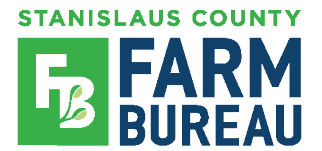


# The Stanislaus Farm News



For the **good** of your **food**.

The *voice* of Stanislaus County Agriculture



**Official Publication of Stanislaus  
County Farm Bureau  
Vol.75 No.11 July 5, 2024**

In 1923, Turlock and Modesto Irrigation Districts joined forces to build the first Don Pedro Dam, which had a storage capacity of 289,000 acre-feet. Years later, the two districts, along with the city and county of San Francisco, teamed to build a larger project — new Don Pedro Dam. It was finished in 1971 after four years of construction. See TID story on page 24.

Published Fridays by the  
Stanislaus County Farm Bureau

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Stanislaus Farm News (ISSN: 8750-4960) Copyright © 2023 is published 24 times per year by the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau 1201 L St. Modesto, CA 95454. Call (209) 522-7278 to subscribe. Application to mail at Periodicals postage prices is pending at Modesto, CA.

The Stanislaus Farm News will publish on the following dates in 2024: Jan 12, Feb 2, Feb 16, March 8, March 22, April 12, April 26, May 17, May 31, June 21, July 5, July 26, Aug 9, Aug 30, Sept 13, Oct 4, Oct 18, Nov 8, Nov 22, Dec 13

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to: 1201 L Street Modesto, CA 95354. Stanislaus County Farm Bureau does not assume responsibility for statements by advertisers or for products advertised in the Stanislaus Farm News. Farm Bureau does not assume responsibility for statements or expressions of opinion other than in editorials or in articles showing authorship by an officer of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau.

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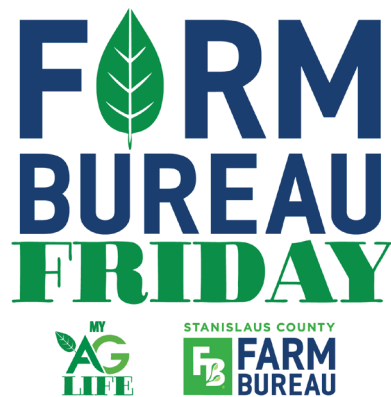
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To serve as the voice of Stanislaus County agriculture at all levels of government, while providing programs to assist its farms and family members and educate the general public of needs and importance to agriculture.



# FRIDAY REVIEW

## LEGISLATIVE AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

### *Agricultural Employment Policy*

The Legislature passed two bills to implement a previously agreed Private Attorneys' General Act (PAGA) reform package on June 27; the Governor is expected to sign both bills on June 28. The PAGA reform initiative that triggered negotiations leading to the agreement has been withdrawn from the November ballot. The reform agreement features several PAGA revisions, including requiring that a PAGA plaintiff must actually suffer the alleged harm caused by the accused employer, and limiting PAGA monetary recoveries against employers who make efforts to correct alleged Labor Code violations. Staff: Bryan Little, [blittle@cfbf.com](mailto:blittle@cfbf.com)

Other legislation of interest continues to move through the legislative process ahead of the July recess:

The Senate Judiciary Committee passed AB 2738 Assemblymember Luz Rivas (D Sylmar) on June 25 on an 8-1 vote with two absences/abstentions and was referred to the Senate Appropriations Committee. AB 2738 will encourage local prosecutor litigation against employers for alleged Labor Code violations (permitted for the first time by Farm Bureau-opposed AB 594, Maenschein, 2023) by requiring a California court to award attorney's fees to a public prosecutor prevailing in a Labor Code related civil action. Farm Bureau opposes. Staff: Bryan Little, [blittle@cfbf.com](mailto:blittle@cfbf.com)

The Senate Labor, Public Employment and Retirement Committee passed AB 2421 Assemblymember Evan Low (D Campbell) on June 26 on a 5-0 vote, referring it to the Senate Judiciary Committee for further consideration. AB 2421, though limited in

scope to public employment in California, sets a terrible precedent of conferring an attorney-client-like privilege on communications between an employee and a union or union representative, potentially hampering an employer's ability to investigate safety problems, harassment allegations and to engage in other employee communications that could result in disciplinary action against an employee, setting a bad precedent that a future Legislature could expand to private sector employers. Farm Bureau opposes. Staff: Bryan Little, [blittle@cfbf.com](mailto:blittle@cfbf.com)

Also on June 26, the Assembly Insurance Committee passed SB 1299 Senator Dave Cortese (D San Jose), on a 12-3 vote, referring it to Assembly Appropriations for further consideration of its fiscal impacts. SB 1299 creates a rebuttable presumption that heat illness suffered by an agricultural employee during a workweek or pay period during which the employee performed work under conditions that would trigger the Heat Illness Prevention standard is work-related and compensable through workers compensation. Farm Bureau opposes. Staff: Bryan Little, [blittle@cfbf.com](mailto:blittle@cfbf.com) Later in the same hearing, Assembly Insurance failed to pass SB 1116 Senator Anthony Portantino (D Burbank) which allows striking workers to collect unemployment insurance benefits and is a re-tread of Portantino's SB 799 from the 2023 session, which was vetoed by Governor Newsom. Five committee members voted "not voting" with the roll was called, citing objections that participants in Israel-Hamas War-related protests characterized as strikes could receive benefits, causing SB 1116's failure to pass. Farm Bureau opposes SB 1116 due to its likely negative impact

on the fiscal health of the state's unemployment insurance trust fund. Staff: Bryan Little, [blittle@cfbf.com](mailto:blittle@cfbf.com)

### *Energy and Utilities*

AB 2797 authored by Assemblymember Tina McKinnor (D Inglewood) will be heard in the Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications Committee on July 2. The bill, which Farm Bureau submitted a letter in opposition to, would usurp the thoughtful and pragmatic final decision of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) addressing legacy copper network installations or landlines. AT&T lost their request to discontinue their obligations associated with Carrier of Last Resort at the CPUC earlier this month and responded with the proposed legislation, which was spliced into a completely different piece of legislation that had already been through the Assembly, so that full consideration of its ramifications is truncated. Farm Bureau members are concerned about the practical impacts of terminating support for landlines and being forced to rely on the unpredictable reliability of cell phone service or internet service. A substantial number of our members reside in rural areas, including high fire threat areas, and for safety purposes must have access to reliable communication methods. Residents from Yolo County, Mendocino County, Sonoma County, Yuba County, and others have all provided specific instances of when it has been essential to rely on landlines for safety reasons. The bill also provides for a process that gives the utility unfettered control over which areas it would withdraw its support for landline service. There was tremendous opposition to the request

*See "REVIEW" on page 4*

From "REVIEW" on page 3

at the CPUC and significant opposition to AB 2797 is anticipated as well. Staff contact: Karen Mills, kmills@cfbf.com

### Forestry and Wildfire

SB 945 authored by Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil (D Jackson) and sponsored by the California Farm Bureau passed from the Assembly Committee on Health on the Consent Calendar. The bill moves onto the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources next week and is a proposed Consent Calendar item. This means the bill has no formal opposition and has not received a single no vote. SB 945 tasks the Department of Public Health to advance a data platform connecting wildfire smoke events, health outcomes, and state investments in wildfire fuels mitigation. The goal is to create a data driven approach to those maximizing those fuel mitigation investments for improved health outcomes, and enjoys support from a large coalition including agriculture, rural government, and medical associations.

