

# The Stanislaus Farm News

The *voice* of Stanislaus County Agriculture

STANISLAUS COUNTY



For the good of your food.



**Official Publication of Stanislaus County Farm Bureau  
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An affiliate of the California Farm Bureau, the Farm Employers Labor Service — or FELS — helps ag employers navigate complex labor laws, avoid legal issues and manage human resources. See full story on page 3

Agricultural Safety Updates on pages, 12 & 20

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## 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.

## From the Field to Farm Safety: Gilbert Altamirano's Return to FELS

By Vicky Boyd, SCFB

Gilbert Altamirano didn't grow up in agriculture. But working at Family Tree Farms near Reedley as a human resources manager who inherited the operation's safety program whetted his appetite for farm safety.

"That's where I really started to focus on the safety aspect of ag, and it's when I actually fell in love with the safety industry, so to speak," Altamirano said.

That interest led him to join Farm Employers Labor Service as a labor management consultant. After about three years at FELS, Altamirano got an opportunity to develop and expand a safety training program at Fowler Packing's two sites. There he learned not only about the nuts and bolts of farm safety but also the administrative side



Gilbert Altamirano rejoins the FELS team.

of labor and safety regulations.

Longing to get out of the office and back into the field, he returned to FELS as a labor management consultant in October 2025 serving the San Joaquin Valley and Central Coast when Santos Martinez retired.

"Fowler Packing is an amazing company," said Altamirano, who's based in Fresno. "I have nothing bad to say about them, but in my heart of hearts, I honestly did miss being out in the field. I missed getting to know different farmers and ranchers. I'm not an office guy, and 90% of my time was spent in the office. I really, really missed being in the field."

Bryan Little, FELS chief operating officer, said he watched how Altamirano had grown personally and professionally while at Fowler Packing. When a position opened at FELS last year, Little said he believed Altamirano was the right person to fill it.

"I think he learned a lot," Little said, noting Fowler had more than 200 workers in the packinghouses and in the orchards. "I think he got a lot of good experience, not just at training and organizing training programs but also figuring out what things needed to be done."

Little said he was pleasantly surprised when he and Altamirano attended the CFBF Annual Meeting in December in Anaheim, and Altamirano spoke about FELS before a group.

"I hadn't seen him make a presentation since he came back," Little said. "He just took to it like a duck to water."

Altamirano admitted that public speaking was not a strong suit when he entered the industry. But years of practice helped him hone his skills.

"It wasn't always easy," he said. "But after doing it for 14 years, it came naturally for me. So going before a group and doing safety training for years and for up to 50 people, I really enjoyed it. And I felt a sense of pride and worth in providing safety

trainings and being able to connect with the employer and employees."

### FELS: A PROACTIVE APPROACH

An affiliate of the California Farm Bureau, FELS is a Sacramento-based member organization that helps ag employers navigate complex labor laws, avoid legal issues and manage human resources. It also provides tools, such as regular newsletters, HR compliance manuals, bilingual safety training and legal support.

"With FELS, you're going to get a company that's proactive, not just a company that says 'call me when you need me,'" Altamirano said. "We go way beyond that once you become a member of FELS."

That said, some members seek ala carte services where they can pick and choose what they need while others want full-blown consultancy.

As a labor management consultant, Altamirano's responsibilities run the gamut from safety training and compliance to labor law compliance. Many of the safety topics he covers are the same ones overseen by the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health, better known as Cal-OSHA. They include heat illness prevention, wildfire smoke emergency standards, workplace harassment and workplace violence.

Depending on the type of ag operation, he may tailor specific safety measures, such as confined space safety, tractor and forklift training, and machinery safety. But accident prevention is just part of his purview.

Based on members' requests, Altamirano also may conduct labor compliance audits that include reviewing pay stubs, I-9s and W-4s. In a recent meeting with a member, for example, he said he noticed pay stubs showed workers were clocking out for lunch breaks during the fifth hour. Under state law, hourly workers who put in eight-hour days must receive a 30-minute unpaid break, which must start before

the end of the fifth hour. Otherwise, the employer could face a meal-time penalty of an additional hour's pay for each worker.

Fearing the workers could occasionally be cutting things tight, Altamirano said he suggested the employer create a buffer by pushing up lunch by 15 minutes.

#### KEEPING MEMBERS IN COMPLIANCE

Coming from a sales background, Altamirano received his first introduction to ag production and worker safety when Family Tree Farms hired him as a human resources specialist. During his interview, he admitted he was green and had no HR or ag experience, but the owner said they could teach him.

It was at the Reedley operation that Altamirano learned about tree fruit and blueberry production, which included harvest, pruning season and other seasonal cultural practices.

"It was my first introduction to ag and all of the work that goes into growing fruit from the field to the packinghouse," he said. "I worked in the packinghouse side of things

and got first-hand experience in all of the different departments and what everyone did and how everyone worked."

About a year after he started, the person in charge of safety left the company, so Altamirano took over those duties, too. But it was the safety side of the industry that left a lasting impression on him even to this day.

Through his interactions with FELS members, Altamirano said he's learned that they by and large want to do the right thing but often times don't know where to start.

"They know they need to be in compliance," he said. "All of them, whether they're new or whether they are fourth-, fifth- or sixth-generation farmers, they all know, but they just want to farm. That's what they know how to do best.

"When you have all of those responsibilities coming down ... to farmers, all of these regulations can be cumbersome.

Our job is to know what you need to know, and our job is to keep you in compliance."

And for new or potential FELS member, that typically starts with a safety inspection, which will give farm labor consultants a starting point and guide them through the next steps.

As an introduction to FELS, Altamirano said he is offering free onsite safety inspections to Stanislaus County Farm Bureau members. You can reach him by cell at 559-726-5408.



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Farm Employers Labor Service, an affiliated company of the California Farm Bureau; partnering for compliance and human resources management with California farm employers since 1970.

## Interview with Renee Pinel, Discussing SPM and Pesticide Myths

In a recent Podcast interview, My Ag Life's Kristin Platts, and I sat down with Renee Pinel, President and CEO of Western Plant Health Association, to discuss SPM and a recent study that is helping to dispel myths about pesticide use in California.

Here is our conversation.

Anna Genasci: Renee, before we jump in, can you just briefly tell us a little bit about Western Plant Health and what you do there, for folks who may not know?

Renee P.: Western Plant Health Association is a regional trade association. We represent fertilizer and pesticide manufacturers,

agricultural biotechnology distributors, and agricultural retailers in California, Arizona, and Hawaii. Our primary activity is working both with the legislature and with regulatory agencies to assure that the products that our members supply to farms remain available, as well as supporting issues that are of importance to farmers, since those are ultimately our customers.

Anna Genasci: Well, Renee, that's a perfect segue into some of the topics we want to hit on today. Sustainable Pest Management, SPM, can you give us just kind of the short and sweet version of what SPM is, before we jump into the nuts and bolts of today's topic?

