STANISLAUS COUNTY FARM BUREAU

Stanislaus County

FARM NEWS PAPER

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Feature Story

California Nursery Conference Comes to Modesto as Generation Growers Celebrates 70 Years

Industry education, local nursery tours and a family milestone highlight the importance of California's nursery industry.

By: Caitie Diemel



van Klaveren Family

Modesto welcomed nursery professionals, researchers and industry leaders from across the state October 27–29 for the 2026 California Nursery Conference, hosted at Modesto Junior College (MJC). The conference provided an opportunity to share research, discuss industry challenges, tour local nurseries and celebrate an impressive milestone for one Stanislaus County nursery family.



Following the conference, I had the pleasure of speaking with Deanna van Klaveren of Generation Growers in Modesto about the event, the importance of recognizing the nursery industry's contributions to local agriculture, and her family's 70-year history in the business.

The California Nursery Conference is organized through the UC Nursery and Floriculture Alliance (UCNFA), a statewide partnership connecting University of California researchers, educators and nursery growers and The California Assoc of Nurseries Endowment for Research & Scholarship Foundation (CANERS Foundation). Similar to the SCFB Foundation – CANERS supports industry education, research and scholarship opportunities. Over the years, the alliance and foundation has transitioned from offering educational roadshows throughout California to hosting an annual conference that rotates between Northern and Southern California.

The conference provides an opportunity for researchers to share their latest findings and industry updates with growers while also getting out into the field to see firsthand the businesses and operations their research supports. Next year's conference is expected to take place in Riverside.

A Look Inside Stanislaus County's Nursery Industry

With Modesto serving as this year's host city, conference attendees had the opportunity to visit several local nursery operations and explore some of the unique challenges facing growers in our region. One important topic was the continued impact of regulations surrounding the Asian citrus psyllid (ACP) and Huanglongbing (HLB), also known as citrus greening disease. Nearly two decades after the pest became a concern in California, preventing its spread and protecting the state's citrus industry remain

important priorities for nursery growers.

Attendees toured Frantz Wholesale Nursery, including its citrus production facilities, where discussions focused on regulatory requirements and efforts to prevent the spread of ACP and HLB. At Burchell Nursery, participants learned more about the regulations surrounding the movement of nursery stock and how those requirements affect business operations.

The tour also included a stop at The Greenery in Turlock, offering attendees a different perspective on the nursery supply chain. As a retail garden center, The Greenery represents the final destination for many of the plants produced by wholesale nurseries. Attendees learned how incoming shipments are managed, inspected and received before plants are made available to customers.

Together, these stops provided a look at the nursery industry from production to retail, highlighting the work and regulatory requirements involved in getting plants from growers to consumers.

Another highlight was Modesto Junior College itself. Deanna praised MJC for being an excellent host and was especially impressed by the students who volunteered throughout the conference. She shared that industry members were impressed by the students' engagement and the strength of MJC's horticulture program. Conference attendees also had the opportunity to tour the college's horticulture facilities and see the hands-on educational opportunities available to students.



According to Deanna, conference attendance increased by approximately 30% this year. Modesto's central location, proximity to the Bay Area and accessibility for Southern California attendees helped make the event a success, along with strong participation from Stanislaus County nurseries. Beyond the educational sessions and tours, Deanna emphasized the importance of bringing industry members together. The opportunity to exchange ideas, discuss challenges and connect with fellow growers is one of the conference's greatest benefits.

Making Sure the Nursery Industry Counts

One of the most important issues Deanna discussed was the need for more accurate reporting of the nursery industry's economic contributions, particularly when it comes to container-grown plants. Deanna explained that current agricultural reporting does not adequately capture the value of containerized nursery products sold into retail markets, such as garden centers. She estimates that approximately 60% of nursery stock sold in Stanislaus County is container-grown material destined for retail markets, while the remaining 40% is sold into production agriculture, including fruit and nut trees and grapevines. Under current reporting practices, a significant portion of nursery sales is not being accurately reflected in agricultural production statistics. This is more than just a reporting issue.

Agricultural production figures help demonstrate the economic importance of individual commodities and can influence decisions about educational programs, workforce development and industry support. Programs such as high school FFA and college horticulture courses rely on industry information to help identify where training and educational opportunities are needed. When nursery production is underrepresented, the industry's true economic impact and need for a skilled workforce can be overlooked. Even with these reporting challenges, nursery production ranked as Stanislaus County's fifth-largest agricultural commodity in the 2025 Stanislaus County Agricultural Crop Report.

Deanna hopes changes to the reporting process will allow the industry to more accurately account for container-grown nursery products and better demonstrate the full value of nursery production in our county. For an industry that supports local jobs, agricultural education, commercial growers, retail garden centers and home gardeners alike,

having an accurate picture of its economic contributions is essential.

Generation Growers Celebrates 70 Years

The conference also provided the perfect opportunity to celebrate a special milestone for one local nursery family. Generation Growers, owned by the van Klaveren family, celebrated its 70th anniversary with a dinner and gathering held in conjunction with the conference.

The family's nursery business began in Campbell, California, before purchasing its current Modesto property in 1975 and beginning operations there in 1976.

Today, three generations are actively involved in the family business, including Deanna and Roger van Klaveren's daughter, Abby, who returned to join the operation within the past few years. While Generation Growers is celebrating 70 years in business, the family's horticultural roots go back much further. Deanna shared that they can trace six generations of nursery experience back to the Netherlands.

I had previously spoken with Abby about her experience working in the family business. She shared how satisfying it is to watch trucks loaded with plants leave the nursery, knowing those plants are headed to garden centers where customers will enjoy them. But when I asked Abby about her favorite part of the business, her answer was immediate: propagation.

When I shared that with Deanna, she laughed. Apparently, Abby comes from a long line of van Klaverens who share that same enthusiasm for propagation!

For Deanna, seeing the next generation embrace the family's passion for growing plants is especially meaningful. "It is really exciting to see her come back to join the family business," Deanna said.

The family previously hosted annual dinners for their customers, so with the California Nursery Conference taking place just a few miles away during their anniversary year, the timing couldn't have been better. The celebration brought together customers, industry friends and fellow nursery professionals to recognize seven decades of growing plants and building relationships.

Growing Plants That Make People Happy

With so many years of family history in the nursery business, I asked Deanna what she loves most about the industry. Her answer was simple: the people.

"The people. The people in the industry. They are excited about plants and plants making people happy. It is just a joy to connect with fellow nursery professionals. You feel the energy around growing something that makes people happy, and plants make the world better. I just love that part."

Of course, I couldn't let our conversation end without asking a nursery expert for a little gardening advice. I asked Deanna to name three plants she thought everyone should have in their yard. She laughed and told me, "Caitie, that's like asking me to pick a favorite child."