Staff: Peter Ansel; pansel@cfbf.com

### Insurance

AB 2996 authored by Assemblymember David Alvarez (D San Diego) and supported by the California Farm Bureau passed from the Senate Business and Professions Committee and the Senate Insurance Committee this week. AB 2996 will leverage the state's iBANK to support the ability of the FAIR Plan to maintain solvency as the number of policies continues to grow. The bill is not a solution to the insurance markets problems but is a prudent backstop to FAIR Plan total insolvency, which would drag down the entire statewide market fully. Farm Bureau supports depopulating the volume of FAIR Plan policies and simultaneously encourages the FAIR Plan to utilize a resource like iBANK if feasible to better maintain its economic position.

Staff: Peter Ansel; pansel@cfbf.com

The Department of Insurance conducted a virtual workshop regarding its draft regulations for catastrophe modeling and rate plan setting. As mentioned recently, these

are the next set of regulations from the Department to restore competitiveness to California's insurance market. As part of that process, insurers will be permitted to use catastrophe modeling and reinsurance cost pass through (often determined by underwriting parameters of the reinsurers) in exchange for commitments to write policies again in distressed areas of the state. Farm Bureau submitted written public comments to the draft regulations and participated in the virtual workshop. Staff: Peter Ansel; pansel@cfbf.com

### Pesticides

Ag strikes a compromise on boosting mill fee. A broad coalition of farm groups and chemical manufacturers have dropped their opposition to a proposed increase to the mill assessment after securing new amendments.

The Legislature recently rejected the Newsum administration's mill proposal and instead rallied behind a policy bill that would do the same but with critical legislative oversight.

After hearing concerns over accountability from both ag and environmental justice advocates, Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia (D Coachella) has added a set of guardrails within AB 2113. This week he tightened up that language ahead of a Senate Ag hearing. The administration's proposal would have enabled the Department of Pesticide Regulation to enact additional increases in four years. AB 2113, however, would cap such increases, unless DPR returns to the Capitol for prior approval. The bill would also require DPR to meet certain timelines for registering new products and to report annually on that process. Farm groups have worked closely with Garcia as well as the administration and legislative leaders on the bill.

The measure has gained bipartisan support and in August faces the Legislature's fiscal gauntlet with a key appropriations vote. Staff: Chris Reardon, creardon@cfbf.com



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**Record-High July 4th Cookout Costs: Inflation Hits the Backyard**

Americans will be gathering on the Fourth of July for a day of fireworks, food, parades and more. But as you celebrate with your friends and family this Independence Day, your cookout bill will be a bit higher.

Volunteers from across the United States contributed to this year's American Farm Bureau Fourth of July market basket survey to determine the average cost of summer cookout staples. The survey pulls prices for a complete, homemade cookout consisting of cheeseburgers, chicken breasts, pork chops, potato chips, pork and beans, fresh strawberries, homemade potato salad, fresh-squeezed lemonade, chocolate chip cookies and ice cream. With plenty of options to feed a hungry crowd, a group of 10 this year can expect to pay \$71.22 for their celebration, up 5% from last year and up 30% from five years ago. Nationally,

this means we are surpassing \$7 per person for the first time, with the total meal coming to \$7.12 a person. Only two dishes decreased in price while everything else on your table rose, on average. Your grocery bill may be a shock, but it is in line with the inflation that has roiled the economy – including the farm economy – over the last several years.

**On the Grill**

Meat will put the biggest dent in your grocery budget. Ground beef, pork chops and chicken breast account for 50% of the total cookout cost, as we see changes in the pork and beef industries having a big impact on supermarket prices.

This year, 2 pounds of ground beef will cost an average of \$12.77, up more than \$1, or 11%, from last year. While there are higher numbers of fed cattle in the supply chain this spring compared to 2023, the overall cattle inventory is the smallest it has been in 73 years and beef in cold storage is setting record lows for recent years. As we head into the heart of the summer, fewer cattle are being placed on feed, but more are heading to the grocery store shelves.

Fewer cattle also mean there won't be as much beef available to replace our shrinking supplies in cold storage. Although short-run supply boosts from available cold storage and near-record cattle weights should keep beef prices from skyrocketing, high summer demand for beef and improved drought and forage conditions across the country have given farmers and ranchers a reason to retain breeding animals; when this happens, there will be fewer cattle on feed for beef supplies, further supporting higher beef prices. With the discontinuation of NASS' July cattle inventory survey, the beef industry may have a more difficult time judging the available cattle supplies.

California's Proposition 12 bans in-state meat sales from animals whose production didn't meet California's animal welfare standards, regardless of where they were raised. This is the first year it has

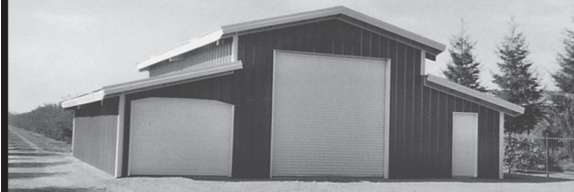


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See "July 4th" on page 8

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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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*From "July 4th" on page 5*

been in full effect, and many have anxiously awaited its impact on pork prices. Unsurprisingly, our pork chops rose 8% nationally, up over \$1 from last year, to \$15.49. Pork chop prices in California were even higher, at \$19.91.

Increased broiler production will save your wallet from some of these other protein price increases as 2 pounds of chicken breast will cost you an average of \$7.83, a 4% decrease since 2023 and down over 13% from the record high in 2022. Outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in 2022 sent poultry and egg prices skyrocketing. While the virus still affects some flocks - and now dairy herds - producers have been strengthening biosecurity measures to help poultry flocks recover and stop the spread in dairy. Farmers have increased hatchings and bird weights to mitigate losses and keep prices affordable.

**The Fixins**

Some say a good cookout is truly made by the sides, but your favorite side dish recipes might see the most drastic price differences from Independence Day 2023.

It's not just ground beef prices driving the cost of cheeseburgers up. One package of hamburger buns will cost you \$2.41, 7% more than 2023. Ending stocks of wheat are at an eight-year low, but increased production should pull wheat and wheat-product prices down as we finish the harvest season. Wheat genetics are notoriously complex and breeding improvements don't rely on the use of hybrids that seed companies can patent and profit from, most wheat strains and shortages in research to develop new wheat varieties make it a difficult crop to adapt to supply challenges. The U.S. is falling behind other countries in public sector ag research with spending falling by a third from 2002 to 2019. It's important to prioritize ag research to help keep America a top world provider of agricultural products.

Slow-to-negative milk production growth in recent months has increased the all-milk price, leading the prices for the dairy items up. American cheese slices were relatively stable, only up 1% to \$3.57 this year versus

\$3.53 in 2023. However, a half-gallon of ice cream will add \$5.65 to your grocery bill, up 7% from last year.