Renee P.: Fundamentally, it is a change of philosophy on how you manage pesticide products. The traditional view, or the traditional use of IPM, which has been around for probably 30 years now, and very well incorporated into, really, every farmer, or PCA, or industry member mindset is... How to utilize the least toxic tools.

And then have to move up that chain of products in the toolbox in order to control and manage pests that are in agricultural areas. The use of IPM is how you control those pests, basically, within the fence posts, of a field.

SPM is really that same mindset, but it goes beyond the fence post. So, what you're incorporating, is either how, the use of those products can impact communities that surround those farms, whether that's a physical impact, or whether it is a psychological.

Or really, emotional impact to the idea that products are being used around them. So, it's the incorporation of being conscious about the use of a product goes beyond just the field itself. It also has, reverberations beyond that point to surrounding communities.

Anna Genasci: That's probably the best explanation I've heard to date. And, you know, in theory, I'm not against

what they're looking at, right? But the concern, I have ... you probably share this, is that we might take away tools that we don't have replacements for quite yet.

Renee P.: And I think that's ... that's a big challenge with SPM. Agriculture supports moving to more precise tools, to softer tools. They are, in reality, a much higher level of technology, so they are not a less expensive tool. They are going to be more expensive tools to farmers as a result, but it also, what people tend to not recognize, or don't... maybe even don't want to recognize, is the fact that when you become more precise, you become softer.

That, in reality, pests can develop resistance faster, as well as they don't have the control effects as a traditional, conventional products.

So, you still have to have those products. Otherwise, you're going to either never actually control the pests, have to do a lot more applications of products.

You end up with either resistance or out-of-control pests. And frankly, that's what we are now seeing in the agricultural arena, is pest explosions that are not controllable, because there's a mindset in the past that you could replace one product with another. Now, because of the technology, you can't do that. What it may have taken one product to control is now taking eight.

A lot of times, even with those eight products, you can't control the pest, so we need to keep in mind that we still need to have these products that will actually control a pest, so then a farmer can, once that pest is controlled, move to these other softer, more precise products to maintain that control. But the idea that you have a pest explosion, and then you're going to be able to control it with these very, very soft products, is a bit of an illusion, I'm afraid.

And so, for us, we struggle with is making sure that whether it's decision makers at CalEPA or decision makers at the legisla-



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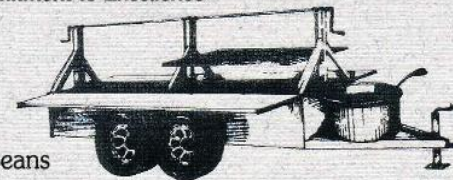
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## Rooted in Advocacy: California Women for Agriculture Marks 50 Years

Volunteer organization connects farmers,



Founders of CWA. (l-r) Beverly Efinel, Jeri Taylor, Cherry Ishimatsu, and Doris Larson. 1 - 1976

*ranchers and community leaders across the state with backing from Farm Credit institutions serving the Golden State.*

See Founders photo, to the left.

In 1975, several women involved in agriculture gathered in the Coachella Valley to discuss how they could educate policymakers and consumers about the needs of California agriculture.

Since those beginnings 50 years ago, California Women for Agriculture (CWA) has grown to become the most active all-volunteer agricultural organization in the state. Its 1,500 members represent farmers, ranchers, bankers, lawyers, marketing professionals and food producers from Butte County to the Mexican border.

Sharron Zoller, a Lake County walnut grower who served as CWA's president from 2022-24, said the group exists to advocate for, promote, and educate the public about California agriculture.

"Our name was carefully chosen," Zoller said. "They chose for instead of in to be sure everyone who believed in the mission would join."

To mark the milestone anniversary, CWA recently held a Golden Weekend Celebration in La Quinta, near Coachella, where the founding women met to launch the organization. While they celebrated, Cherry Ishimatsu, the group's first state president, was also

celebrating her 100th birthday.

"We're proud to salute California Women for Agriculture for its great work in promoting our state's farmers and ranchers during its first 50 years," said Keith Hesterberg, President and CEO of Fresno Madera Farm Credit. "These women have spent countless hours over the years educating consumers and decision-makers alike about the importance of agriculture in the Golden State, and we look forward to supporting their work in the years to come."

Heather Lemos, Relationship Manager, with American AgCredit added CWA also helps keep the state's ag community connected.

"As a statewide organization, CWA helps tie together the broad and diverse sectors of California's farming community," Lemos said. "Their members learn about different challenges farmers and ranchers have in different parts of the state, and their networking helps spread information about best practices in advocacy as well."

She added that many Farm Credit employees are CWA members, including CoBank's Farm Credit Banking Group Vice President Sara Reid, who served as CWA's president for two years.

Five Farm Credit organizations serving California – AgWest Farm Credit, American AgCredit, CoBank, Colusa-Glenn Farm Credit and Fresno Madera Farm Credit – have supported California Women for Agriculture for some 20 years. They are all part of the nationwide Farm Credit System – the largest provider of credit to U.S. agriculture.

Many of the group's 19 chapters have "showcase" events, such as Zoller's Lake County chapter's AgVenture program (now in its 14th year) as a proven educational program.

"We have a class of 12 area leaders each year, including county supervisors, city

See 'CWA' on page 14



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### **Precision is key to reducing antibiotic use on dairies**

When cows develop mastitis — inflammation of the udder — dairies often respond with immediate antibiotic treatment. That approach has long protected animal health and milk production. But research suggests treating every case the same way may not always be necessary. Christian Bernal-Córdoba, a veterinarian and graduate researcher at the University of California, Davis, said the discussion around antibiotics should focus less on cutting use and more on improving precision. “Antibiotics themselves are not the problem,” he said. “The problem is how we use them.” Rather than emphasizing reduction alone, Bernal-Córdoba said producers should focus on optimizing antibiotic use by applying treatment when it provides clear benefit. At the same time, reducing unnecessary treatments lowers drug costs on the farm, decreases discarded milk during withdrawal periods and reduces time spent managing dairy hospital pens.

### **How joining FFA has impacted its members**

Current and former members of FFA, formerly known as Future Farmers of America, from across California shared how the student-led organization has affected their lives in a special Ag Alert® series. “My biggest misconception about agriculture before joining FFA was that only farmers can be involved and have a career in this industry,” said Ella Rolland, an FFA member at East Nicholas High School in Sutter County. “Since joining FFA, I’ve been exposed to many career paths that allow us to serve others and support the industry that feeds and protects the world every day.” Destiny Reyes, a Stanislaus County college student and recent FFA member, said she has the organization to thank for some of her closest friends. Brendan Black, a Tulare County agriculture teacher, said he chose his career path “purely off of my FFA experience.” And Timmy Klittich, a Ventura County nursery operator and former FFA member, said his participation in the organization “was where I started to learn real leadership skills.”

