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Magazine



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Solutions for a changing world!

New Water Bootcamp Seminars Announced for Water Awareness Month



May is Water Awareness Month and the California Water Institute (CWI) - Research and Education Division at Fresno State is set to host its annual Water Bootcamp, a virtual series aimed at educating people about the complex water system in California.

"Water is so critical to the Valley and a lot of us just know that it comes out of our tap, we don't know where it's coming from," said Laura Ramos, interim director of CWI's Research and Education Division.

The origin of Water Awareness Month can be traced back to the California Drought of 1987-1992 when it was launched as a collaborative initiative between the California Department of Water Resources and the Association of CA Water Agencies. The main purpose of Water Awareness Month is to raise public awareness about the importance of water conservation, the value of water as a natural resource, and the need to use it wisely and sustainably.

Additionally, Water Awareness Month seeks to educate people about the various water-related issues facing their community and the measures being taken to address them. Various water agencies across the state now organize public outreach and educational activities every May to raise awareness about these issues.

For its part, the California Water Institute will host its annual Water

Bootcamp, a free multi-day, virtual series dedicated to water education. The boot camp, hosted in partnership with World Ag Expo® and open to all, will be held every Wednesday in May. It will tackle topics including hydrology, groundwater, surface water, water rights, and stormwater quality.

"It's learning about the water that comes out of the faucet, how it's treated, how it arrives to you, and what you can do to help the water issues in the Valley," Ramos said, adding the Water Bootcamp was created as introductory sessions on different water issues to give the public a better understanding of what is going on across the state.

"As people hear more about these topics in the news, they'll understand a little bit more of the background on what these issues are so that the news is more meaningful to them," she said.

Three of the Water Bootcamp days will be held in English and one of the days will be held in Spanish. Each individual session is about 20-30 minutes long and will also include a Q&A portion. Participants can choose to attend one session, an entire day, or even the entire multi-day series.

"The sessions build upon each other, but they also stand alone," Ramos said.

For more information or to register for California Water Institute's Water Bootcamp, visit <https://bit.ly/WAE-23WaterBootcamp>.

UC Davis releases 5 strawberry varieties resistant to deadly fungal disease

Strawberries selectively bred for Fusarium wilt resistance and high yields



UC Eclipse strawberries grown in Santa Maria are resistant to the soilborne disease Fusarium wilt. Photo by Jael Mackendorf/UC Davis

By Emily C. Dooley

UC Davis College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

The University of California, Davis, is releasing five new strawberry varieties that are resistant to the soilborne disease Fusarium wilt, have high yields and improved fruit quality.

UC Eclipse, UC Golden Gate, UC Keystone, UC Monarch and UC Surfline will be available for sale to California nurseries from Foundation Plant Services in April.

Roughly 88% of strawberries grown in the nation come from California. Fusarium wilt is one of the most common reasons for crop loss and death and yet 55 to 59% of cultivars planted in the state since 2014 have not been resistant, according to UC Davis research.

This is the first release from the UC Davis Strawberry Breeding Program where all the cultivars have Fusarium wilt resistance. They are meant to replace susceptible plants on the market such as Monterey, UCD Royal Royce and UCD Valiant.

Monarch was also developed specifically as a prototype for mechanical harvesting – another first out of the breeding program, which dates to the 1930s and has released 72 patented cultivars over the decades.

“These provide the same yield or better and they are Fusarium resistant,” said Steve Knapp, a Distinguished Professor in the Department of Plant Sciences and director of the UC Davis Strawberry Breeding Program. “They

have a better collection of traits. They're superior.”

Dangerous pathogen

Fusarium wilt didn't present much of a danger to strawberry crops until after the fumigant methyl bromide was phased out of use in the United States in 2005. But the pathogen had always been in the soil, and cases of wilt appeared a year later and increased over time, leading to concerns that a Fusarium wilt pandemic could destroy the crop in California.

“The disease has taken off fast and we need to react quickly to address the need,” said Glenn Cole, a breeder and field manager with the Strawberry Breeding Program.

Knapp said the program tries to “encourage people to consider things like disease resistance” and routinely invites growers and other experts to events showcasing research breakthroughs and improved cultivars.

Varieties for the seasons

The new strawberry varieties each have improved flavor and characteristics that allow for near year-round growing around California, where about 1.8 billion pounds of the fruit are harvested each year. Some of the cultivars are adapted for production in the southern part of the state while others do well under the long daylight hours of summer along the coast.