Lemon production is estimated to fall over 16% this year, due to a citrus greening disease outbreak in California, where most U.S. lemons are produced, in late 2023. In addition to disease effects on citrus trees, regulatory quarantines in the area to mitigate its spread have increased costs to producers. These supply effects have raised lemon prices 13% on average from last year to \$3.20 for 1.5 pounds. Sugar prices increased by 11% due to lower global production and increased high-tier tariff imports from Mexico. Made by combining 1.5 pounds of lemons with 1 pound of sugar, fresh-squeezed lemonade had the most drastic price increase on the Fourth of July table at \$4.19 total, 12% higher

than last year.

The second price decrease in this year's survey, after chicken, is potato salad, down 4% from last year. The recipe is balancing out higher egg prices with lower potato prices. Two pounds of potatoes will cost an average of \$1.53, 17% less than last year, recovering from record-high prices due to weather-related production decreases in recent years. Egg prices are lower than the all-time high in 2022 caused by initial HPAI outbreaks; but egg layer inventories are still under pressure from HPAI, so egg prices are likely to remain above historical averages.

Pork and beans, potato chips, chocolate chip cookies, and strawberries round out our shoppers' Independence Day tables. Pork and beans are up 2% from 2023 but are still down



### Notification Regulation Public Hearings

# Save the Date



**DPR is anticipating holding public hearings on the notification regulation on the following dates and locations:**

- **UPDATE: Friday, July 12, Carnegie Arts Center, 250 N. Broadway, Turlock**
- **Monday, July 15, held virtually on Zoom**
- **Tuesday, July 23, in Kern County (location to be confirmed, tentatively scheduled in Shafter)**

**Hearings would take place between 6-8:30 p.m. Spanish interpretation would be provided.**

**More information to follow.**

To request interpretation in additional languages, please email [languageaccess@cdpr.ca.gov](mailto:languageaccess@cdpr.ca.gov) by July 1, 2024.



from 2022. The quantity of chocolate chip cookies our shoppers are asked to price is also down from the record in 2022 but is 2% higher than last year. Strawberries and potato chips are both higher than the last two years. Two pints of strawberries cost \$4.61 on average, less than its high in 2021. Labor shortages and wage increases across the supply chain are just one factor increasing food costs, and strawberries are a labor-intensive crop that are likely sensitive to this rising input cost. A large bag of chips costs \$4.90 on average, up 8% from last year. Many of our shoppers reported sales on potato chips in their grocery store runs. So, don't give up hope on summer sales as many retailers place your favorite cookout items on sale to encourage purchases of summertime classics.

#### Coast to Coast

Depending on where you live, your grocery prices may differ from these national averages. In the majority of the country, you will

still pay less than \$7 per person. Those in the Northeast will feed a hungry crowd of 10 for the low of \$63.54. Southerners and Midwesterners will spend an average of \$68.33 and \$68.26, respectively. Unfortunately for those in the Western U.S., your grocery bill will be nearly \$1 per person higher than the national average - \$80.88 for a party of 10.

**Inflation is an Issue Across the Supply Chain**  
The increases in the cost of our cookout items reflect a number of broader economic factors. General inflation has been highly disruptive to the whole economy, leaving behind many whose incomes haven't kept pace. Rising supply costs and global uncertainties have created new challenges for farmers and everyone in the food supply chain. While food price increases slowed in 2023 after skyrocketing in 2022, the our cookout cost has increased 30% in just five years. Consumers nationwide still view inflation and high food prices as ongoing problems. When adjusted for inflation,

our survey total is 5% lower than the previous record year of 2022; but inflation reduces the purchasing power of your dollar over time, making it a problem for consumers and producers alike.

In important ways, Americans still have access to the most affordable food system in the world. The average American spends 6.7% of their total expenditures on food and non-alcoholic beverages, the lowest of any country in the world. Nevertheless, for many, the nutrition programs in the farm bill are critical support.

Despite rising prices in grocery stores, farm finances remain a concern for producers across the U.S. Farm income dropped 17% in 2023 and is expected to decrease another 25% this year. At the same time, production expenses have reached record highs in recent

See "July 4th" on page 13

## FLORY

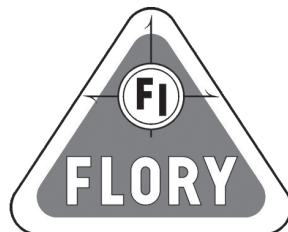
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## Farm Kid Privilege

By Jackie Mundt

I have a friend that lives in a big city who recently shared a story about how local students visiting a nature preserve were given shovels and allowed to dig holes. This was a novel experience for almost all of them. Both my partner and I raised our eyebrows because we were raised as farm kids and wouldn't find digging holes very fun or interesting at that age. The conversation eventually led to our childhood memories of digging holes.

The first hole I remember digging was in kindergarten when my Girl Scout troop planted a tree at our school. Many of my fondest "hole-digging memories" are of planting trees with my friends for Earth Day or other events. It really is odd to think about how many kids have never planted a tree or used a shovel to build a fence, fix underground equipment or any number of other chores.

When comparing my childhood to others, I recognize how lucky I am and feel a wave of gratitude for my privilege. I was a very happy kid — some of that was probably genetic but a lot came from things like having happily married parents who provided for my needs along with the support that comes from a large extended family.

My privilege feels amplified because I am part of a shrinking population to grow up in a small town or on a family farm. I have experienced the freedom of a bike, the adventure of climbing into corn cribs, the creativity of building something from your mind and the satisfaction of working with dirty hands. I solve problems of all kinds, use tools, drive vehicles of all sizes and back up trailers.

Even though they never have to spend a day stacking hay bales in a sweltering, chaff-filled haymow or picking rocks out of a field, I am sad for the kids who don't grow up on a farm. They are missing out on some of the best ways to grow skills, work ethic, responsibility, confidence, grit, problem solving and countless other valuable character traits.

I use my farm kid upbringing all the time, but it is most evident when it helps me to survive as a farm adult. Farming requires the kind of mental toughness that is built up over time.