### **FFA president shares what leadership has taught her**

Lily Vaughan, the 2025-26 California FFA state president, reflected on what it means to lead the youth organization in an Ag Alert® commentary. “I joined FFA my freshman year for a practical reason. While I didn’t grow up immersed in agriculture, my family began raising and showing market hogs for the county fair when I was in middle school. I wanted to continue showing market hogs, which meant enrolling in an agriculture biology class and officially joining the Las Plumas FFA chapter,” Vaughan said. “Serving as California FFA state president has taught me that leadership is deeply personal. It is not about having the fanciest resume or the most impressive title. On the hardest days, leadership means asking for help and admitting when I cannot give my best. It means leaning on my team, my adviser

and the people who reminded me that I was never meant to do this alone.”

### **Expert advises ways California farms can reduce pumping power costs**

Improving pumping efficiency can significantly cut irrigation energy costs, Charles Burt, professor emeritus at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, said in a recent Ag Alert® article. Burt said pumps often operate inefficiently due to wear or mismatched flow and pressure conditions. Cleaning wells and reducing drawdown can lower total pressure requirements and energy use per acre-foot pumped. In new drip systems, reducing discharge pressure from 40-45 pounds per square inch to about 25 psi can cut booster pump power costs nearly in half. However, in existing systems, pressure reductions won’t save energy unless the pump matches the new requirements. Variable frequency drives can improve control but should meet high efficiency standards. Farmers should always maintain adequate pressure to protect irrigation uniformity and crop performance.

### **Beekeepers assess this year’s colony health**

With California’s almond pollination season underway, beekeepers from around the country have journeyed to the Central Valley for the six-week-long bloom. While beekeepers have not seen the devastating hive mortality this winter that they did in 2025, they say they’re still losing colonies. “Things are looking OK, but we won’t really know until the end of bloom,” said Ryan Burris, California State Beekeepers Association president and a Palo Cedro beekeeper and queen breeder. “It sounds like the numbers are better, but some people still lost a lot of bees.” Beekeepers nationwide made headlines in the 2024-25 winter when they reported an average of 62% colony losses. With increasing production costs and depressed honey prices, many beekeepers said the current situation is not sustainable economically. “It’s very, very difficult,” Burris said.

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### Subpar snowpack pushes back crop plans for farmers

Despite a strong start to California’s wet season, snowpack conditions remain below average. A deficient snowpack could mean less water available for summer irrigation, threatening to cut surface water deliveries to farmers. San Joaquin Valley farmer Aaron Barcellos said the uncertainty has impacted his crop planning, forcing him to consider not planting any cotton for the first time in nearly four decades. “I can’t afford to take the risk from an economic standpoint that I’m going to put a valuable water resource on a crop that may not end up having enough water to finish,” Barcellos said. He added, “That could change if pricing gets better or if we get a better allocation than we’re expecting right now.” Jay Lund, vice director of the University of California, Davis, Center for Watershed Sciences, said there is still a chance more storms will boost snowpack levels to average before April, when they typically peak.

### Survey finds raids impacted California farm production

A new statewide survey has shed light on the impact during the past year of immigration enforcement on farms and farmworkers in California. The California Farmer Immigration Enforcement Survey, which was conducted by researchers at Michigan State University in partnership with the California Farm Bureau, is the first of its kind to assess the impact of the Trump administration’s mass deportation agenda on California farms. “We were really interested in understanding whether there have been labor shortages as a result of recent immigration enforcement,” said Zachariah

Rutledge, assistant professor and extension specialist at Michigan State University. More than 500 farmers from across 50 counties responded to the survey, which was conducted in late 2025 and early 2026. “There were very few reports of direct immigration enforcement activities on farms,” Rutledge said. “There was more anxiety and fear among the farming community as a result of general immigration enforcement efforts more broadly.”

### Peach growers seek relief following cannery closure

With the collapse of Del Monte Foods’ U.S. canned fruit business following the company’s bankruptcy last year and subsequent cannery closure, affected cling peach growers are seeking financial relief to help recover from the loss of one of the sector’s biggest buyers. In the past, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has funded voluntary tree-pull programs to address industry oversupply. Peach growers learned this past August that their long-term contracts with Del Monte were canceled due to the company’s bankruptcy. The California Canning Peach Association filed a claim with the bankruptcy court for the value of the rejected contracts, which amounted to more than a half-billion dollars for peach contracts set to expire between 2026 and 2044. U.S. Rep. Mike Thompson, D-St. Helena, said he is working to identify relief for growers through existing federal programs or by crafting new legislation. “We’re looking at every possible specialty crop support program that could come into play,” he said.



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**STANISLAUS COUNTY FARM BUREAU**

From 'WPH' on page 5

ture, understand it's not a one-to-one change-out, and that a toolbox is a toolbox, and that means you have to have tools in them.

Yes, you can't just be selective and have nice new technology tools. You also need to have those tools that when we utilize IPM, you can move up to the proper level of control.

Anna Genasci: So, Renee, you kind of touched on this in your explanation of SPM earlier. I know from an agricultural standpoint, we are asking the decision makers to make those decisions based on science and facts, and there seems to be a lot of emotion and assumptions around SPM. And most recently, in an article that you wrote for West Coast Nut Magazine you talk about this data from a recent study. Where previously, there was this kind of myth that PCAs would write recommendations for over-use of pesticides because there was compensation tied to those recommendations.

But in this article that you wrote, you talk about what the research really shows. Can you shed some light on that for us?

Renee P.: This has been sort of, allegations that are just under the surface, and it's been going on for a number of years with groups. The assumption that PCAs' compensation is based on them writing the most expensive recommendations, or using the products, these more traditional products, that people believe have a higher compensation level to them. In reality, as I said before newer technologies cost more money. So, actually, when someone writes a recommendation for a traditional, conventional product, it's actually less. It costs farmers less.

Compensation is not based on, this, kickback sort of mindset of, you're going to make more money the more you write, and so to answer that, a couple of years ago, DPR funded a study that was done by UC Davis to examine what the facts are behind what a PCA who works for, say, an agricultural retailer versus an independent PCA, or a PCA who's employed by a grower, what kind of recommendations do they make, and is it based more on the compensation they can receive, and the volume that they will sell for their employer.

With the idea being that an independent somehow was more credible, than a PCA who's employed by a private party, (or) a private company.

And what they found is there's virtually no difference, that the products and the types of products that were recommended were virtually the same.

We appreciate the fact that this (study) was conducted by a third party, these UC Davis scientists, and it was funded by an outside independent party that had nothing to gain.

We're very confident in the integrity of PCAs and agricultural retailers, as well as farmers who are using products, but it was gratifying to see that documented.

Anna Genasci: Given that you have this this study now that is reputable, are you finding that folks are open to hearing it as you work with legislature and decision makers?