Eclipse, a “summer plant” cultivar, has the potential to increase grower profitability as it produces in the fall and

See Strawberries page 11



Saturday May 20, 2023 • 9:00 AM

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Dairy Industry Innovation Assessment Tool identifies most promising solutions



To identify market solutions to dairy industry challenges, The VINE and Wageningen Livestock Research - Dairy Campus have released their novel Global Dairy Industry Innovation Assessment Tool.

By Hanif Houston, The VINE

The Hague, NL – The dairy industry in both California and the Netherlands faces four major challenges: manure management, enteric methane, labor, and sustainability measurements and standards. To identify existing and emerging market solutions and assess the impact of these solutions across the four categories and animal welfare, an innovation assessment tool has been created.

The VINE, an initiative of the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Wageningen Livestock Research - Dairy Campus have released their novel Global Dairy Industry Innovation Assessment Tool. This tool is the first step in a joint dairy collaborative aimed at promoting sustainable, climate-smart agriculture for a better future.

"The partnership between The VINE and Wageningen Livestock Research - Dairy Campus has enabled us to combine our expertise and insights to create an overview of these key challenges and opportunities for the dairy industry," said Gabe Youtsey, chief innovation officer for UC ANR. "Understanding this landscape of innovation allows us to leverage our shared resources to support and drive the commercialization of solutions."

"Innovation is key for the future development of the dairy sector in both countries" said Kees de Koning, manager Innovation at Dairy Campus.

This tool provides a snapshot of the current state of innovation addressing some of the challenges in the dairy industry, showcasing innovative technologies and products that are, or have the potential to, make a difference on a global scale. By identifying the most promising solutions and encouraging collaboration among key industry players, the team aims to drive further progress toward a sustainable dairy industry.

The database lists companies, identifies which challenges their product addresses and ranks the maturity of the product from "proof of concept" to "mature."

"This Global Dairy Industry Innovation Assessment Tool is designed to give insights on the opportunities and tradeoffs inherent in deploying any new technology," said Mareese Keane, co-founder of Opengate and partner of The VINE. "It is a living database and any companies that want to add or update their entry are invited to get in touch."

To complement the assessment tool, The Vine and Wageningen dairy
See Dairy next page

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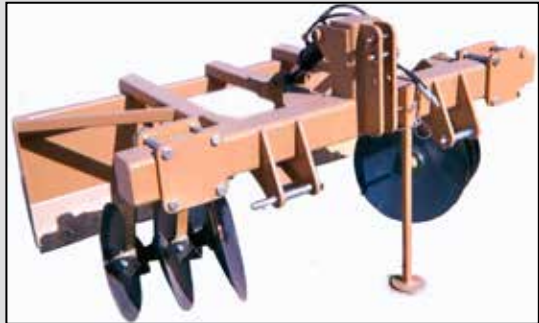
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Dairy

continued from previous page

collaboration are working on the following projects:

Building Blocks for Virtual Future Farm: Envisioning a theoretical farm with zero emissions or maximum circularity by leveraging Dutch precision technology and California large-scale farming expertise.

The VINE VIP (Validation of Innovations Project): Focusing first on value-added products from manure, participants will look for technologies that provide value-added products at scale from manure, beyond energy and direct application as fertilizer.

A delegation of California-based dairy industry innovators and operators are invited to join an innovation tour of the Dutch dairy industry, starting Nov. 6.

For more information about the Dairy Innovation Assessment Tool, how the companies included were selected, and how to submit or update additional entries, please visit <https://thevine.io/towards-better-dairy-global-innovation-landscape>.

About The VINE: The VINE, an initiative of the University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, is California's agriculture, food and biotech innovation network. The VINE aims to harness the power of open innovation to help industries and entrepreneurs grow and scale globally while catalyzing technology innovation and commercialization for productive, sustainable, and equitable food systems.

About Wageningen Livestock Research - Dairy Campus: Wageningen Dairy Campus is a leading research institution in the Netherlands focused on dairy farming and sustainability. The Dairy Campus provides a platform for education, research and innovation, bringing together industry partners, academi, and government organizations to advance sustainable practices in the dairy sector.

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UC Climate Steward: 'It's the most fulfilling work'

Climate Stewards course instructor inspires change in Butte County



UC Climate Steward Rose Brazil-Few is growing a compost program in Chico. Photo courtesy of Rose Brazil-Few

By Mike Hsu
Senior Public Information Representative

Growing up in Butte County, Rose Brazil-Few has watched climate change devastate communities and ecosystems in the form of severe drought and deadly wildfire, including the 2018 Camp Fire that swept through Paradise. Through the University of California Climate Stewards program, Brazil-Few is taking action in her home county – and inspiring others to help.