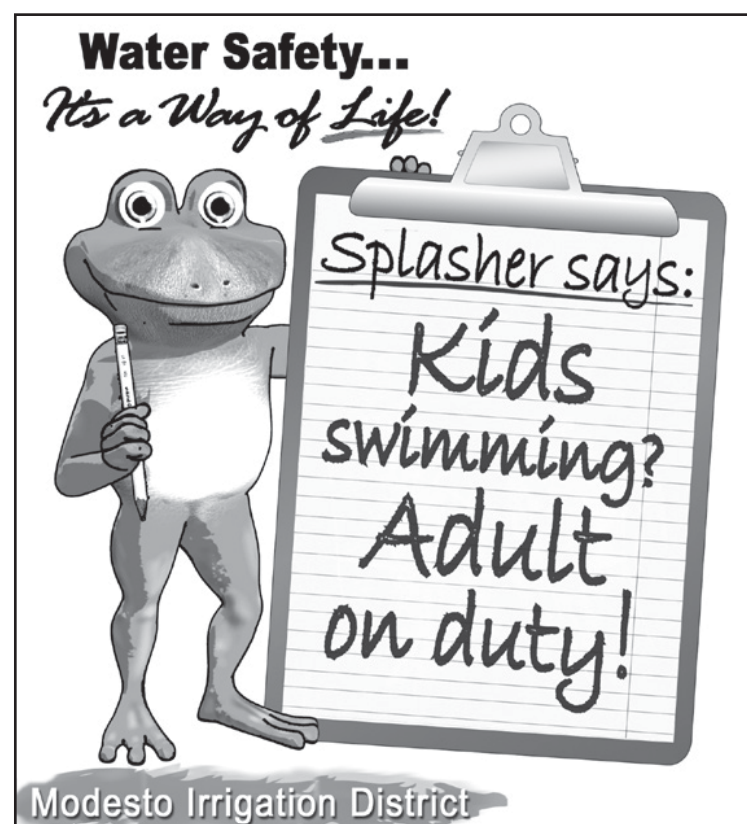
As I was leaving our house the other day, I met Marc as he was arriving. Cell phones don't hold a candle to the communication that comes with the eye contact of a quick conversation through truck windows in the middle of a gravel road.

As we wrapped up a quick conversation, Marc's parting words were, "Don't look at what's on the back of my pickup." He wasn't trying to be secretive. We are several weeks into calving season and he had found a stillborn calf during his pen check. Marc was trying to save me from the sadness of a lost animal.

My heart will always hurt when we lose a calf, but death is an inevitable part of owning livestock. A lifetime experience on the farm helped me build the strength to weather the cycle of life and death that is a truth of this life.

Farm life is full of hard things — hard lessons, hard truths, hard work. We gain confidence and competence to face challenges in life by doing what is difficult and surviving.

Jackie Mundt, a Wisconsin native, is a Farm Bureau leader and farmer from Kansas. She is a contributor to Collegiate and Young Farmers & Ranchers programming at the local, state and national level. She was recently selected as a member of the American Farm Bureau's 12th Partners in Advocacy Leadership class. This column originally appeared on the Kansas Farm Bureau website.



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### From "July 4th" on page 9

years. Interest rate hikes, which the Federal Reserve uses to rein in inflation, raised farm interest expenditures by 43% from 2022 to 2023. These expenditures are the highest since the 1980s when the U.S. was also plagued by extreme inflation. Farmers and ranchers face high capital costs to operate, and high interest rates not only increase credit costs, but also limit access. Combined with weather uncertainty and volatile commodity prices, farmers and ranchers are vulnerable to significant impacts to their businesses' bottom line. Higher food prices do not equal higher income for farmers; less than 15 cents of every dollar spent on food goes to the farm once you take into account processing, transportation and marketing.

### How the Farm Bill can Help

The farm bill is crucial to providing risk management tools such as crop insurance,

marketing or operating loans, and commodity programs. Global challenges have affected consumers and producers alike, and the latest farm bill does not reflect the unique challenges that have developed in recent years. High inflation has made many commodity reference prices too low, undermining the effectiveness of the farm price safety net. Research funding within the bill ensures the industry is advancing innovation that increases productivity, but is tied to fixed dollar amounts. Despite the remarkable effectiveness of our food system, for many the nutrition programs in the farm bill are critical support. The 2018 farm bill has already been extended a year, making our farm programs six years old. That extension expires in September, so it is vital to pass a new farm bill that modernizes these important programs to provide stability for farmers and ranchers while continuing food security for our nation and world.

### Conclusion

Our volunteer shoppers had their most expensive Fourth of July grocery bill in the history of the survey this year. However, when adjusted for the high inflation rates plaguing the United States in recent years, the real value of their Independence Day party has not surpassed the previous record set in 2022. Though faced with disease outbreaks, inventory shortages and operating challenges, farmers and ranchers have adapted to increased demand across the world for U.S. products, providing safe, affordable food for your Independence Day celebration and every other day, showcasing the resilience of the American food system. Congress must prioritize the passage of a new farm bill that effectively supports farmers in their work to provide sustainable food, fiber and fuel for the globe. So, as you fix your plate this Fourth of July, don't just thank the cook, thank the farmers and ranchers who work tirelessly to provide the food on your plate.



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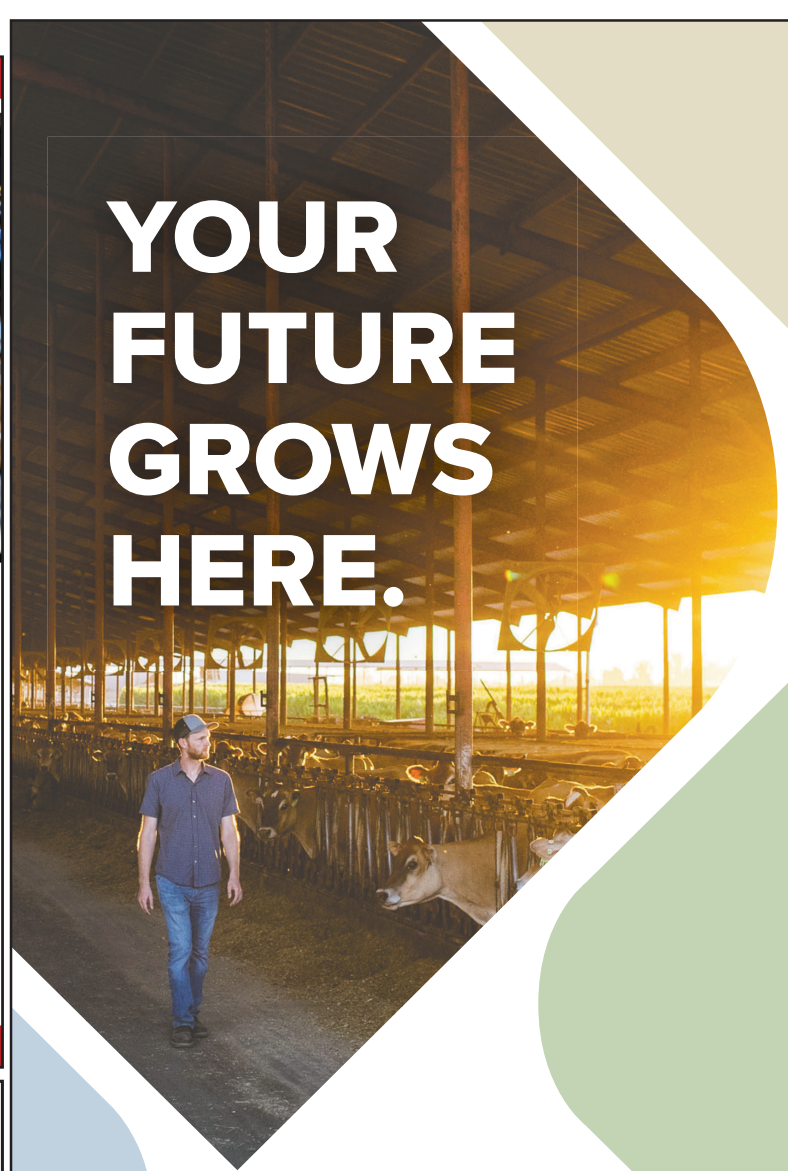
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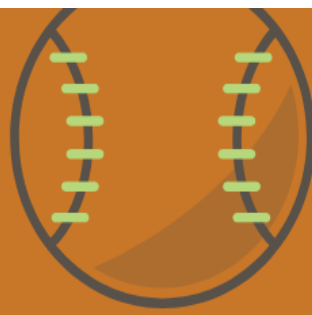
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## OID Update on the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)