Renee P.: Well, I mean, it's... you know, California is, like you said,



The poster features a green background with white botanical illustrations of various plants, including herbs and flowers, framing the text. At the top left, the text 'MJC NURSERY' is displayed in a bold, black, sans-serif font. To its right is the Modesto Junior College logo, which includes the letters 'MJC' in a stylized font and the words 'MODESTO JUNIOR COLLEGE' below it. Further right, the text 'School of Agriculture' is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. The central focus of the poster is the word 'PLANT' in a very large, bold, black, serif font, with the word 'Sale' written in a smaller, black, cursive font directly beneath it. Below this, the event details are listed in a bold, black, sans-serif font: 'SATURDAY, APRIL 11' followed by '8:00AM - 2:00PM'. The location is given as 'MJC EAST CAMPUS NURSERY' and 'LOCATED ON THE CORNER OF GOLDWELL AVE & COLLEGE AVE'. At the bottom, contact information is provided: 'QUESTIONS? CONTACT SANCHEZKA@MJC.EDU'.

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it's... a lot of the political dynamics is based off of emotion.

And assumptions, and... not wanting to offend some groups that particularly have traditionally felt they've been underrepresented, and so decision makers don't want them to feel like they're being ignored. Those individuals, I don't know that you'll ever convince. But to be able to advocate for DPR, to be able to defend the process that they have in place.

Anna Genasci: Traditionally, DPR was making regulatory changes, or updates based on scientific information, right? In the last couple years, all of a sudden, we're seeing, voter and policy-driven changes to regulations. And that means we need to start talking to a different crowd. Have you, has Western Plant Health, begun to

look into that at all?

Renee P.: It is impossible to change the mind of 43 million Californians who are convinced that, you know, pesticides mean a bad thing. But we certainly address the issues. We work very hard, to make sure that consumers understand. So, whether it's your family's safety, or it's affordability, whether it's food deserts, because there's less food that's going to be available, as opposed to just the strict science, which is, in the past, I think our industry has relied on, is, you know, just listen to the science. Well, there's not a lot of science in California, you know?

But you can connect with people, in ways, whether, again, whether it's these environmental justice communities, or whether they're more urban communities, that they understand, and that includes, really, since COVID, is family health.

So, if you're not able to protect your home from these insects and rodents and things like that, then your family is at risk, your food costs are going to go up, they understand that. If you live in a city and already, you're dealing with food deserts, the fact that you have a fresh product that only has so many days it can stay on the shelf.

If it's more expensive, those stores are not going to carry those. So, you can connect with them and explain to them, not so much from the nuts and bolts of the scientific necessity of these products to control pests.

You know, what... we understand that those consumers probably aren't interested in the word 'yield,' and what that means, or the profitability of a farm.

But they are interested in what that means to them. And so, virtually everything we do is geared towards communicating towards those groups so that they understand, ultimately, what that means. And while, most of the polling that we see the reality is, is that in background, they may talk about, pesticides it's rarely in the top 10 of things that consumers want to have addressed.

It's food affordability, it's food availability, fresh food availability, the nutritious nature of the food.

I don't want to say it's easier, but it makes it a more, viable way to then address their underlying concerns...

For more of this interview, or other Farm Bureau Friday Podcasts, visit <https://myaglife.com/network/farm-bureau-friday/>



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## Decoding OBBBA Federal Tax-Deductible Overtime for Farm Employees

By: Bryan Little, Farm Employers Labor Service

### Wages, Hours, Overtime & Employment

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), passed by Congress and signed into law last year by President Donald Trump, allows employees to deduct overtime premiums (the “half” in “time-and-a-half”) mandated by section 7 of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) from their income for federal income taxable income for tax years 2025 through 2028.

Individual taxpayers can deduct as much as \$12,500, and married taxpayers filing jointly may deduct up to \$25,000, in overtime premiums from their income for federal tax purposes.

OBBBA also imposes on employers filing and information provision requirements to inform employees about overtime premiums qualifying for deduction, with relief from penalties for the 2025 tax year (a recognition that Internal Revenue Service compliance guidance is still very much in flux).

All this poses unique problems for agricultural employers that likely employ employees who are exempt from FLSA section 7 overtime but are subject to overtime under

California law and under California Industrial Welfare Commission Wage (IWC) Order 14, Employed in an Agricultural Occupation, Order 13, Preparing Agricultural Products for Market, on the Farm, or Order 4, Professional, Technical, Clerical, Mechanical, and Similar Occupations, while they might also employ employees who must be paid overtime premiums under both FLSA section 7 and California law and other IWC Wage Orders, most notably Order 8, Industries Handling Products after Harvest.

Attorneys with labor and employment law firm Fisher Phillips sort out this confusion in “No Tax on Overtime” Hits Different for Agricultural Employers: Why Most

On the Farm Ag Workers Won’t Benefit + Key Compliance Points for Your Business.

The article focuses on why most employees employed in agriculture are ineligible to take a tax deduction for overtime pay. It notes the tax deduction is available only for overtime pay required by section 7 of the FLSA and that persons employed in agriculture are exempt from that requirement. The article continues by explaining what it means to be employed in agriculture.

The article notes that California agricultural employees are entirely exempt from FLSA overtime but are of course required to be paid overtime under state law.

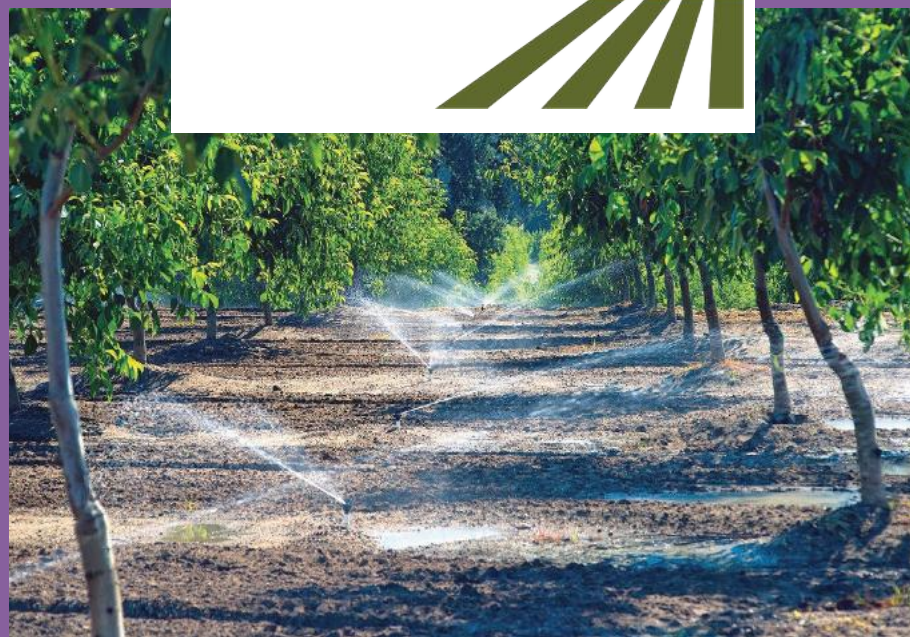
Is any overtime paid to a California ag employee as mandated by California law and regulation OBBBA-deductible?

