

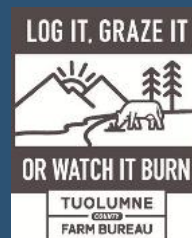
Beginning this season, processing tomato growers, haulers and harvesters will come under mandatory state compliance agreements designed to contain and manage the

parasitic weed broomrape. The California Department of Food and Agriculture introduced the agreements, which spell out equipment sanitation and broomrape risks, just before the 2025 season as part of a soft launch. This season, the agreements will be required to be signed by all parties before tomatoes are moved from a field, said Michelle Dennis, CDFA Integrated Pest Control Branch chief. The reason for the tough stance is the potential economic impact the weed poses to the state's processing tomato industry, said Brad Hanson, a University of California Cooperative Extension weed specialist. "It means you can go from a pretty small problem to a pretty big problem in short order," he said.

Farm Bureau president invites members to state Capitol

California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass is inviting the organization's members to advocate at the state Capitol in Sacramento this spring on issues that affect California farmers and ranchers. "More often than not, elected officials genuinely want to do the right thing. But they can't possibly be experts in every industry. Unless we take the time to explain how proposals affect agriculture, they simply won't know," Douglass said this month in an Ag Alert® commentary. The Farm Bureau's Calling on the Capitol Series will bring farmers and ranchers from across the state to Sacramento, where they will meet with state lawmakers and legislative staff. The series will include visits to the Capitol on March 18, April 21, May 5 and May 26.

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Farmworkers lament loss of hours and pay

California's 2016 agricultural overtime law was meant to raise wages for farmworkers. While some have benefited from the law, a growing body of research suggests it has ended up reducing overall earnings for farmworkers as employers shortened the workweek to keep their costs down. By 2022, when the law was

partially phased in, farm employees in California were working three to five hours less per week than a decade prior. On average, their weekly income had declined by \$80 to \$120, according to research by Alexandra Hill, a University of California, Berkeley, professor who researches agricultural economics and farmworker well-being. Since the law was implemented, Colusa County farmworker Araceli Aceves Cortés said she had lost a third of her work hours. “Suddenly, I couldn’t cover the electricity bill,” she said. “I couldn’t pay rent.”

Canneries reduce tomato acreage to lowest in 50 years

After a short-lived increase during the pandemic, California’s processing tomato acreage is set to decline for a third consecutive year. The state’s tomato processors planned to contract for 9.8 million tons from 185,000 acres this year, down about 11% from the 11 million tons processors asked for last year, according to a January report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. If processors’ intentions remain unchanged, those figures would make the tonnage contracted from growers this year the lowest since 2005, and it would mark the first time in more than half a century that farmers in California plant fewer than 200,000 acres of processing tomatoes. Falling demand comes as a blow to farmers. In recent years, processing tomatoes were one of the few row crops that were generally profitable for growers. “It hurts us like I think it probably hurts every other tomato grower,” Yolo County farmer Bruce Rominger said.

Delaying harvest has helped blackbird populations

Tricolored blackbirds once thrived in California’s wetlands. But as the state developed, those ecosystems began to disappear, causing the species’ population to decline and seek new breeding grounds. The birds now often gather during the spring to breed in Central Valley grain fields. Because the tricolored blackbird is listed as threatened under California’s Endangered Species Act, farmers are not allowed to disturb the birds. That creates a dilemma for farmers who grow silage, a staple forage on

dairies, as they are unable to harvest their crops on time. Since 2015, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program has compensated farmers for yield losses sustained in the course of protecting at-risk colonies. The program has succeeded in helping the species recover. From 2014 to 2025, the statewide tricolored blackbird population increased from a low of about 145,000 to about 229,000.

Farmer says low water allocation complicates planting decisions

Last month, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation announced a preliminary water allocation of just 15% of their contract total for Central Valley Project water users south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. While the allocation could yet increase, Fresno County farmer Dan Errotabere said the low initial allocation has complicated his spring planting decisions. “We hope the allocation will continue to climb, but there’s no assurance. So, we have to kind of blindly plan out how our spring will completely look when we’re finished,” Errotabere told Ag Alert® in a field report. “That puts in jeopardy going forward how much we can farm. It’s not just surface water delivery that’s lighter. We also have groundwater management. Those two together can cap our supplies without any sense that the number will go higher.” The San Joaquin Valley grower said he was prepping his ground to plant processing tomatoes. He also grows almonds, pistachios, garlic and other crops.

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