But she was a good sport and gave me three recommendations!

First, a camellia. Any variety will do, because they're all lovely.

Second, a hydrangea. Again, she said you really can't go wrong with any variety.

And third, a Kishu mandarin citrus tree! That last recommendation made me laugh because Roger had previously told me that a Kishu mandarin was exactly what I needed in my own yard. He recalled how his children would strip all the fruit off the family's tree when they were growing up. Clearly, the van Klaveren family knows a thing or two about growing plants that bring people joy!

The 2026 California Nursery Conference was a wonderful opportunity to showcase Stanislaus County's nursery industry, the strength of our agricultural education programs and the importance of connecting growers with researchers and fellow industry members.

Congratulations to Modesto Junior College and everyone involved in hosting a successful conference, and a special congratulations to the van Klaveren family and Generation Growers on 70 years in the nursery business.

As Deanna so perfectly put it, plants make people happy, and plants make the world better. What a wonderful legacy to continue growing.



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Dear Abi,

I'm raising my kids on the same farm where I grew up, but between sports and busy schedules, their childhood looks much different than mine did. How can I pass down the same work ethic and appreciation for agriculture while still letting them enjoy being kids?

-Raising the Next Generation

Dear Raising the Next Generation,
First of all, I think the fact that you're asking this question means you're already headed in the right direction. There's something pretty special about growing up on a farm. It's a childhood filled with early mornings, dirty boots, lessons learned the hard way, and the understanding that sometimes the animals get fed before you do. But I also think we have a tendency to look back on our own childhoods through rose-colored glasses. After all, I'm sure our parents thought we had it easier than they did, too!

The truth is, raising farm kids today doesn't have to look exactly like it did 30 years ago to teach the same values. Your kids don't have to spend every summer day working in the orchard to understand the value of hard work. Sometimes it's as simple as giving them a small responsibility, letting them help with chores (even when it takes twice as long), or explaining why Mom or Dad can't always be home for dinner during harvest.

And while it's easy to worry about technology, busy schedules, and everything else competing for their attention, I don't think we should underestimate the lessons they're goes learning just by being part of a farming family.

They're watching you show up when you're tired. They're seeing firsthand that hard work doesn't always come with immediate rewards. They're learning that taking care of something, whether it's an animal, a crop, or a piece of equipment, requires consistency and commitment.

But perhaps most importantly, they're learning that agriculture is about more than just making a living. It's about family, responsibility, and being part of something bigger than yourself.

So let them play sports. Let them experience things outside of agriculture. Because the goal isn't necessarily to raise kids who grow up to become farmers (even though of course we would all love that). It's to raise good people who understand where they came from and appreciate the work that into putting food on the table.

And if they happen to fall in love with farming along the way? Well, I'd call that a pretty wonderful bonus.

-Abi

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

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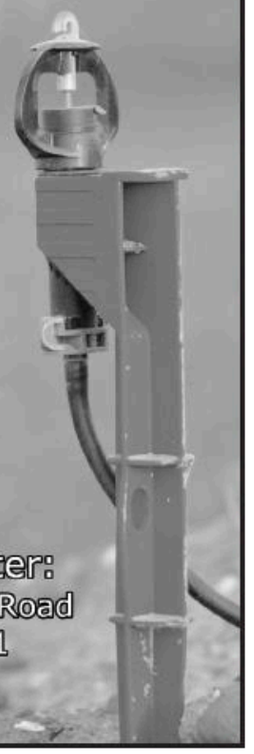
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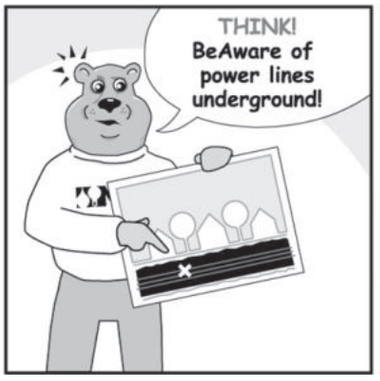
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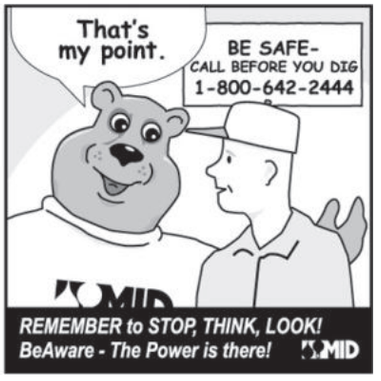
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Recipe Card

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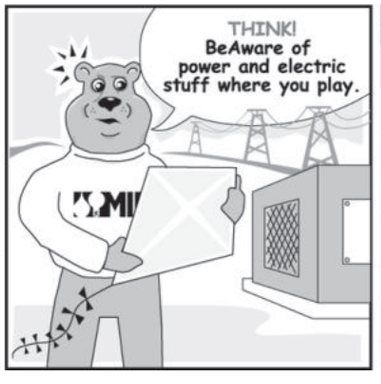
- 1 box spice cake mix
- 1 15oz can pure pumpkin

Directions

- Mix the pumkin and cake mix powder together.
- Drop by spoonfuls into greased muffin cups or cupcake liners.
- Bake at 350 degrees for 19-22 minutes or until knife comes out clean
- Enjoy!













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Around the County

WESTERN DAIRY SHOWCASE CELEBRATES FIFTH YEAR WITH RECORD PARTICIPATION

Annual event welcomes 182 exhibitors, more than 300 head of cattle, and awards over $25,000 in scholarships to support the next generation of dairy leaders.



Annual event welcomes 182 exhibitors, more than 300 head of cattle, and awards over $25,000 in scholarships to support the next generation of dairy leaders.

TURLOCK, Calif. — What began during the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for youth who had lost access to fairs, livestock shows, and other agricultural activities has grown into a thriving annual event celebrating dairy youth and the future of the dairy industry.

The Western Dairy Showcase celebrated its fifth year in 2026 with record participation, welcoming 182 exhibitors, 292 entries, more than 300 head of cattle, and 130 youth participating in showmanship.

Established during a time of uncertainty, the Showcase provided young dairy exhibitors with a place to exhibit their projects, compete, learn, and remain connected to the agricultural community. Five years later, that original mission continues to guide the organization's growth and success.

The record turnout reflects the dedication of dairy families, exhibitors, sponsors, donors, and supporters who have helped make the Western Dairy Showcase a valued event for young people in agriculture.

As a nonprofit organization, the Western Dairy Showcase is committed to investing in youth. Donations and sponsor contributions directly support exhibitors, with proceeds returned to young people through awards, educational opportunities, and scholarships. Each year, the organization awards more than $25,000 in scholarships to deserving dairy youth, helping them pursue their educational and career goals. Beyond financial assistance, the Showcase provides valuable opportunities for young people to develop skills in showmanship, animal care, fitting, leadership, communication, responsibility, and sportsmanship.