“Seeing the environmental situation firsthand in California, every day I find a reason to work on climate action projects,” she explained. “It’s the most fulfilling work that I could possibly be doing right now.”

As a California Climate Action Corps Fellow (a workforce development program affiliated with California Volunteers), Brazil-Few is working at the Butte Environmental Council as community sustainability coordinator. She said the UC Climate Stewards course she completed last fall – administered by the UC California Naturalist program – taught her crucial lessons she applies every day, especially on framing and conveying the climate crisis.

“One of the biggest takeaways is how to communicate about climate change while we’re doing climate action work,” she said. “Sometimes you encounter community members who don’t necessarily like the term ‘climate change,’ but they still believe in cleaning up parks and planting trees for shade – so focusing on positive action will still accomplish your bigger goals.”

Brazil-Few will further amplify those locally rooted solutions and climate stewardship opportunities when she starts teaching her own UC Climate Stewards course this summer, through Butte Environmental Council.

“Rose is the first CCAC fellow to become a certified Climate Stewards course instructor as part of the Pathway to Leadership we co-developed with CCAC,” said Sarah-Mae Nelson, UC Climate Stewards academic coordinator. “This pathway is an opportunity for fellows to continue fostering community and ecosystem resilience in their communities as active Climate Stewards, once their official fellowship has ended.”

Since launching in fall 2020, nearly 500 people have completed the UC Climate Stewards course, which is delivered by 17 partner organizations throughout the state. Nelson noted that, in addition to the CCAC collaboration, UC Climate Stewards is also working with Sustainability Service Corps and SEI (Strategic Energy Innovations) Climate Corps – and looking into bringing the course to other states.

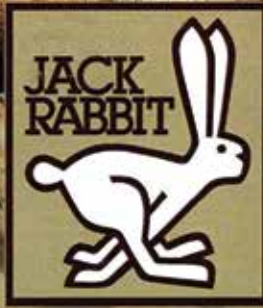
A 2021 graduate of Humboldt State University with a bachelor’s degree in environmental studies, Brazil-Few said she appreciates that the UC Climate Stewards course instills a sense of hope and empowerment and possibility.

“I know some people who feel hopeless because there’s such a focus on the doom of climate change – when in reality you can find so many programs and people in your local community making positive change,” she said.

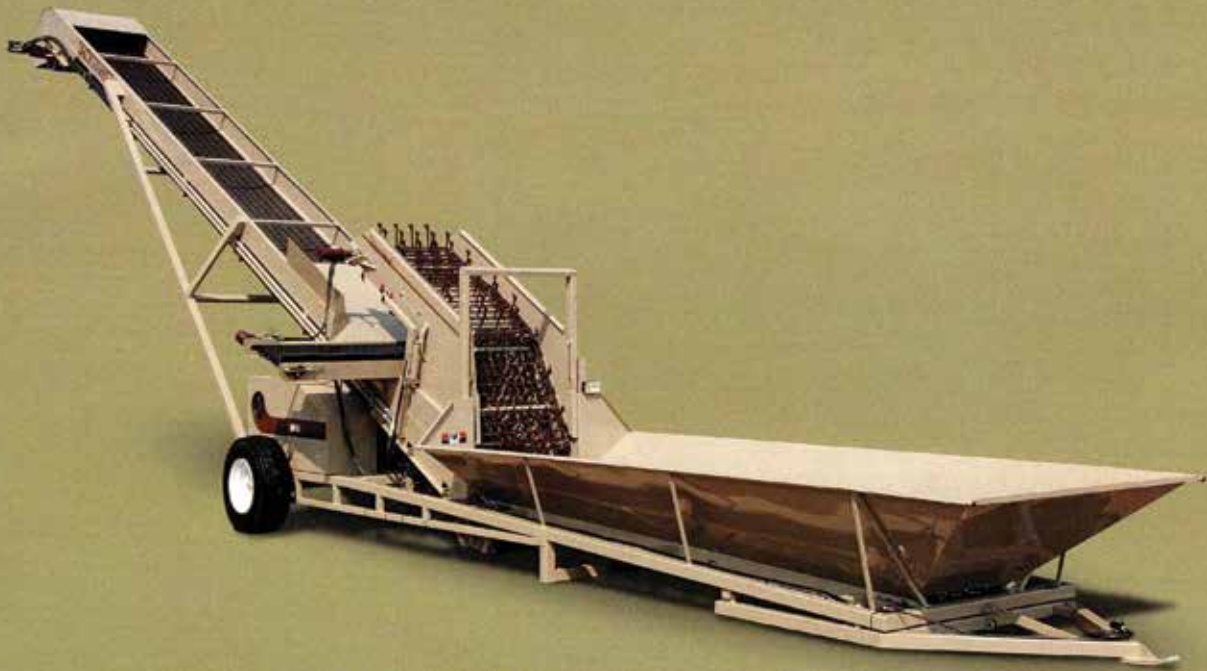
In her community, Brazil-Few highlights the partnership efforts between the Butte County Local Food Network and area growers, the Traditional Ecological Knowledge sharing at Verbena Fields in Chico, and the continued growth of the community composting program – among many other projects.