Because the FLSA exempts all persons employed in agriculture from overtime pay, including those in California, overtime premiums paid to them as per state law are not OBBBA deductible.

As a result, a California agricultural employee paid time-and-a-half after eight and up to 12 hours in a workday, after 40 hours in a workweek, or during the first eight hours of the seventh consecutive day of work in a workweek, as well as double-time after 12 hours in a workday or eight hours on the seventh consecutive day of work in a workweek, was not paid overtime premiums that would be OBBBA deductible from the employee’s federal taxable income.

Aside from the complications of sorting out federal versus state overtime exemptions, California farm employers sometimes employ people who are covered by overtime-pay provisions of both FLSA section 7 and California law.

These might include employees who are covered by overtime requirements of California law and Industrial Welfare Commission Wage Order 8, Industries Handling Products after Harvest, but who are not



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subject to the FLSA section 7 exemption for persons employed in agriculture.

Under the FLSA, employed in agriculture means both primary agriculture (farming in all its branches e.g., the cultivation and tillage of the soil; dairying; the production, cultivation, growing, and harvesting of any agricultural or horticultural commodities; and the raising of livestock, bees, fur-bearing animals, or poultry) and secondary agriculture (all practices, including forestry or lumbering operations, performed by a farmer or on a farm, and as an incident to or in conjunction with such farming operations).

Secondary agriculture includes cutting or freezing a farm’s own produce (i.e., that produced or raised by the farmer or on its farm), fruits, vegetables, and meat, without adding any ingredients.

In contrast, activities like working in a winery or processing a neighbor’s produce fall outside the FLSA section 7 definition of overtime-exempt agriculture. As a result, overtime premiums paid to these employees for work performed after 40 hours in a workweek as required by the FLSA (and also by the California Labor Code and IWC Wage Order 8) is OBBBA deductible.

All the preceding can be summed up in two simple rules:

- Agricultural employees who are overtime exempt under FLSA section 7 but who are paid overtime premiums under California law and regulations have not been paid overtime premiums that may be deducted under OBBBA and thus may not deduct them from their income for federal income tax purposes.
- Employees who are not overtime-exempt under FLSA section 7 and are paid overtime premiums for working more than 40 hours in a workweek may deduct those premiums from their income for federal income tax purposes, subject to the limitations discussed above.

Internal Revenue Service Notice 25-62 suggests to employers the following:

Employers and payors are encouraged to provide employees and payees with separate accountings of overtime compensation such that the employee or payee has the information the employee or payee needs to determine whether the employee or payee can claim the deduction for qualified overtime compensation under section 225 for taxable year 2025. Employers and payors can make such information available to their employees and payees by including it in box 14 of the employee’s Form W-2, or through an online portal, additional written statements furnished to the employees or payees, or other secure methods.

FELS has resources available for FELS members at FELS Resources: Wages & Hours in California: “One Big Beautiful Bill Act Overtime Premium Deductibility”.



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From 'CWA' on page 7

council members, business leaders and government department heads, who get a deep dive into how our four main crops – pears, walnuts, grapes, and olives – are grown and processed,” she said.

During the trips, the participants learn about each crop’s regulatory issues, market trends, and labor issues, and they get to see a farm in action.

“The first class focuses on pears and is scheduled during the harvest,” she said. “We visit an orchard to see the pears harvested, then go to the pear shed where the crop is delivered, processed and boxed, and put into cold storage ready for market.

“A field trip for each crop provides the participants with first-hand views that are paired with in-depth information – the science behind growing crops, U.S. and global economics, labor dynamics, regulatory burdens, and the political issues – that each farmer must contend with.

“Many of the participants say that although they’ve lived in Lake County all their lives, they had no idea about everything that goes

into a local farming operation.”

Advocacy in a state that Zoller delicately noted is “not always user-friendly” to agriculture is a crucial focus. CWA encourages members to form relationships with their local decision-makers, along with state and federal legislators.

The state organization hosts an annual two-day event in Sacramento to discuss legislation and hold conversations with lawmakers. On the federal level, CWA partners with American Agri Women, a coalition of other states’ advocacy groups, to travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with members of Congress and officials with government agencies.

“We have been able to educate decision makers, most of whom are several generations away from a farm, to frame some of their proposed legislation into a real-life understanding of the consequences for the ag community and blunt the impacts,” she noted.



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Zoller predicted that in the years to come, CWA will continue to “help shape decisions that secure our food supply, strengthen rural communities, and build our economies. We know—and we have shown—that when women speak together, the world listens differently.”

She added that Leona Lewis, one of the founding members and a former state president, recalled at the 50th anniversary celebration that she and two other women who met to organize the group went into the fields to pick lettuce to show their support for growers, who were facing headwinds at the time.

“Lewis said the person directing them said they were doing it wrong – that harvesting has to be done ‘butts up.’ So, they repositioned themselves and continued picking until they were told, no, you have to put the lettuce butts up in the carton. The story was greeted with much laughter and applause,” Zoller said.

“Those women won’t fade into the background. They are rooted in the rich earth of our identity.”

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About California Women for Agriculture:

California Women for Agriculture speaks clearly about the future of agriculture, lifting one another up and with our collective voice is impossible to ignore. We honor our founders by doing what they did with grace and strength: showing up, speaking clearly, and working together until the future we imagine becomes the future we live - anchored in science, technology and stewardship guided by the next generation of leaders. To encourage and grow these new leaders, CWA has established the California Women for Agriculture Foundation. Through scholarships and leadership programs, the Foundation will equip young women with the education, experiences and networks they need to shape California agriculture for generations. To support the effort or to learn more visit [cawomen4ag.com](http://cawomen4ag.com) or contact Sharron Zoller at 916- 441-2910.



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## Advocacy Updates

### Statewide Agricultural Employee Minimum Wage

Assemblymember Maggy Krell, D-Sacramento, has introduced Assembly Bill 2646, legislation that would establish a statewide agricultural minimum wage of \$19.75 per hour beginning Jan. 1, 2027, with annual adjustments tied to the consumer price index.

The proposal appears intended to reinstate a higher wage floor for workers participating in the H-2A temporary agricultural visa program. In November 2025, the U.S. Department of Labor revised the federal H-2A wage standard, resulting in California's 2026 H-2A Adverse Effect Wage Rate defaulting to the state's statutory minimum wage of \$16.90 per hour. AB 2646 would effectively set a new, higher state-level wage requirement for agricultural workers.