These experiences help prepare exhibitors for future success both within the dairy industry and beyond, while strengthening their connection to agriculture and their communities.

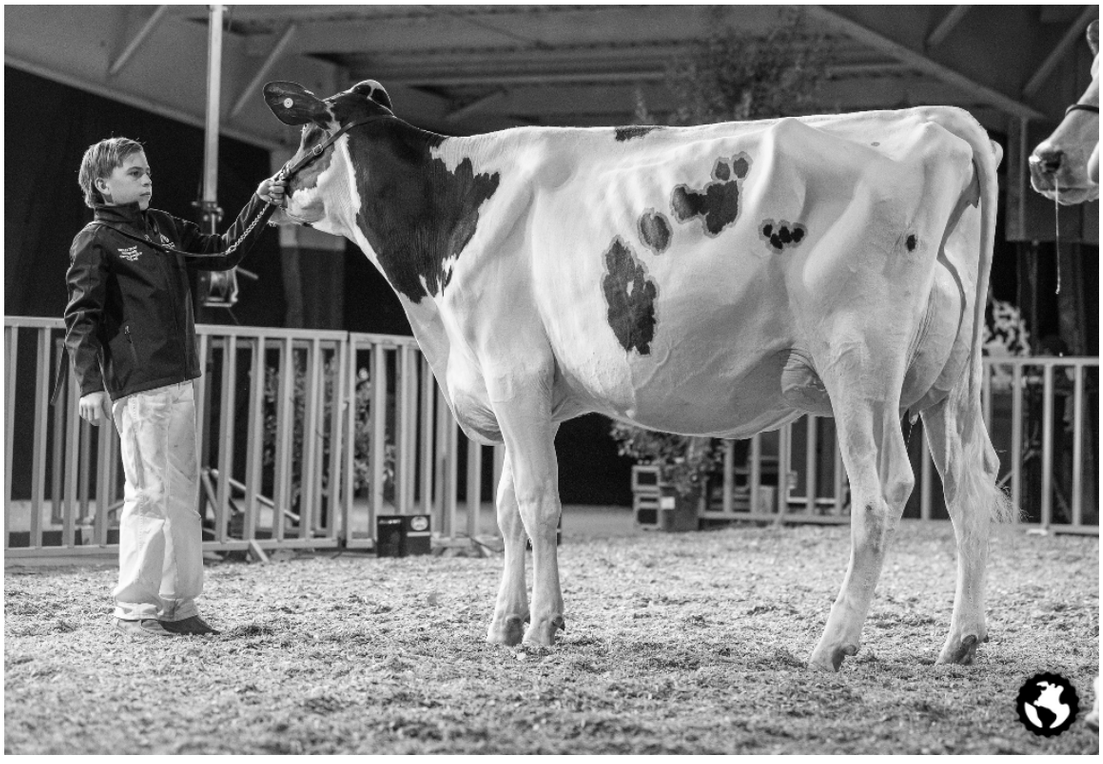
From its beginnings during the pandemic to its record-setting fifth year, the Western Dairy Showcase has remained focused on its founding purpose: creating opportunities for youth and investing in the next generation of dairy industry leaders.

Five years. Record participation. One mission: supporting youth, celebrating agriculture, and investing in the future of dairy.

We could not host a show of this caliber without the support of our generous donors:

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Cranehill	bronze
Denier Genetics	bronze
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President's Club Spotlight

YOSEMITE FARM CREDIT, INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE

Yosemite Farm Credit strengthens local agriculture through lending, advocacy and community involvement.

President's Club Spotlight: Supporting local farmers, strengthening communities and investing in the next generation of agriculture

For generations, Yosemite Farm Credit has played an important role in helping farmers and ranchers across Stanislaus and Merced counties grow their operations, navigate challenges and invest in the future of agriculture. As a member of Stanislaus County Farm Bureau's President's Club, the organization continues to demonstrate its commitment to the agricultural community through financial services, education, advocacy and community involvement.

According to Dino Migliazzo, Board President of Yosemite Farm Credit, one of the organization's greatest strengths is its people and the relationships they have built with local agricultural families.

With six branch locations in Modesto, Oakdale, Turlock, Patterson, Merced and Los Banos, Yosemite Farm Credit serves approximately 1,700 members throughout its service area and employs 189 people.

That experience is one of the things Migliazzo believes sets Yosemite Farm Credit apart. At its Merced branch alone, two senior loan officers have a combined 90 years of service, reflecting the long-standing relationships the organization has built with generations of farmers and ranchers.

Unlike traditional commercial banks, Yosemite Farm Credit operates as a cooperative, meaning its borrowers are also members who have a voice in the organization. Its board of directors includes eight elected farmers and ranchers from the region, along with three appointed directors who bring additional financial expertise.

This structure allows the organization to make decisions with a firsthand understanding of the challenges facing local agriculture.

Another unique benefit of the cooperative model is its patronage program, which allows Yosemite Farm Credit to return a portion of its profits to members. Migliazzo explained that over the past four years, the organization has maintained a history of returning approximately 100 basis points in patronage, effectively reducing borrowing costs for its members.

Understanding the Challenges of Agriculture

Agriculture is an industry filled with uncertainty, and Migliazzo recognizes that no two farming operations face exactly the same challenges.

From rising production costs and fluctuating commodity markets to water availability, labor expenses and increasing regulations, farmers and ranchers must continually adapt to circumstances often outside their control.

“I think people don't understand the risk that farmers and ranchers take every day,” Migliazzo said.

He explained that producers face an extensive list of challenges, including weather, resources, labor, energy costs, trade policies and legislative decisions, all while hoping their products bring enough in the marketplace to remain profitable.

To better understand these challenges, Yosemite Farm Credit conducts multiple internal and external risk assessments throughout the year. The organization also regularly brings in industry experts to discuss issues affecting agriculture, including groundwater regulations, water availability and the potential impacts on farmland values and agricultural production.

These conversations help ensure that both the board of directors and staff remain informed about the issues facing their borrowers.

Yosemite Farm Credit also places a strong emphasis on listening to its members, gathering feedback and continually evaluating how its financial products can better serve agricultural operations.

While lending regulations create certain limitations, the organization works to provide financing options tailored to the needs of farmers, ranchers and agricultural businesses. These include production agriculture, equipment purchases, processing operations and capital improvements.

Migliazzo emphasized that regardless of how well an operation is managed, agriculture will always experience financial ups and downs. Having knowledgeable lenders who understand those challenges is an important part of helping producers navigate difficult times.

Investing in the Next Generation

One of Yosemite Farm Credit's greatest priorities is supporting young people interested in agriculture.