As you may know, Oakdale Irrigation District (OID) is located within two different groundwater subbasins and is required to participate in both. In the Eastern San Joaquin (ESJ) Subbasin (north of the Stanislaus River), OID formed its own Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) and is 1 of 16 GSAs that make up



the Eastern San Joaquin Groundwater Basin Authority (ESJGBA). In the Modesto Subbasin, OID is 1 of 7 member agencies in the Stanislaus and Tuolumne Rivers Groundwater Basin Association (STRGBA) GSA. The following is an update on each basin's status with regards to reaching sustainability:

The ESJ Subbasin is 2 years ahead of the Modesto Subbasin because that subbasin was declared as a critically overdrafted basin. As

such, the first Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) was required to be submitted in 2020 and we're currently cooperatively working on the 5-year update that is required to be submitted to the Department of Water Resources (DWR) by the end of January 2025. As time goes by, the State has evolved their thinking on some issues regarding management actions/demand reduction and is requiring the GSP to contain procedures that would allow for demand reduction if the basin is not already headed towards sustainability. Additionally, the State is requiring that the GSP now have procedures in it for dry well mitigation. If it is determined that excessive pumping is the



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cause of a well going dry, the GSA will be required to mitigate the issue in some form or fashion (i.e. provide temporary water service, funding for a replacement well, etc.). These two programs will continue to require a considerable amount of time and effort to develop, implement and administer.

The STRGBA GSA, in the Modesto Subbasin, is busy trying to get their GSP approved by DWR. The initial draft of the GSP was submitted in January 2022, but unfortunately word was received from the Department of Water Resources (DWR) in January 2024 that the GSP was deemed incomplete. This meant that the GSA now had 180 days (due on July 16, 2024)

to resubmit an improved revised GSP in hopes of DWR approval. Since January, the GSA has had multiple meetings amongst themselves as well as several meetings with DWR to ensure the proposed revisions would meet their liking. Much like the ESJ Subbasin, DWR is requiring the GSA to commit to a well mitigation program and a demand reduction/management actions program in the revised GSP to ensure the subbasin will reach sustainability. Knowing that there is not enough time within the 180-day window for these programs to be created, DWR has indicated that if each of the agencies commit, via resolution, to develop these programs in the near future that DWR will accept the GSP.

Both the ESJGBA and the STRGBA GSA are working very hard on behalf of their respective agencies and constituents to push these plans and programs across the finish line and we're optimistic that we will be successful! We have to remember that these plans didn't exist five years ago and careful consideration is required to make sure they're equitable and that all beneficial uses and users of groundwater are accounted for. Your participation and involvement as we continue to work together with other GSAs and member agencies to formulate future policies and procedures for sustainable groundwater management is encouraged and appreciated. Please visit [STRGBA.org](http://STRGBA.org) and/or [esjgroundwater.org](http://esjgroundwater.org) to get involved.

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## It's a bountiful life: Getting the farm to the table

Source: Summer 2024 California Bountiful magazine

Trucker drives home the importance of his role in agriculture

Californians are surrounded by fertile land producing delicious and nutritious foods, and for that they can thank farmers and ranchers. This bounty then finds its way to their tables each day, and for that they can thank a chain of unsung professionals working behind the scenes.

One of these dedicated individuals in the farm-to-fork process is Alejandro Juarez, a seasonal agricultural truck driver who transports around 6,000 tons of food per season for the trucking company Antonini Fruit Express. The company was founded in Stockton in 1926 by Italian immigrant Virgilio (Vic) Antonini



## 2024 TRAININGS

Register here:

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



**March 5, 2024**

### Pesticide Handler & Fit Testing

8:00-12:00pm - Spanish

1:00-5:00pm - English

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

Pricing: Member \$60/Nonmember \$75

**July 25, 2024**

### Tractor Safety

9:00-10:00am - Spanish

10:00-11:00am - English

CalOSHA requires that employees who operate equipment be trained annually.

Pricing: Member \$40/Nonmember \$50

**May 23, 2024**

### Heat Illness Prevention

9:00-10:00am - Spanish

10:00-11:00am - English

CalOSHA requires this training annually for outdoor employees.

Pricing: Member \$40/Nonmember \$50

**October 24, 2024**

### Hazardous Ag Materials (HAM)

8:00-9:30am - English

10:00-11:30am - Spanish

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

Pricing: Member \$40/Nonmember \$50

**June 27, 2024**

### CPR & First Aid

8:00-12:00pm - Spanish

1:00-5:00pm - English

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

Pricing: Member \$100/Nonmember \$125

**November 22, 2024**

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and is now run by his grandchildren, siblings Joe Antonini, president, and Karen Wuellner, vice president. Joe's son Stefano Antonini is the supervisor of the company's Modesto terminal, where Juarez started working in the 2021 harvest season, transporting crops such as tomatoes, almonds and walnuts.

**How did you get interested in agricultural trucking?**

I grew up in the ag industry. My dad worked raising poultry and that's where I spent most of my weekends. And then from there, my love for being outdoors just grew. I got into driving trucks about five years ago through my father-in-law. He was the owner and operator of a trucking company for about 33 years.



**What is your typical shift like?**

I work from late June to mid-October, six days a week. I'm on the morning shift, so I come in about 3 or 3:30 and I'm on for 12 to 14 hours, depending on traffic, and then I'm off for the evening shift. My routes change because they'll send us to whatever farms have crops ready to transport. We go about as far south as Bakersfield and about as far north as Williams. We'll go to Winters too. It's just beautiful in the Capay Valley. I love the drive out that way.

**What are some of the things you do each day besides drive?**

We clock in, get our keys to our vehicle and pick out a trailer. We do a pre-trip inspection of all the equipment to make sure everything is working properly and safely. We come back with the trailer and truck number to dispatch and then dispatch sends us out to the next load that's coming out. Out in the fields, depending on the crop, sometimes we have to wait for our load to be ready to pick up. And sometimes if it is ready, we just (unhook and leave an empty trailer and hook to a loaded trailer). When we deliver, we also take the trucks through a weigh station and an inspection station that inspects the crop.