They all illustrate a key point that Brazil-Few will emphasize as she designs her UC Climate Stewards course: a meaningful climate project need not take place at a large scale – action can happen, literally, in one’s own backyard.

“It can be easily attainable and accessible,” she said. “And just talking about it with people and getting your community excited is the very first step in creating a series of events that eventually leads to a bigger impact on climate change and positive environmentalism.”



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Common Threads honors 13 women in agriculture for their service

Farm Credit again serves as a top-level sponsor of awards to recognize women's contributions to agriculture and their communities



Central Valley: Left to right: Tricia Stever Blattler (Exeter), Aubrey Bettencourt (Hanford), Nanette Simonian (Fowler), Lucy Areias (Fresno), Holly Rosa (Hanford), Sheri Kanagawa (Hanford) and Juanita Calzadillas-Pedrozo (Merced).



North: Left to right: Bobbin Mulvaney (Sacramento), Audrey Z. Tennis (Chico), Sharron Zoller (Kelseyville), Linda Walker (Los Molinos), Geri Byrne (Tulelake), Bonnie Fernandez-Fenaroli (Woodland).

Anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

That is the core of Common Threads, an awards program that recognizes women in agriculture in the San Joaquin Valley and Northern California for their service to agriculture and to their communities. As the Common Threads North awards program put it:

“Agriculture is the common thread of all honorees. Their contributions are symbolic of the rich, colorful threads used to fashion a multifaceted tapestry, not unlike the agricultural diversity of our region. The common threads of our tapestry display an array of cultures, ages, and regions. Some threads are vivid and bright, like the colorful bounty of our land’s harvest. Some are as soft as well-used denim and a little faded with age. Some have the tensile strength of iron; others the complexity and richness of fine lace.”

Colleen Cecil, executive director of the Butte County Farm Bureau and a member of the Common Threads North committee, which recognizes women from Stanislaus County north to the Oregon border, said it was important to honor the contributions of women to agriculture.

“Women are often overlooked because they’re busy working bees in the background and they don’t get the spotlight,” Cecil said.

“Other programs recognize outstanding people, but this is the only one I know of about women in ag. It’s special to get this award because you’ve been nominated by others who hold you in high regard. I’ve had the opportunity to read the applications and letters of recommendation, and I just want to give everyone an award. We’re grateful to be able to bring attention to these women.”

Rebecca Quist, the chair of the Common Threads

Fresno committee, which recognizes women in Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced and Tulare counties, noted that the committee’s honorees represent a wide variety in ages.

“Ag has no age limit. The women we recognize are legacy women – whether they’ve done things quietly behind the scenes or they’re part of a newer generation where they’re out-front advocating in a public forum,” she said.

In the Fresno area, seven honorees were honored on March 1 at a luncheon in Clovis: Lucy Areias, Fresno; Aubrey Bettencourt, Hanford; Juanita Calzadillas-Pedrozo, Merced; Holly Rosa, Hanford; Nanette Simonian, Fowler; Sheri Kanagawa, Hanford; and Tricia Stever Blattler, Honorary Recipient, Tulare.

And in the north, six women were recognized at a dinner in Winters on April 5: Geri Byrne, Tulelake; Bonnie Fernandez-Fenaroli, Woodland; Bobbin Mulvaney, Sacramento; Audrey Z. Tennis, Chico; Linda Walker, Los Molinos; and Sharron Zoller, Kelseyville.

AgWest Farm Credit, American AgCredit, CoBank and Fresno Madera Farm Credit have collectively contributed more than \$35,000 to support Common Threads as top-level sponsors since 2015. The organizations are part of the nationwide Farm Credit System – the largest provider of credit to U.S. agriculture.

Mark Littlefield, President and CEO of AgWest Farm Credit, said Farm Credit supports Common Threads because of the importance of women in agriculture.