Through scholarships, local fairs, 4-H and FFA programs, and other youth activities, the organization works to build relationships with the next generation of farmers and ranchers long before they may need agricultural financing.

Migliazzo explained that even if a young person does not come from a production agriculture background, participating in a livestock project can provide valuable lessons about the financial realities of farming.

From purchasing an animal and paying for feed to hoping to make a profit at the county fair, these experiences help young people better understand the risks and responsibilities involved in agriculture.

Yosemite Farm Credit also offers a Young, Beginning and Small (YBS) farmer program designed to help individuals establish themselves in agriculture, including those who may not have a family operation to inherit.

Recognizing the significant financial barriers facing new farmers, Migliazzo said the organization has advocated for increased lending limits for beginning farmer programs, particularly in California, where the cost of entering agriculture can be substantial.

In addition, Yosemite Farm Credit established an advisory council of young and beginning farmers and ranchers approximately three years ago. The council provides an opportunity for younger producers to share their concerns and financial needs directly with leadership while learning more about agricultural lending and the cooperative system.

Migliazzo described the council as a valuable learning experience for both sides. Young producers gain a better understanding of financing opportunities, while the board gains insight into the needs of the next generation of agricultural borrowers.

The organization also offers summer internships, providing college students with firsthand experience in agricultural finance and opportunities to explore careers within the industry.

Giving Back to the Community

Yosemite Farm Credit's commitment extends well beyond agricultural lending.

The organization maintains an active presence throughout the communities it serves, supporting local agricultural organizations, charitable initiatives, food banks, scholarships and community events.

In 2025 alone, 87 Yosemite Farm Credit employees contributed more than 1,000 volunteer hours to community organizations and causes.

“I'm so proud of our staff,” Migliazzo said. “They walk the walk, too.”

For Migliazzo, this involvement reflects the dedication of Yosemite Farm Credit employees and their genuine commitment to the communities where they live and work.

Whether supporting a local livestock auction, participating in a fundraiser or volunteering for a charitable organization, Yosemite Farm Credit strives to make a positive impact both inside and outside the agricultural industry.

Migliazzo also spoke highly of the farmers and ranchers throughout the region, emphasizing the quality of local agricultural operations and the resources that make the Central Valley such an important agricultural region.

He described serving on the board and helping guide the organization's growth as a rewarding experience, particularly because of the talented employees and agricultural producers he has had the opportunity to work alongside.

A Partnership Built on Shared Goals

As a Stanislaus County Farm Bureau President's Club member, Yosemite Farm Credit recognizes the importance of working alongside organizations that advocate for farmers and ranchers.

For Migliazzo, the partnership is a natural fit, with both organizations sharing a common goal of supporting the long-term success of agriculture.

“I think the relationship between YFC and the Farm Bureau is a natural relationship,” Migliazzo said. “I just think they both benefit greatly being able to be in the same room at the same time.”

He explained that agricultural lenders, farmers, ranchers and advocacy organizations all depend on one another and have an important role to play in protecting the future of the industry.

Yosemite Farm Credit understands that farmers and ranchers face increasing challenges from government regulations, rising costs and changing economic conditions. Through its involvement in agricultural advocacy, including visits to Washington, D.C., the organization works to ensure the concerns of agricultural producers are heard by lawmakers.

Migliazzo believes that collaboration and a united voice are essential when communicating the needs of agriculture to elected officials at the local, state and national levels.

These relationships also create opportunities to connect young farmers with financial resources, educational programs and the support they need to establish successful operations.

Perhaps most importantly, Yosemite Farm Credit recognizes that agriculture is built on relationships. From the farmers and ranchers who produce our food to the lenders who help finance their operations and the organizations advocating on their behalf, each plays an important role in keeping the industry strong.

Through its continued support of Stanislaus County Farm Bureau and its President's Club, Yosemite Farm Credit demonstrates a commitment not only to the success of its members but also to the future of agriculture throughout the region.

Stanislaus County Farm Bureau is proud to recognize Yosemite Farm Credit as a President's Club member and appreciates its continued investment in our agricultural community.



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STANISLAUS COUNTY FARM BUREAU

Staff Christmas Gift Guide!



Everyone in the office picked their two best gift ideas to share with our members. If you're looking for an inexpensive gift or a splurge, there's something here for everyone on your list!



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Executive Director

Under $25



Darn Tough Wool Socks

Splurge



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Abi

Membership Coordinator

Under $25



Primally Pure Lip Oil

Splurge



Staub Dutch Oven



Melissa

Office Manager

Under $25



Geometry Kitchen Towel

Splurge



Minky Couture Blanket



Taylor

Education Coordinator

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Candle Warmer Lamp

Splurge



Yeti Ice Chest



Tom

Director of Governmental Affairs

Under $25

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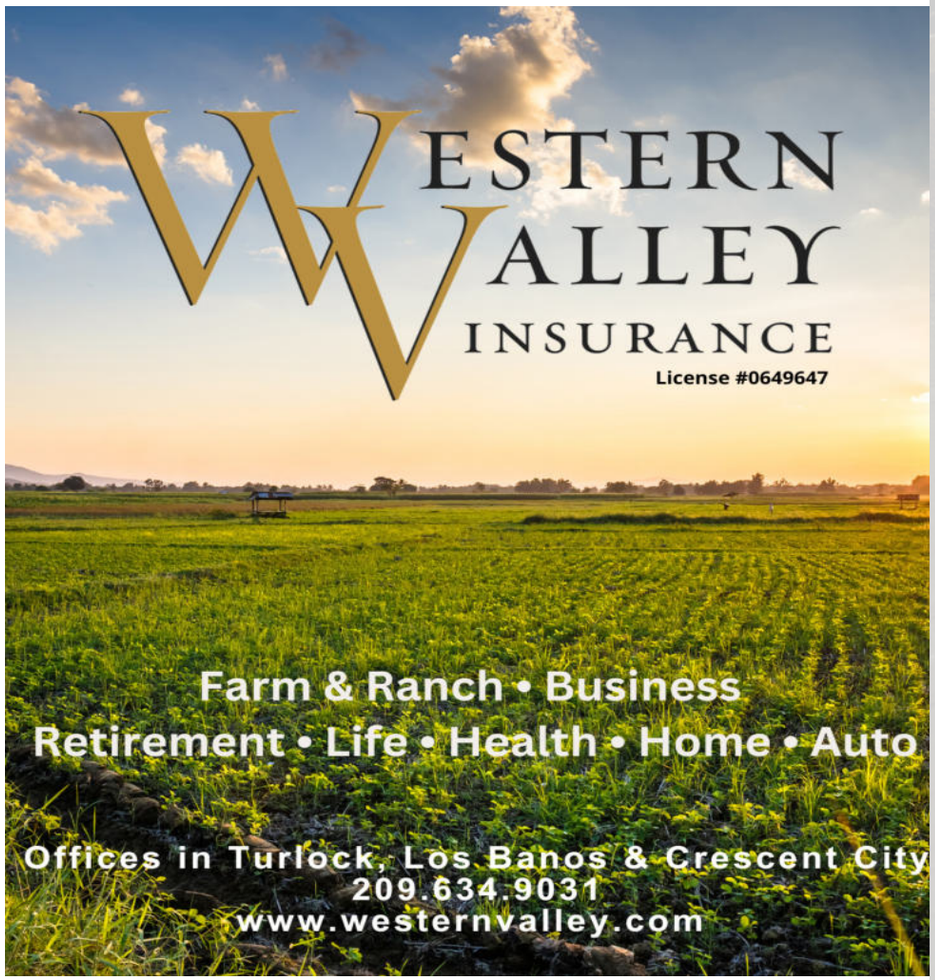
Gift Card to local brewery