**What are some of the biggest**

**challenges of your job?**

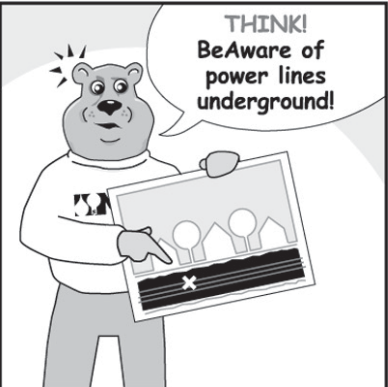
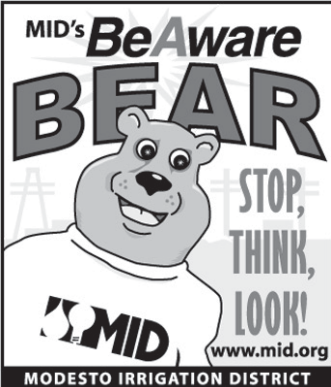
Probably the breakdowns out in the field. We just have to wait for the machine to get fixed. We also have to deal with your typical traffic buildups, but, at most, we'll probably wait about 30 minutes. Mother Nature has a big effect on the job too. Tomato harvesting isn't done during the rain, so if it rains, that affects us very much as well. Also, too much water can cause problems in the tomato fields and too much excessive heat can speed up tomato growing, which speeds up the trucking.

**What would you like the average person to know about your job?**

I wish they would have a little bit more patience with us. I know everybody's in a hurry getting from work to home or from home to soccer or baseball games or music lessons, but we're out there because we're transporting their food products. I'd also just like to elaborate that ag is a good place to make a career, whether it be farming, trucking or processing.

**What do you find most rewarding about your job?**

The fact that we're a key element in food processing. We're the middle guys. It starts with the farmer and the seed, to the workers who maintain it, to workers who pick it, to us who transport it, to the processors and the packaging, and then to the distributors. It's a chain. We're a necessary part in this whole process that makes one can of something so small as tomato paste or sauce and gets it to people's tables.



**USDA begins accepting applications to help dairies impacted by Avian flu**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture began accepting applications Monday for financial assistance to dairy producers who incur losses due to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. The funds, to be provided through the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-raised Fish Program, would assist in covering a portion of financial losses resulting from reduced milk production when cattle are removed from commercial milking in dairy herds after a confirmed positive avian influenza test. Twelve states have reported dairy cattle infections.

**Study examines improved tomato storage to curb postharvest loss**

Some 30% of harvested fruits and vegetables worldwide are never eaten due to damage, spoiling or appearance. Now researchers at University of California, Davis, are studying ways to extend shelf life to help California tomato growers avoid postharvest crop loss. New published research examines changes in tomatoes at the molecular level to better understand what happens during postharvest handling and cold storage. Researchers say the findings may help establish optimal tomato handling and storage guidelines to reduce food loss and waste.

**Researchers study biochar filtration for purifying reclaimed water for crops**

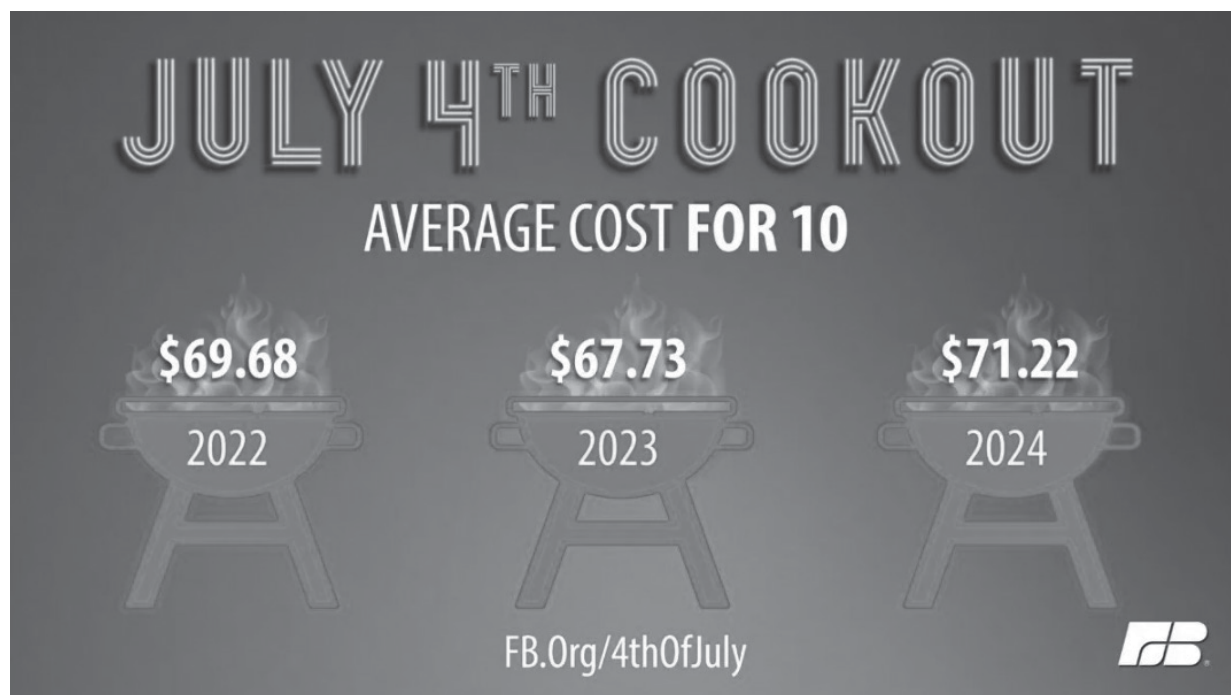
Researchers in California are testing potential low-cost technology to make reclaimed water safer for agricultural use. A \$1 million project being undertaken by scientists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Salinity Laboratory at University of California, Riverside, is testing the effectiveness of biochar in filtering the reclaimed water. Researchers say using biochar polishers could potentially remove the need to detect antibiotics, assisting treatment plants that do not have advanced detection or treatment technologies.

**American Farm Bureau Federation: Fourth of July cookout gets more costly**  
Families celebrating the Fourth of July holi-

day will continue to find stubbornly high prices at the grocery store, according to the 2024 American Farm Bureau Federation annual market basket survey. An Independence Day cookout will cost \$71.22 for 10 guests this year, with the grocery bill up 5% from 2023 and almost 30% from just five years ago. A \$7.12 per-person cost represents a record high since AFBF began the survey in 2013. The cookout favorites include cheeseburgers, chicken breasts, pork chops, homemade potato salad, strawberries and ice cream.

**California avocado growers eye pause of Mexican imports**  
With the

supply of Mexican avocados tapering off and prices rising, California growers have ramped up harvest, hoping to send the bulk of their crop to the market while it remains strong. They may see prices jump even higher if the U.S. Department of Ag-



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riculture does not immediately resume full inspections of avocados from the Mexican state of Michoacan, the global epicenter of avocado production. Inspections were halted there after two USDA inspectors were attacked earlier this month. Officials said USDA inspections in Michoacan will “gradually” return.