The bill applies the \$19.75 minimum wage to "approved agricultural employees" and "corresponding employees." Approved agricultural employees are defined as non-resident workers engaged in agriculture—broadly defined under the Agricultural Labor Relations Act—whose employment

in California has been approved by the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency or the Employment Development Department. These agencies are responsible for overseeing and approving H-2A employment in the state.

The bill also extends the \$19.75 minimum wage to corresponding employees. Under AB 2646, a corresponding employee is any California resident engaged in agricultural work who is not an approved agricultural employee but performs the same or substantially similar work. The measure does not require that a corresponding employee work for an employer who uses H-2A workers, meaning the higher wage could apply broadly across agricultural operations.

Staff contact: Bryan Little, [blittle@cfbf.com](mailto:blittle@cfbf.com).

### New Bill Aims to Require Enforceable Nitrogen Limits for Irrigated Agriculture

Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, D-Orinda, introduced Assembly Bill 2447, the Water Supply Protection Act, in February 2026 to regulate agricultural nitrogen pollution in California. It directs the California State Water Resources Control Board by July 1, 2027, to establish a statewide

methodology for reporting nitrogen balances, accounting for soil nitrogen, and setting enforceable limits on nitrogen discharges from croplands. The bill is sponsored by the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The bill guts precedential provisions of the East San Joaquin Order and ignores current work by the state water board's second agricultural expert panel and active litigation. Staff contacts: Kari Fisher, [kfisher@cfbf.com](mailto:kfisher@cfbf.com); Alexandra Biering, [abiering@cfbf.com](mailto:abiering@cfbf.com).

## Agricultural Technology

Efforts to modernize outdated worker safety regulations that limit the use of autonomous tractors continued this year. California Farm Bureau, alongside a coalition of agricultural organizations and equipment manufacturers, engaged the governor's office and legislative leadership to encourage a solution that allows innovation to move forward while addressing labor concerns. Two years ago, Farm Bureau-sponsored Assembly Bill 1016 was signed into law, authorizing the California Department of Pesticide Regulation to update rules governing the use of unmanned aerial vehicles by licensed aerial applicators. The law directs DPR to establish updated pathways for private applicators (those applying on

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their own farms) and commercial applicators.

In fall 2025, DPR launched an AB 1016 working group to begin developing implementing regulations. Initially, the group focused only on private applicators, with commercial applicator updates delayed until 2028. Farm Bureau raised concerns about this timeline and urged DPR to reconsider a strategy that would slow broader adoption of the technology.

Following stakeholder engagement and a temporary pause, DPR relaunched the

working group with a clear commitment to advancing regulatory updates for commercial aerial applicators. This shift will help scale emerging technologies and better align regulatory policy with California's investments in agricultural innovation and workforce development.

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

### Informational Hearing on Agriculture and Cap and Invest

The California Senate Environmental Quality Committee will hold a joint informational hearing on the state's Cap-and-Invest Program and its impact on California agriculture. The hear-

ing will begin at 10 a.m. in Room 112 of the state Capitol and is open to the public for those who wish to listen or provide public comment.

The agenda includes three panels representing state agencies—including the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the California Environmental Protection Agency—the University of California and members of the agricultural sector. Although agriculture participated in negotiations last year regarding the extension of Cap-and-Invest, the industry did not receive any Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund allocations. California Farm Bureau, alongside a broad coalition of agricultural organizations, is advocating for funding in the 2026-27 state budget for key greenhouse gas reduction programs, including:

\$200 million for the Funding Agricultural Replacement Measures for Emission Reductions Program. \$50 million for the Food Production Investment Program. \$75 million for Sustainable Agricultural Waste Management. \$75 million for Livestock Methane Reduction Programs.

Farm Bureau encourages members to attend the hearing and provide public comment highlighting the importance of these investments in climate-smart agriculture.



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From 'Advocacy' on page 17

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

### **Tricolored Blackbird Conservation Payment Scenario Restored**

Following a month of uncertainty, California Farm Bureau received news this week that the silage delay scenario has been restored to the Tricolored Blackbird Regional Conservation Partnership Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program lists for this year's upcoming season. The scenario is used to compensate landowners who delay harvest of their silage crops due to nesting tricolored blackbirds in their fields, typically in the range of \$700-\$1,100 per acre.

The exact dollar amount hasn't yet been published for this season, but we are hearing it is slightly lower than last year's average rate. Last year, the rate varied by county cost of living. This year, it will be a flat rate across the board. Details about exact dollar amounts for this funding scenario will be forthcoming.

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

### **Farm Labor Contractor/Foreign Labor Contractor Bonding Bill**

Assemblymember Damon Connolly, D-San Rafael, has introduced Assembly Bill 2227, legislation that would revise the surety bond requirements for farm labor contractors. The bill shifts the bonding trigger from total employee payroll to gross receipts derived from farm labor contractor operations and establishes higher bond thresholds for contractors who are not also registered as foreign labor contractors.

Under the proposal, minimum bond requirements for farm labor contractors that are also registered as foreign labor contractors would be: \$25,000 for gross receipts up to \$500,000. \$50,000 for gross receipts between \$500,000 and \$2 million. \$75,000 for gross receipts exceeding \$2 million.

For farm labor contractors not registered as foreign labor contractors, the required bond amounts would increase to: \$50,000 for gross receipts up to \$500,000. \$100,000 for gross receipts between \$500,000 and \$2 million. \$150,000 for gross receipts exceeding \$2 million.

The bill appears intended to align farm labor contractor bonding requirements more closely with those imposed on foreign labor contractors and to incentivize farm labor contractors to obtain foreign labor contractor registration. However, many farm labor contractors do not recruit H-2A or H-2B workers abroad — the primary purpose of foreign labor contractor registration — raising questions about the broader applicability of the measure.

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

### **Immigrant Commercial Drivers Allowed to Keep Their Licenses for Now**

A California judge has ruled that 20,000 immigrant commercial drivers who are here on asylum or temporary status will be allowed to keep their licenses. The California Department of Motor Vehicles was seeking to cancel these licenses to comply with regulations from the U.S. Department of Transportation. This decision risks the California DMV losing the ability to issue California driver's licenses, which Transportation Department might rescind. Staff contact: Steven Fenaroli, sfenaroli@cfbf.com.

### **Restrictive Changes to CDFA Grant Eligibility**

The California Farm Bureau recently expressed its concerns to the California Department of Food and Agriculture in a letter



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regarding the proposed eligibility changes to the department's block grant program. Farm Bureau understands and appreciates CDEA's continued commitment to supporting agricultural producers across California. However, the proposed change to limit eligibility to Resource Conservation Districts and 501(c)(3) organizations, thereby excluding 501(c)(5) nonprofit organizations, will have significant unintended consequences. Specifically, the change eliminates the ability for many county Farm Bureaus to apply for funding under the program. Farm Bureau looks forward to working with the department in the future to have an inclusive eligibility process that reaches farmers and ranchers efficiently and effectively.

Staff contact: Chris Reardon, creardon@cfbf.com.