Splurge



Kubota M5-111 tractor





STANISLAUS COUNTY FARM BUREAU

UPCOMING EVENTS

Calendar

Nov 19th

Northwest Regional Meeting

Hart Ransom

Join us for a Thanskgiving dinner and gift raffle

Nov 20th

Spray Safe

MJC West Campus

FREE continuing education hours for growers and employees

Nov 23rd

Workforce Development Meeting

SCFB Office

Help shape the future of Stanislaus County Workforce

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2026 GOOD EGG BREAKFAST RECAP

The GEB is the longest running egg promotion breakfast in the United States. The breakfast event recognizes individuals – known as "Good Eggs" - who have demonstrated dedication and outstanding service to their communities.

The 62nd Annual Good Egg Breakfast (GEB) was held in Modesto, California on Thursday, October 22nd. The GEB is the longest running egg promotion breakfast in the United States. The breakfast event recognizes individuals – known as "Good Eggs" - who have demonstrated dedication and outstanding service to their communities.

AND THE WINNER IS.....David Gianelli!



Trish Christensen and David Gianelli

Trish Christensen, President and CEO of the Modesto Chamber of Commerce, presented this year's Good Egg Award to David Gianelli. Trish's introduction was egg-ceptional as she eggstolled David's many accomplishments and his longstanding commitment to the community.

David is an estate and probate attorney based in Modesto. He has served as Chairman of the Modesto Chamber of Commerce Board and helped establish the Modesto Boys and Girls Club. He has also served as President of the Stanislaus County Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Organization and has been involved with the Education Foundation of Stanislaus County and the Downtown Modesto Partnership.

David's contributions to the community are so extensive that there simply isn't enough room to list them all. His dedication to making Modesto and Stanislaus County better places to live is truly commendable. He is indeed a true "Good Egg"!

KEYNOTE SPEAKER Tracy Schohr



Tracy Schohr and GEB emcee Stephen Stallone

GEB attendees were treated to an egg-cellent presentation by Tracy Schohr, a University of California Cooperative Extension advisor. Tracy serves as the University of California – Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor for Butte, Plumas and Sierra Counties. She provides technical assistance to ranchers, land managers, and agencies on livestock production and natural resource management.

Tracy is also a leading public figure, researcher, and operational liaison in addressing the significant economic and operational conflicts between expanding gray wolf populations and livestock ranchers in Northern California. One of her key messages to the GEB audience was the importance of cooperation among all parties involved in a conflict. Open communication and collaboration are essential to finding practical solutions when interests and priorities differ.

THE CHICKEN AND THE EGG with "handler" Jeanne Oosterman



WHAT came first, you ask? According to AI…the egg came first. And now you know!

The GEB also awarded scholarships to four Modesto Junior College students. According to our scholarship application reviewers – the applications submitted by the students were – you guessed it – exceptional! Congratulations to the outstanding young scholars and their advisor Tim Truax, for supporting their achievements and educational goals

INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION

MJC Instructor Tim Truax, Students, Natalie Giuntoli, Chelsea Alderson, and Jeanne Oosterman (not pictured MJC student Nevaeh Russo)

Kudos for a job well done to GEB Committee members Les Baptista – Gemperle



Family Farms; Amanda Berry – CEVA; Trish Christensen - Modesto Chamber of Commerce; Caitie Campodonico – Stanislaus County Farm Bureau; Patty Hendrix – Coast Packaging; Kim Hernandez; Keri Layne – Yosemite Farm Credit; Felicia Lopez – Modesto Chamber of Commerce, Vicente Gutierrez – NuCal; Jeff Meyer; Debbie Murdock – PEPA; Art Razo – California Poultry Federation; Stephen Stallone – JS West and Companies; Tim Truax – Modesto Junior College, in addition to the cooks.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to everyone that participated in the celebration of the 62nd Anniversary of the Good Egg Breakfast. The longevity of the GEB is a testament to those that have served the community as well as the Good Egg Committee made up of members from California Poultry Federation, Modesto Chamber of Commerce, Pacific Egg & Poultry Association and Stanislaus County Farm Bureau. See you at next year's event! We will be celebrating 63 years of honoring those that give back to their community.



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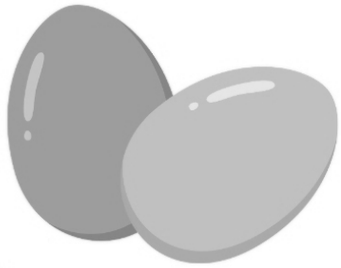
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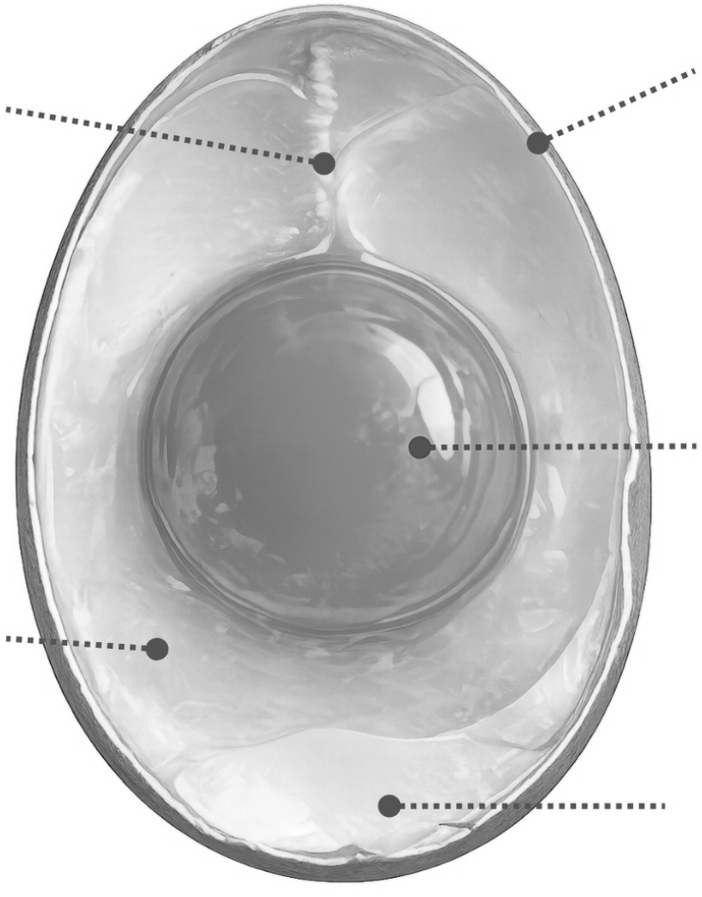
Kids Corner!