### Salinas Valley farmers report gains in battle against lettuce virus

California lettuce growers are so far breathing a sigh of relief this year that the dreaded impatiens necrotic spot virus that has devastated Salinas Valley lettuce crops in recent years seems to have receded. But agricultural researchers warn that it will take extensive work and vigilance to prevent a future outbreak that could be costly for

affected crops. That vigilance includes aggressive weeding efforts to prevent INSV-carrying thrips from finding weed hosts and spreading the virus to nearby farm fields. In 2022, the lettuce virus caused \$150 million in crop losses in the famed Salad Bowl region.

### California melon growers report ample supply for Fourth of July and beyond

California watermelons, cantaloupes, honeydews and mixed melons will arrive in grocery stores in time for the Independence Day holiday. Melon season has shifted to the San Joaquin Valley as harvest wraps up in the Southern California desert in the Imperial Valley and in Yuma, Arizona. Harvest in the San Joaquin Valley is expected to continue through October and resume in the desert from October to December.

Stanislaus County farmer Matt Maring said there may be a surplus of melons on the market as the season progresses.

### Dairies undertake climate-smart practices to manage manure and nourish crops

Prompted by drought-induced water-allocation cutbacks in 2014, the diversified DeJager Farms began looking at buried drip irrigation and manure water from its dairy operations to try to help its farming operations survive. Since then, the Chowchilla-based producer of milk, beef, row crops and specialty crops has installed seven irrigation systems that treat and filter manure water from nearby dairy operations to support crops such as silage corn. Such efforts are being increasingly supported by climate-smart agriculture grants for dairy producers.



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## President's Message: A Farm Bureau membership is an investment in our legacy

By: Shannon Douglass

The other night I sat down at the kitchen table with my 13-year-old to review his 4-H story for his record book. If you've ever been involved in 4-H, you're intimately familiar with the vigorous and sometimes stressful process of completing the record book each year.

It's not easy, but it's important.

In addition to helping 4-H'ers develop the life skill of recordkeeping, the iconic book gives them an opportunity to reflect on their year, measure their achievements

and growth, set goals and develop plans to meet those goals.

At California Farm Bureau, we are constantly evaluating and setting goals. And we do it together because every single one of us has a stake in protecting our diverse farming and ranching legacy, a stake in keeping agriculture a viable way of life for generations to come. It's the very reason Farm Bureau exists and why—at the six-month point of my presidency—I'm writing this message to you.

In my son's 4-H story, he points out that one of his long-term goals is to continue the farming tradition his dad and I began. He also shares that showing cattle and competitive swimming are his two favorite activities. Their commonality: "Only the hardest

workers can succeed."

Hard work is an agriculturalist's daily reality. Imagine how much more difficult it would be, how much more expensive it would be without Farm Bureau working on your behalf.

Think of it this way: On our farms and in our businesses, we pay for many professional services—everyone from accountants and lawyers to veterinarians and pest control advisors. They all provide essential services, performing tasks that we either don't have the time for or lack the expertise to tackle on our own. Similarly, Farm Bureau provides an essential service. When you consider Farm Bureau in those terms, I hope you'll agree that the dollars you spend each year on your membership yield an









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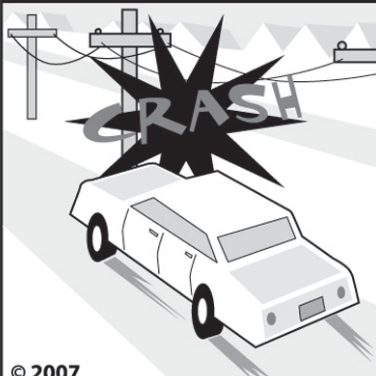
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excellent return on your investment.

Your investment in Farm Bureau pays off in the near term and in the long term, and includes everything from gaining access to generic crop-protection materials to the tax-saving benefits of the Williamson Act, which helps keep farmland in production. Those are just two of Farm Bureau's legacy achievements—work done decades ago that continues to bear fruit.

Did you know that Farm Bureau's advocacy efforts with the state's energy provid-

ers yield an average annual savings of up to \$1,100 per agricultural meter? Or that farm tax saves our members an average of nearly \$2,100 each year? That, in itself, more than pays for your membership and frankly keeps our families farming.

Being a Farm Bureau member is an investment in your business, your way of life and, if you're like me, your family legacy. The 70-plus employees at the state office, the team back in Washington, D.C., the staff at your local county Farm Bureau—they're all working on your behalf, day in and day out.

Meeting when I was elected as your president, I believe deeply that Farm Bureau is the critical piece of our solution moving forward. It's not necessarily about us, because many of us will retire within the next few decades. We'll do fine until then, but it's about the next generation—our kids, our grandkids, our nieces and nephews or whoever comes next to take over our farms and our businesses. It's about their ability to farm. It's about the challenges we've already battled through and the groundwork we've laid to equip them for the challenges to come.

The huge value of Farm Bureau is our long-term benefit. The work that we do—together, now—at Farm Bureau is absolutely critical to keeping the future alive and thriving.

As my son wrote in his 4-H story, "Only the hardest workers can succeed." I wholeheartedly believe that the ability for him and others like him to farm in California is dependent on the work Farm Bureau does today.

We're working hard, and we are stronger together. Thank you for your continued support.

*Shannon Douglass, a diversified farmer in Glenn County, was elected to a two-year term as president of the California Farm Bureau in December 2023.*

As I said to you at last year's Annual



*Douglass, who previously served three terms as first vice president, is the first woman to head the organization, which was founded in 1919.*



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## Turlock Irrigation District

By Vicky Boyd

Brad Koehn may be the new Turlock Irrigation District general manager, but he's not new to the district that serves southern Stanislaus and northern Merced counties. The TID Board of Directors recently appointed him to lead the water agency based on his proven leadership and deep understanding of district operations, said board President Ron Macedo.

"His experience as the chief operating officer and the different leadership positions he has held in both the water and power administrations makes him uniquely situated to step into the general manager role and ensure a seamless transition," Macedo said in a statement.

A Turlock native and Turlock High School graduate, Koehn joined the district in 2011 as the civil engineering department manager. He began his new duties June 21 and replaced Michelle Reimer, who announced her resignation as general manager May 31 after 18 years with the district.

Koehn recently talked with The Stanislaus Farm News about several issues and projects that the district is currently involved with. Regardless of the activity, Koehn said the district and board keep their objectives in mind.

"TID's mission is to provide reliable and affordable water and power, and that's front and center of every decision we make," he said.

### *Voluntary agreements*

Among the issues is the voluntary agreement that TID, Modesto Irrigation District and their river partner San Francisco Public Utilities Commission have drafted for the Tuolumne River. It is proposed as an alternative to the California State Water Resources Control Board's 2018 Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan that calls for an average of 40% unimpaired flows for the San Joaquin River and its three main tributaries.

The voluntary agreement includes both non-flow measures, such as habitat restoration, and flow measures designed to improve Tuolumne River health.

"These are based on Tuolumne River science very specific to the watershed and are designed to make it healthy," he said. TID and its partners also hope the State Water Board will consider their voluntary agreement along with those from Sacramento River water providers in 2025. "It's on a good track," Koehn said. "We've made a lot of progress and have support for the agreement. We're really hoping that it continues on the right track, and we get over this last hurdle."