### SCOTUS Issues Ruling on Tariffs

The U.S. Supreme Court issued a 6-3 de-

cision this week finding that most of the Trump administration's global tariffs were unlawfully imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. The court concluded that IEEPA does not grant the president authority to impose new taxes, including tariffs.

Following the ruling, President Trump issued an executive order establishing a 10% global tariff under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974. However, tariffs imposed under that authority are limited to a maximum duration of 150 days. U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer indicated that tariffs could increase to as much as 15% for certain countries, though it remains unclear which countries would be affected or whether a longer-term tariff strategy is forthcoming.

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

### California Farm Bureau Joins Letter in Support of Buying American Cotton Act

California Farm Bureau joined with several other organizations earlier this week in supporting the Buying American Cotton Act (H.R. 7230). The bipartisan legislation would establish market-based incentives for end-stage retailers to sell apparel and other goods produced—either whole or in part—from U.S.-grown cotton. The bill would hopefully lead to increased demand for U.S.-grown cotton, incentivize new investments into domestic textile milling and create a more equal playing field for cotton producers to compete with international products.

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

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# Heat Illness, Field Sanitation Lead Cal/OSHA Citations in Agriculture as Enforcement Expands

*By: Theresa Kiehn, President/CEO, AgSafe*

Last month, AgSafe hosted its annual ACTIVE conference in Monterey, California, bringing together agricultural leaders to focus on safety, health and leadership development across the industry. State and federal agencies shared regulatory priorities and program updates, and attendees heard directly from Cal/OSHA’s Agricultural Enforcement Task Force and Outreach Unit program manager and Cal/OSHA Consultation about citation trends and enforcement priorities since 2025.

The message is clear: California’s agricultural industry is operating under heightened regulatory attention. With the establishment of a dedicated Agricultural Enforcement Task Force and Outreach Unit in 2025, Cal/OSHA has intensified its presence across agricultural regions.

Additional inspectors are conducting proactive surveillance inspections, and recent citation data show the five most frequently cited standards in agriculture are heat illness prevention, field sanitation, injury and illness prevention programs, recordkeeping and electrical safety. Employers should anticipate an increase in agency visits to agricultural worksites.

The enforcement focus is not abstract. Citation trends reveal clear patterns in where employers fall short and where inspectors concentrate their efforts. Understanding these areas of exposure allows agricultural operations to prioritize corrective action before an inspection occurs.

## No. 1 Heat Illness Prevention

Heat illness prevention, governed by Title 8 California Code of Regulations Section 3395, continues to rank first. California maintains one of the nation’s most comprehensive heat standards, reflecting the state’s

climate and the outdoor nature of agricultural work.

Core requirements include:

- A written heat illness prevention plan available at the worksite and understandable to employees
- At least one quart of fresh drinking water per employee per hour
- Shade when temperatures exceed 80 degrees Fahrenheit
- High-heat procedures at or above 95 degrees, including observation and communication protocols
- Clear emergency response procedures with directions to the worksite

Citations often stem from implementation gaps. Shade structures may be too far from the active work area. Water containers may not be replenished during peak heat. Supervisors may fail to document high-heat procedures. Acclimatization practices for new employees are sometimes informal rather than systematic.

With expanded enforcement presence, heat illness compliance will remain a visible and high-priority inspection focus.

## Don’t Forget About Indoor Heat Illness

While much of the focus remains on outdoor agricultural work, employers should not overlook California’s indoor heat illness prevention requirements. Packing houses, cold-storage transitions, processing facilities and other indoor operations may also fall under Cal/OSHA’s indoor heat standard when temperatures reach regulatory thresholds.

As enforcement activity expands, inspectors are evaluating both field and facility environments. Heat illness compliance is no longer limited to outdoor crews. It applies anywhere employees are exposed to elevated temperatures.

## No. 2 Field Sanitation

Field sanitation, governed by Section

3457, ranks second. The requirements are straightforward and highly observable during inspections.

Employers must provide:

- At least one toilet per 20 employees
- Toilets within a quarter-mile walk or transportation provided
- Handwashing facilities with clean water, soap and single-use towels
- Appropriate facility signage
- Separate drinking water with individual cups
- Employee training on hygiene practices

Citations frequently arise from maintenance lapses. Inspectors commonly identify missing soap or paper towels; unsanitary portable units or facilities located beyond the required distance.

Because these conditions are immediately visible, field sanitation remains one of the

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most consistently cited standards in agriculture.

### No. 3 Injury and Illness Prevention Program

The injury and illness prevention program, or IIPP, required under Section 3203, ranks third and serves as the foundation of California's workplace safety system.

A compliant IIPP must include:

- A written program specific to the employer's operations
- Procedures to identify and correct work-

place hazards

- A system for employee communication about safety concerns
- Training for employees and supervisors
- Investigation procedures for workplace injuries

Citations often occur when the IIPP is outdated, generic or not actively implemented. Missing training documentation and lack of periodic hazard assessments can expose employers to violations.

A strong IIPP functions as the operating system behind compliance in all other safety standards.

### No. 4 Recordkeeping

Recordkeeping, governed by Section 14300 and related provisions, ranks fourth. While administrative in nature, it carries significant enforcement consequences.

Key Cal/OSHA recordkeeping obligations include:

- Recording work-related injuries and illnesses within seven calendar days
- Maintaining the Cal/OSHA Form 300 log
- Completing and posting the Form 300A annual summary from Feb. 1 through April 30
- Retaining records for five years

See 'AgSafe' on page 22

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From 'AgSafe' on page 21

- Submitting electronic injury data when required

Common violations include failing to post the annual summary, misclassifying recordable cases or failing to update logs in a timely manner.

#### Expanded Personnel File Obligations

In addition to Cal/OSHA requirements, employers must now comply with expanded personnel record obligations under Senate Bill 513, which amends California Labor Code Section 1198.5.

Current and former employees have the right to inspect and copy their personnel files. SB 513 clarifies that education and training records are included within the definition of personnel records.

Employers need to maintain education or training records and must ensure those

records include:

- The name of the employee
- The name of the trainer
- The duration and date of the training
- The core competencies of the training, including skills related to equipment or software
- The resulting certification or qualification

Employers must respond to requests for inspection or copies within 30 calendar days, unless both parties agree in writing to an extension of up to 35 days from the date the employer received the request.

For agricultural employers, where training on heat illness prevention, equipment operation and safety procedures is routine, this law reinforces the importance of detailed and organized documentation. Incomplete or inconsistent training records may now create both labor code exposure and Cal/OSHA risk.

rounds out the top five. Agriculture increasingly relies on powered equipment, irrigation systems, refrigeration units and temporary power sources.

The standard requires:

- Proper installation and maintenance of electrical equipment
- Adequate clearance around electrical panels
- Use of qualified persons for certain electrical work
- Safe work practices, including lockout and tagout procedures when applicable
- Protection from damaged cords and exposed wiring

Citations frequently involve damaged extension cords, improper grounding or unqualified employees performing electrical repairs. Outdoor and wet conditions common in agricultural environments increase enforcement sensitivity.