WHAT'S Inside AN Egg

Directions:

Cut out the parts of an egg and glue them to the right spot!



White (Albumen)
Cushions the embryo and is the main water source for the embryo

Air Cell
A pocket of air that provides the first breath for a developing chick

Yolk
The yellow center that provides the main food source for the embryo.

Chalaza
Rope-like strands that anchor the yolk to the center of the egg

Shell
The hard outer part that protects the egg



FARM BUREAU CELEBRATES PRESIDENT'S CLUB MEMBERS AT INAUGURAL AG LEADER'S SUMMIT

Luncheon highlights the impact of premium membership on agricultural advocacy, education and community outreach

Stanislaus County Farm Bureau welcomed President's Club members, local elected officials and agricultural leaders to its inaugural Ag Leader's Summit on Thursday, November 5, at Frantz Nursery.

The luncheon was created as an opportunity to connect with President's Club members, recognize their continued support and share the important role their membership plays in strengthening local agriculture.

Premium membership dues not only provide valuable financial support for Farm Bureau's programs but also help strengthen the organization's collective voice. By supporting the membership base, President's Club members help increase the number of farmers, ranchers and agricultural businesses represented by Farm Bureau when meeting with elected officials and legislators.



As the first event of its kind, the Ag Leader's Summit was designed to bring additional value to President's Club membership while providing an opportunity for members to hear firsthand about Farm Bureau's ongoing programs, advocacy efforts and future goals.

A central message throughout the afternoon was simple: the support of President's Club members makes a difference.

A strong membership base carries weight in conversations surrounding agricultural policy, allowing Farm Bureau to advocate more effectively for the needs of local producers.

Throughout the luncheon, attendees learned about several of the programs and initiatives made possible through membership support.

One of the highlights was AgEdventure

Day, Farm Bureau's annual agricultural education event that introduces approximately 1,300 third-grade students to the many facets of agriculture through interactive presentations and hands-on activities. Farm Bureau is currently working toward expanding the program countywide, with the goal of reaching even more students. The event is offered at no cost to participating schools, aside from transportation.

Another educational initiative highlighted was Farm Bureau's summer library program. Working with every library in Stanislaus County, Farm Bureau brought agricultural education directly to children and families throughout the community. During the summer, Farm Bureau's intern visited local libraries to read agriculture-themed stories and lead hands-on activities, helping children learn more about where their food comes from.

Attendees also heard about the recent Harvest Takeover at the Modesto Children's Museum, which featured interactive agricultural exhibits and activities designed to introduce young visitors to farming and ranching in a fun and approachable way.

Beyond youth education, Farm Bureau continues to prioritize programs that directly benefit local growers and agricultural employers.

Spray Safe, the organization's largest grower education events, serves more than 500 attendees and provides valuable training and continuing education opportunities. Offered in both English and Spanish, the event is completely free to members and nonmembers alike.

Farm Bureau also offers a variety of required workplace safety training courses throughout the year at discounted rates for members, with President's Club members receiving these trainings at no cost.

In addition to educational programming, the luncheon highlighted Farm Bureau's ongoing advocacy efforts and its work to build relationships with regulatory agencies.

Over the past year, Farm Bureau hosted representatives from both the State Water Resources Control Board and the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR), providing opportunities for agency staff to tour agricultural operations throughout Stanislaus County and meet directly with local growers.

One particularly valuable visit included the director of DPR, who participated in an agricultural tour and attended a Farm Bureau board meeting. The visit allowed board members to share their concerns, discuss regulatory challenges and provide firsthand perspectives on the issues facing local agriculture.

These visits created opportunities for meaningful conversations and helped agency representatives gain a better understanding of how regulations affect farmers and ranchers on the ground.

Following the Farm Bureau program updates, attendees heard from California Farm Bureau Chief Operating Officer Dan Durheim, who shared insight into progress being made at the state level and the importance of continued membership support in advancing agricultural advocacy.

The afternoon also provided time for President's Club members to connect with one another, visit with local leaders and strengthen relationships within the agricultural community.

Among those in attendance were Stanislaus County Supervisors Buck Condit and Terry Withrow, Sheriff Jeff Dirkse, Agricultural Commissioner Linda Pinfold, California Farm Bureau Second Vice President Ron Peterson and several members of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau Board of Directors.

Guests enjoyed lunch and dessert from Hilmar Cheese, along with the opportunity to socialize before and after the presentations.

The inaugural Ag Leader's Summit was a wonderful opportunity to bring together the individuals and businesses whose continued investment helps make Farm Bureau's work possible.

From introducing young students to agriculture to providing valuable grower education and advocating for producers at the local and state levels, President's Club members play an important role in supporting the organization's mission.

Stanislaus County Farm Bureau extends its sincere appreciation to everyone who attended the luncheon and, most importantly, to its President's Club members for their continued generosity, partnership and commitment to local agriculture.

Farm Bureau looks forward to building on the success of this first summit and continuing to provide meaningful opportunities for members to connect, stay informed and see the impact of their support.



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Pumpkin pie mix...$4.29	Fresh cranberries.....$2.15
Whole milk.....$5.37	Whipping creme.....$2.47
Vegetable tray.....$1.44	Sweet potatoes.....$5.22
Misc ingredients.....4.24	Cubed stuffing.....$4.29
Dinner rolls (12).....$4.92	

AVERAGE COST FOR 10 PEOPLE:

$64.85



MJC AG'S FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER

BY JEANNE OOSTERMAN

Each year, Modesto Junior College (MJC) brings together students, faculty, and community members for an important cause: helping fight hunger through the annual Milk Drive. This event is a team effort between the MJC Young Farmers Club and the Dairy Science Department. The annual Milk Drive provides an opportunity for the MJC agricultural community to give back beyond the classroom, through donations of milk and financial contributions. There is always a great turnout on the East Campus Ag Patio and is a great time for fellowship and to hear from industry professionals.