Even if the State Water Board doesn't go along with a joint proposal, he said his district has a plan that's Tuolumne River-specific.

### *SGMA*

Although TID provides mostly surface water to its customers, the district is still involved in developing a groundwater sustainability plan under the state's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. That's because of the interplay between surface water from the Tuolumne River that eventually recharges groundwater.

In fact, the district has had a groundwater monitoring program long before SGMA was enacted in 2014. TID also was the first local entity to adopt a groundwater management plan in 1993 and was a founding member of the Turlock Groundwater Basin Association in 1995.

The Turlock Groundwater Subbasin was only one of two subbasins within the San Joaquin Valley that the state did not categorize as "critically overdrafted" under SGMA. As a result, the two groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) that operate within the subbasin — East Turlock and West Turlock — did not have to submit a groundwater sustainability plan to the state until January 2022. That was two years later than basins deemed critically overdrafted. The West Turlock GSA, located within TID's service area, uses mostly surface wa-

ter. The district is one of 12 local agencies that belong to the West Turlock GSA.

Each year, TID conducts groundwater recharge of more than 100,000 acre-feet, Koehn said. The East Turlock GSA, which is east of TID's irrigation service boundaries, relies mostly on groundwater. Five agencies belong to it.

The two subbasin GSAs decided to work together and submitted a single groundwater management plan to the Department of Water Resources in January 2022. They recently heard from the state that the plan was incomplete, meaning the state asked for additional details on some of the assertions or proposed projects. Those questions have been answered, and Koehn said the GSAs plans to resubmit the plan shortly. "Because the West Turlock area basin is a net recharger, we don't anticipate any curtailment from the plan on private pumping," he said.

### *First-of-its-type solar demo*

TID is the first water agency in the nation to participate in a unique public-private pilot program that involves building solar panels over water canals. Funded by a \$20 million state grant, the project involves TID, the University of California and the private firm Solar Aquagrid LLC.

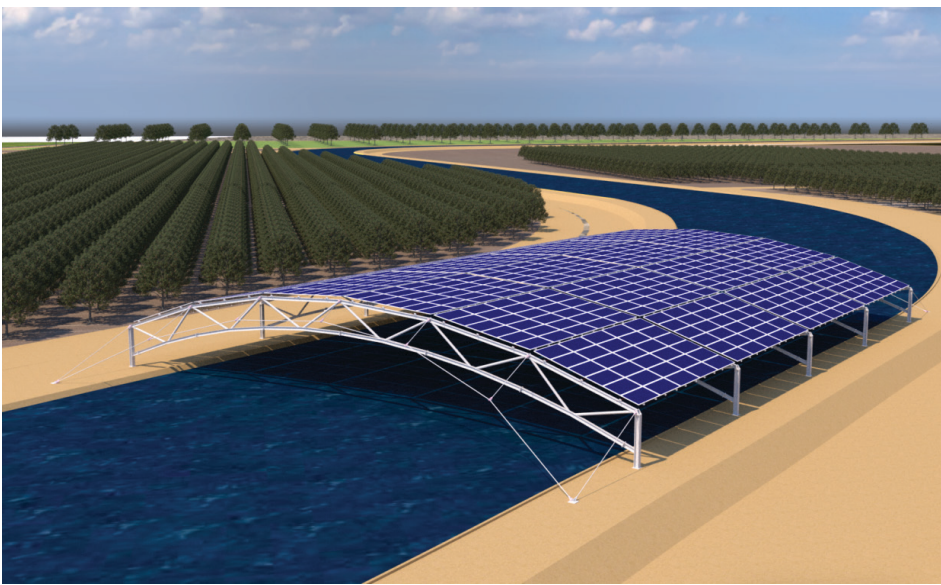
The solar arrays will not float on the canals but rather be built over the waterways at a sloping angle. One side will be about 5 feet off the ground while the other side is about 14 feet above the ground.

By having the panels on structures slightly above the canals, crews will still have access to maintain the water ways and perform repairs, Koehn said.

Dubbed Project Nexus, it also will involve one narrow span over a smaller lateral and one wider span over a larger canal. The structures also will differ in their design. The narrow project was completed earlier this year, while he said he expected the wider one will be finished next year.

One of the questions the pilot project hopes





*Dubbed Project Nexus, a first-of-its-kind pilot project that involves both private and public entities, will examine two types of solar panel framework that span laterals or canals.*

to answer is whether the solar arrays reduce water temperature through shading and will that translate to less evaporation. Does that shading also reduce aquatic vegetation that grows in the canals?

state's aggressive carbon reduction goals while reducing pressure on farmland to host solar farms.

In addition, researchers want to determine whether the water will cool the solar panels and increase their efficiency. Many panels do not generate as much energy under extremely hot conditions.

TID also is looking at floating solar panels for some of its smaller regulating reservoirs. Should the pilot programs prove their feasibility, Koehn said he sees them as a way for the district to meet the

“Both of these projects are intriguing to us,” he said. “Property values within TID are extremely cost mainly because of reliable water supplies. If we’re trying to meet our decarbonization goals by taking 300-400 acres out of production, that could be costly when you add up the typical land costs. We have areas that are already developed — the regulating reservoirs have been developed, so no additional farmland would have to be used.”

The same holds true for canals. Although both of these outside-of-the-box ideas could work, Koehn said the district needs to continue to look at all options.

#### *Looking to the future*

TID's Board of Directors currently is reviewing a comprehensive water plan that will guide the district during the next 25 years as water faces increasing pressures. Koehn described the document as “living” and said it will evolve as needed.

*See "TID" on page 26*



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From "TID" on page 25

"This is not a simple or a quick project — this is a 25-year plan," he said.

Included is direction on how the district will change to being a closed system. Currently, TID comprises 250 miles of gravity-fed laterals and canals serving about 150,000 of farmland.

"When we need to conserve water, how do we change a 125-year-old system to an automated state-of-the-art system that can be controlled and won't spill to the rivers," he said.

The goal is to automate all of the drops and install more regulating reservoirs. By doing so, Koehn estimated the district could save about 40,000 acre-feet annually. In addition, it will likely improve water quality, make more efficient use of the district's work force and improve customer service by making water available in less than an hour.

On the energy side, the district is drafting a similar road map on how it will provide 100% carbon-free energy by 2045 while doing so reliably and affordably. TID currently generates and distributes electricity to about 240,000 people within a 662 square-mile area.

As wind and solar are not the solution by themselves, Koehn said it will take an integrated approach.

"There are a lot of possible features that we can use to get to the finish line," he said. "Let's look at as many as we can, including ones that are out of the box like small modular nuclear reactor plants. If we're going to take these paths, are we continuing to meet our mission? We're hoping there are several solutions — some we can do alone and others may require public-private partners."



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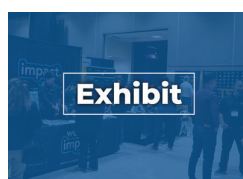


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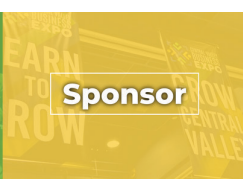
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