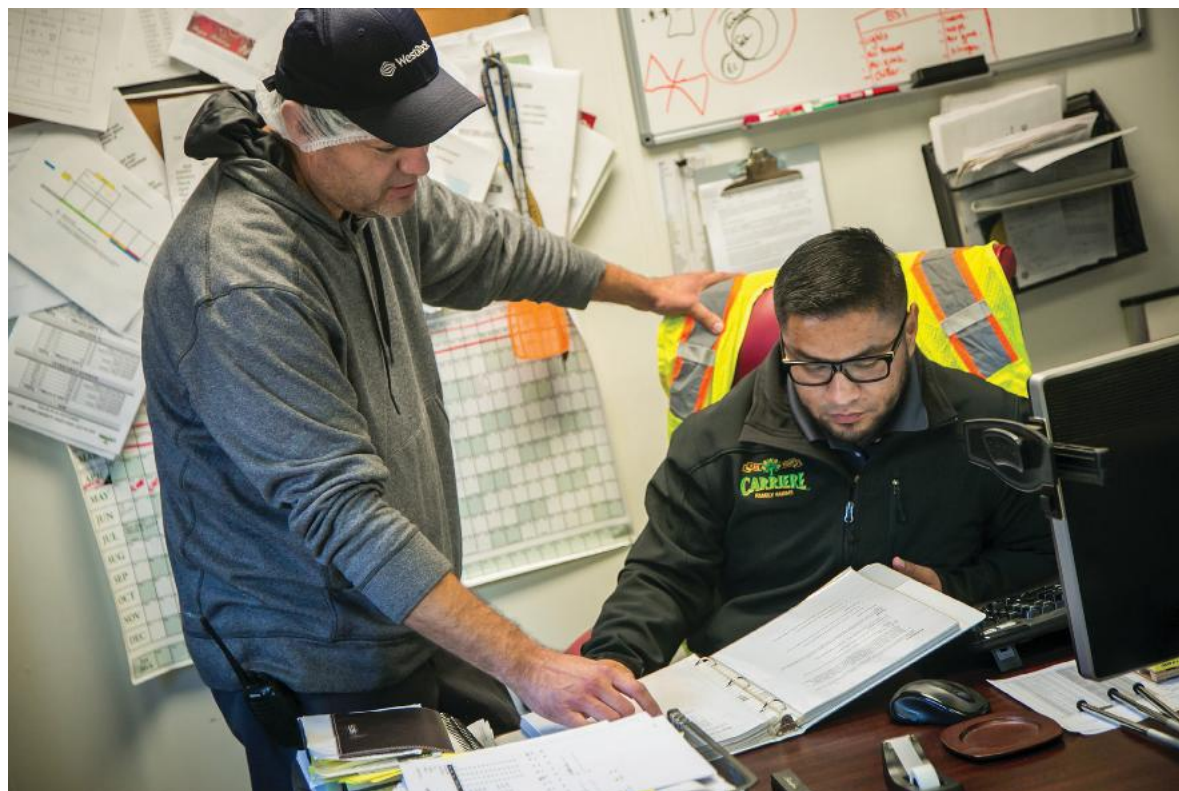
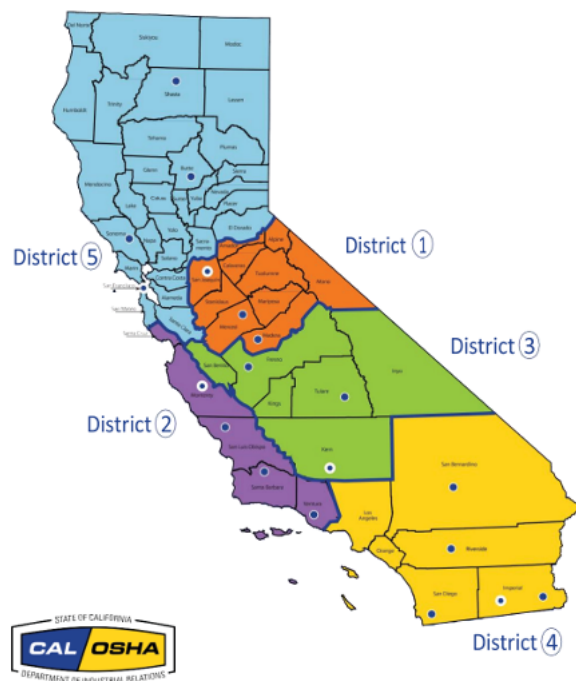
### No. 5 Electrical Safety

Electrical safety, covered under the electrical safety orders in Title 8,

Routine inspections and clear restrictions on who may perform electrical work can significantly reduce risk.

#### Agricultural Enforcement Task Force and Outreach Unit Offices

Region 9: [DOSHREG9BAKERSFIELD@dir.ca.gov](mailto:DOSHREG9BAKERSFIELD@dir.ca.gov)



Be sure to review your company's Injury and Illness Prevention Plan to ensure it is up to date and adequately reflects your operation's tasks, working conditions, and potential hazards. Photo credit: AgSafe

Cal/OSHA has dedicated agricultural inspectors divided amongst 5 California districts. Picture credit: California Department of Industrial Relations website

### Enforcement Is Increasing

The enforcement environment has shifted, and the data are clear. Smaller agricultural operations are being cited at significant rates, and expanded inspection activity is likely to increase that pressure.

Employers should review their heat illness plans, sanitation systems, IIPP implementation, recordkeeping practices and electrical safety procedures now — not after an inspector arrives. They should also ensure compliance in other high-liability areas such as workplace violence prevention, forklift and tractor safety, and proper lock-out/tagout procedures.

Compliance requires structure, documentation and accountability at every level of the operation.

If you need assistance reviewing or strengthening your safety programs, AgSafe is available to help. Contact us at 209-526-4400 or email [safeinfo@agsafe.org](mailto:safeinfo@agsafe.org).

AgSafe is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organiza-

tion (EIN 68-0259724) established in 1991 and recognized as an educational leader in agricultural safety, human resources and leadership development. The organization provides training, education, and practical tools to support agricultural employers, supervisors, and workers in promoting safe workplaces, regulatory compliance, and effective leadership practices. Headquartered in California, AgSafe delivers programs nationwide, including Hawaii and the Pacific Islands, through in-person instruction, virtual learning, and partnerships with industry organizations. Agricultural employers and those seeking additional information about AgSafe and its services can visit [www.agsafe.org](http://www.agsafe.org), email [safeinfo@agsafe.org](mailto:safeinfo@agsafe.org) or call 209-526-4400.



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Ensure your field sanitation facilities have an adequate supply of water, soap, and towels for handwashing. Photo credit: AgSafe

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