This event is part of the Intercollegiate Give-A-Gallon Challenge, organized by the California Milk Advisory Board. Last year, they were awarded the "Most Gallons Raised Award," and again they received that same recognition! **This year they raised 360 gallons of milk donated to the MJC Pirates Pantry, Modesto Love Center, Modesto Gospel Mission, and The Salvation Army.** The California Milk Advisory Board also donated 100 more gallons on behalf of MJC Dairy Science Department to the Second Harvest of Greater Valley Foodbank in Manteca bringing the total donated to **460 gallons** for our fight against hunger this fall. The annual Milk Drive is more than just a campus event. It brings the MJC agricultural community together to give back, serve others, and make a difference in the fight against hunger.



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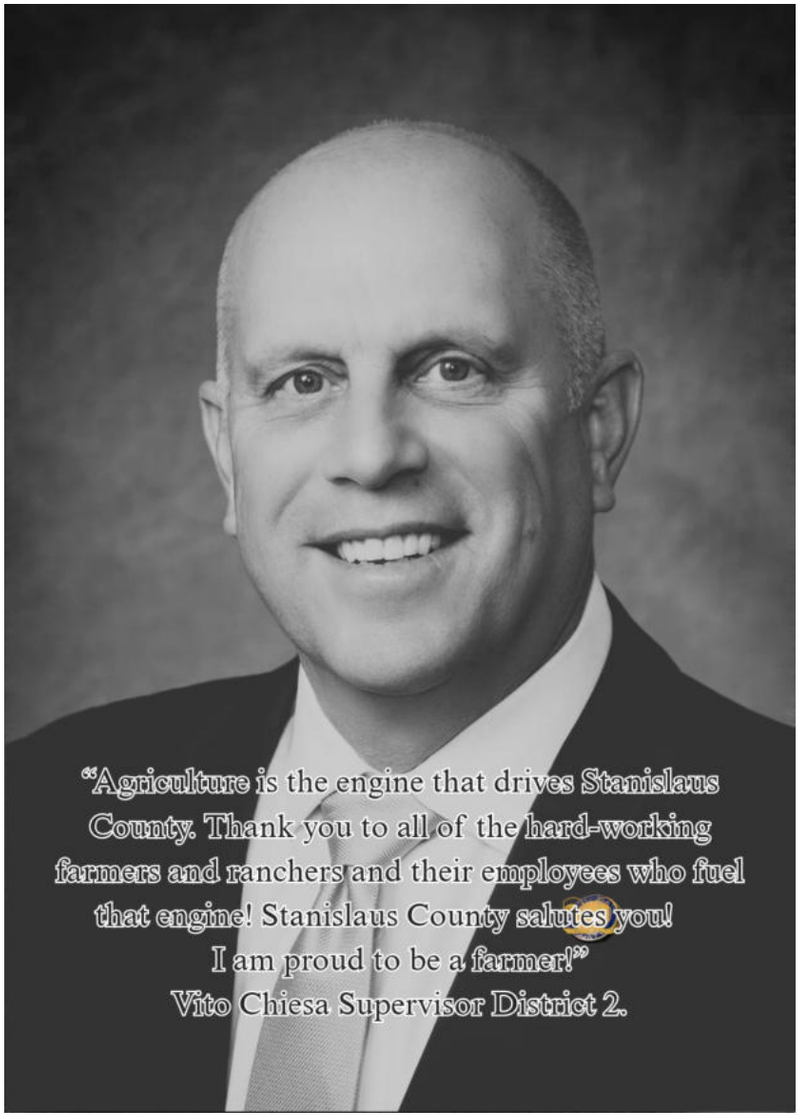
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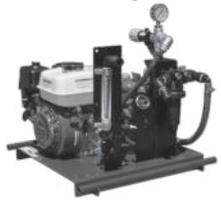
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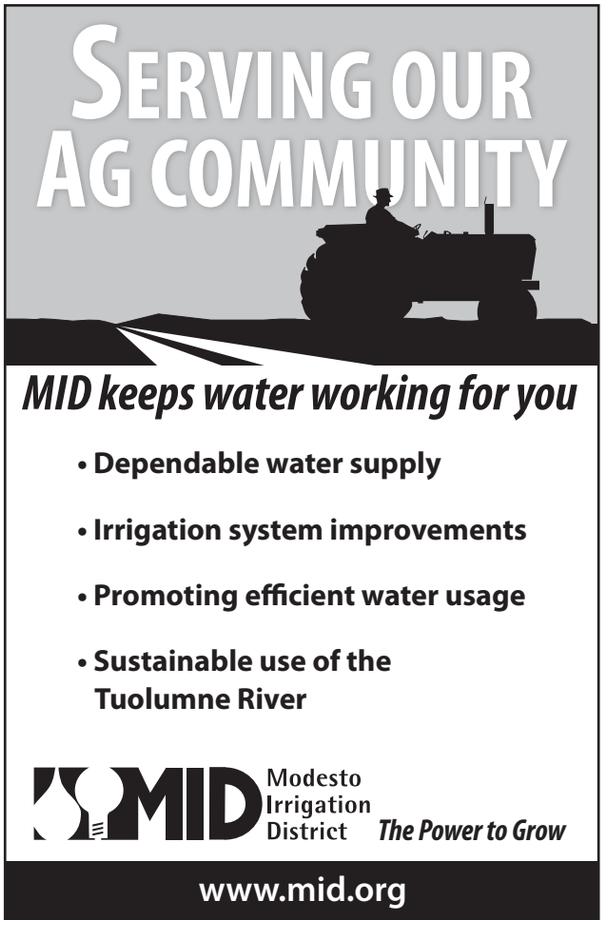

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Feature Story

Starting with custom work, Waterford brothers grow to 4 sister companies and 85 employees

By: Vicky Boyd



Zach and Garrett Fowler founded American Almond Co., an almond processor in Hickman, before the start of the 2025 season to bring more value to growers.

Growing up in the Waterford area, brothers Garrett and Zach Fowler had always wanted to farm since they were little. But like most young adults who try to enter the profession, they were stymied by prohibitive financial outlays for equipment and land.

"I had always wanted to get into farming but wasn't born into it," said Garrett, the older brother. Not dissuaded, they started knocking on doors and doing custom work, like deep ripping and disking, on the side while still working day jobs.

Eventually their side businesses grew to the point where they had to decide whether to focus entirely on custom work or drop their dream. Thus was born Fowler Brothers Farming in 2015.

"Fowler Brothers really started on the land-development side," Zach said, adding their first job involved developing a 6-acre block of walnuts.

Since then, the Waterford-based company has continued to expand and has launched a number of sister companies — Ag Land Partners, Fowler Brothers Construction and most recently, American Almond Co. Altogether the entities employ about 85 workers.

"We're really thankful for those people," Garrett said. "We wouldn't be where we are today without our hard-working employees."

FROM LAND DEVELOPMENT TO ASSET MANAGEMENT

The brothers started their land-development business just as the almond-planting boom of 2015-2018 was taking off.

"Everybody was planting almonds on virgin ground, and we were running all over the valley ripping and disking," Zach said. Throughout the years, they've developed parcels from Chico south to Bakersfield and west to southern Arizona. Included in that work were drilling wells, bringing in power sources and installing irrigation.

"We were taking orchards from bear or existing ground and turning it into something productive," Garrett said.

At the same time, the Fowler brothers were beginning to lease more ground and perform more farm management.

In 2019, they founded Ag Land Partners to expand beyond production farming into full-service agricultural investment and asset management. They partner with landowners, institutional investors and growers to enhance asset performance, seeking opportunities and managing the investment as a whole.

One of the first things the Fowlers do is conduct a full financial analysis to determine their direction and potential return on investment. Fiscal responsibility is woven throughout their management.

As the industry has evolved, so has the mix of their projects and investments. Wine grape vineyard development has fallen out of favor with the struggling market, and pistachio orchard development has tapered off.

As almond prices have begun to rebound, the brothers said they've seen a resurgence of interest in the crop. In addition, olives for oil have captured more attention because of some processors' attractive contracts and the crop's miserly water use.

ANSWERING A 'BURNING' NEED

Randy Baranek, who grew up on a wine-grape operation in the Delta, joined Fowler Brothers Farming nearly four years ago, having worked previously for another ag land developer. But he and the Fowlers were no strangers, having collaborated on a project about two years prior.

At his previous job, Baranek said they tried unsuccessfully to use a small air curtain burner trailer unit to handle removed vineyards.

"It was absolutely horrible," said Baranek, Fowler Brothers director of project management.

Calls from grape growers asking about vineyard removal began to pick up, spurred by the California Air Resources Board's phase out of open-field burning of vines and prunings. Large-scale grape growers faced the restrictions first, with a final ban for all sized producers effective Jan. 1, 2025. The phase-out coincided with the declining wine market, and many struggling grape growers wanted to remove unprofitable vineyards.
So the brothers looked to Air Burners' Fire Box 330, a huge 12-by-12-by-30-foot-long box built by the Palm City, Florida, company. It uses Air Board-approved air curtain burner technology to eliminate wood waste on site without grinding, while reducing smoke emissions by up to 99%.

The heat in the box converts the organic material to biochar, a carbon-rich soil amendment. At the time, the air curtain burner also was a relatively unknown commodity.

"We had to have five to 10 field days to start to get people to understand about this," Baranek said. "There was a lot of education. We even had field days for the Air Board because they hadn't seen it before. We were the first commercial operation to use one. I have to give it to Zach and Garrett for how progressive they are and how vertically integrated their vision is."

Fowler Brothers Farming now owns four burn boxes, which are kept busy year-round handling about 3,500 to 4,000 acres of wine grapes annually.

AMERICAN ALMOND CO.

After getting to know a nearby almond processor-handler a few years ago, the Fowler brothers decided to take the plunge and start a similar business. It also was appealing since it could be scalable.

"And it gives us an avenue to build more on our diversification," Garrett said.

American Almond Co. doesn't hull or shell nuts. Instead, the operation cleans up existing lots of hulled and shelled nuts, sizing them, sorting them, packing them and selling them for growers.

The brothers leased an existing warehouse in Hickman, gutted it and installed unloading equipment, high-tech sorting equipment and a packaging line. American Almond was up and running before the start of the 2025 harvest season.

"We've grown a lot since year one, which was a huge learning experience," Zach said. They handle nuts

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ers can offer to support growers and create more value.

"We have an in-house PCA (pest control advisor), so it's not just we can process nuts and sell them for you," Zach said.

Despite their continued growth, the Fowlers haven't forgotten their roots and continue to support the community, whether it is buying fair animals or sponsoring local sports teams.

"We try to support the industry that supported us," Zach said. "Our families have been here in this area on the east side of Waterford since the 1800s."

from the Sacramento Valley to Bakersfield.

As harvest wound down near the end of October, bins full of almond kernels awaiting processing filled their storage areas.

As orders came in, they ran them based on buyer specifications and packed the nuts either in 50-pound cardboard cartons or 2,200-pound bulk totes. Order destinations ranged from within the U.S. to around the world.



This year, the plant is operating around the clock, "which is a good problem to have," Garrett said. With such a strong response, the brothers plan to examine expansion options before the start of the 2027 harvest season.

As with the other sister companies, American Almond isn't a stand-alone entity. It is part of a complementary package of services the Fowler broth-

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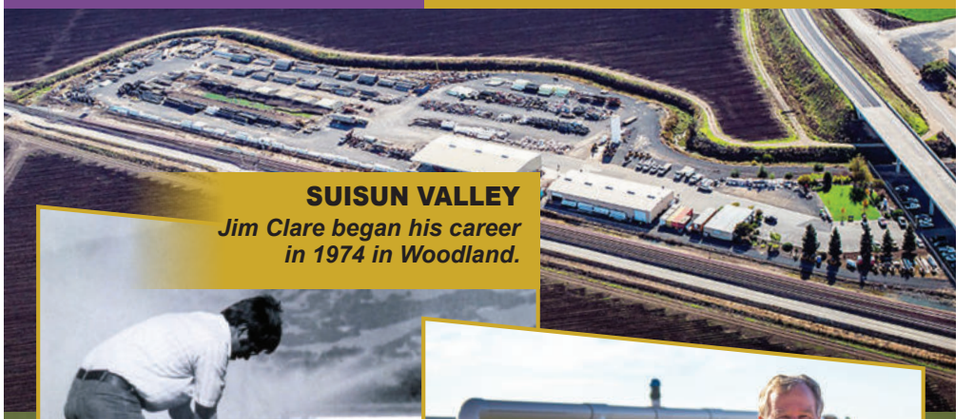
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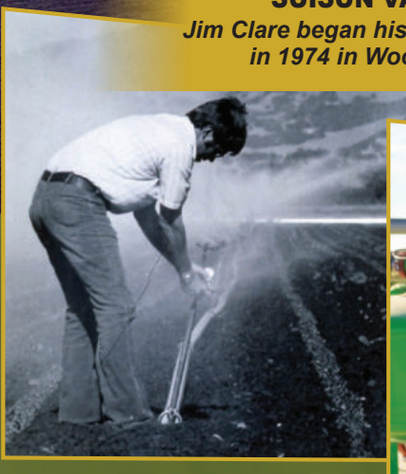
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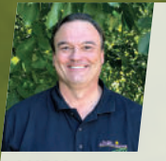




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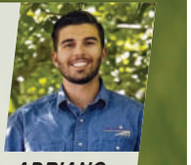
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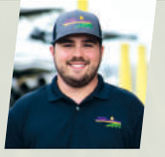

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