“Each of the women honored this year has made outstanding contributions to California agriculture, whether managing operations of their family farming business, through work in organizations supporting agriculture or both,” Littlefield said. “And since so many younger women

See Honors next page

Strawberries

continued from page 4

winter, and yields during research testing were 54% higher than similar cultivars. “We expect this cultivar to have wide commercial appeal,” Knapp said. “Eclipse is going to eclipse them all.”

Golden Gate and Keystone are “day neutral.” Those type of cultivars grow throughout the summer on about 60 percent of strawberry farming acres in the state. The “short-day” plants Surfline and Monarch are resistant to Verticillium wilt and Phytophthora crown rot.


Surfline and Eclipse are firmer and promise longer shelf lives. Monarch provides growers with improved fruit qualities relative to other mass-produced cultivars and has characteristics needed for advances in mechanical harvesting, Knapp said.

Genetic tools

Breeding program experts have long been researching ways to improve strawberry cultivars so the crop can withstand pests, disease and other stressors. To find plants that had Fusarium wilt resistance, they obtained the DNA of thousands of plants in field studies. The scientists also developed genetic tools to screen the plants and identify the genes that have resistance to the Fusarium pathogen.

Knowing that information allowed the team to breed resistance into and develop new cultivars, at a faster rate than previous efforts. “These tools have allowed us to sweep out the susceptibility and bring in resistance,” Knapp said.

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Honors

continued from previous page

are taking on even more important roles in farming and ranching, they will help ensure a strong future for agriculture in the state.”

Keith Hesterberg, President and CEO of Fresno Madera Farm Credit, added that the philanthropic efforts of women in agriculture are a cornerstone of the health of farming communities around the state.

“Since the founding of our nation, rural America has evolved through a unique commitment to volunteerism that has strengthened and improved our communities,” Hesterberg said. “The Common Threads winners truly exemplify this trait as all have given generously of their time over the years to work on projects that have made a real difference.”

The Common Threads program also benefits the recipients’ communities, Holman noted, as some of the proceeds from the awards events benefit a charity designated by each of the honorees.

The Multi-Purpose Robot for Farms Big and Small



Jacob Farms in California using the Amiga by farm_ng uses 'Follow Me' autonomy capability to avoid box lugging and increase productivity.

At the height of the pandemic, Ethan Rublee left Silicon Valley to transition from robot builder to farmer in Watsonville, California. He was quickly confronted with the limitations of tractors and traditional farming equipment in critical tasks like weeding or harvest. The attraction to make it better captivated his mind and creativity.

Nearby neighbor, Larry Jacobs of Jacobs Del Cabo, grower of basil, cherry tomatoes, peppers, herbs, and squash, has had the same challenges for over 40 years. Larry's diverse crops required a huge variety of tools and his team often found working without tractors more efficient.

Inspired the collaboration between Larry and Ethan to build something better. What has become the small farmers and farmworkers friend the farm-ng Amiga was born. Together with the continuous feedback of a tested customer a cost-effective, multi-purpose adaptable robot to the needs of farm was created.

Electric, Adaptable, Open-Source

The Amiga is an all-electric, modular platform with attachments for autonomy, traction, seating, and tools like lifts or motors. Farmers can easily customize attachments to fit their needs and adjust the machine's dimensions for different row widths and heights. While its open-source design encourages collaboration among farmers, welders, and software engineers.

Field workers have personalized the Amiga for a range of tasks, including planting, seeding, harvesting, and other activities that are unsuitable for costly tractors or dedicated implements.

In August 2022, the Amiga Brain was introduced by farm-ng, offering features like autonomy, object recognition, device control, and crop data collection. By February 2023, the Community Alliance of Family Farms recognized the Amiga for its practical design and ease of use.

"The AMIGA has become the go-to assistant for our

crew. It began as a harvest helper, following the crew with packing materials and carrying the harvested crop out of the field. It has become a multiple use platform including a bug vac, compost spreader, flamer, 6-line seeder, and cultivation tool. This is the scale of affordable automation we've been looking for. It's finally here."

Larry Jacobs, Organic Farmer & Founder of Jacobs Farm Supporting Indoor and Outdoor Farming

The Amiga's electric and quiet operation,

compact size, and maneuverability makes it suitable for both indoor and outdoor vegetable farms. The platform has also been used for spraying, preharvest sampling, manual and mechanical weeding, small plot seeding, and phenological data capture. The Amiga's flexibility and portability are particularly appealing to interns and researchers working on small-scale projects.

Agricultural Expertise Meets Space Travel

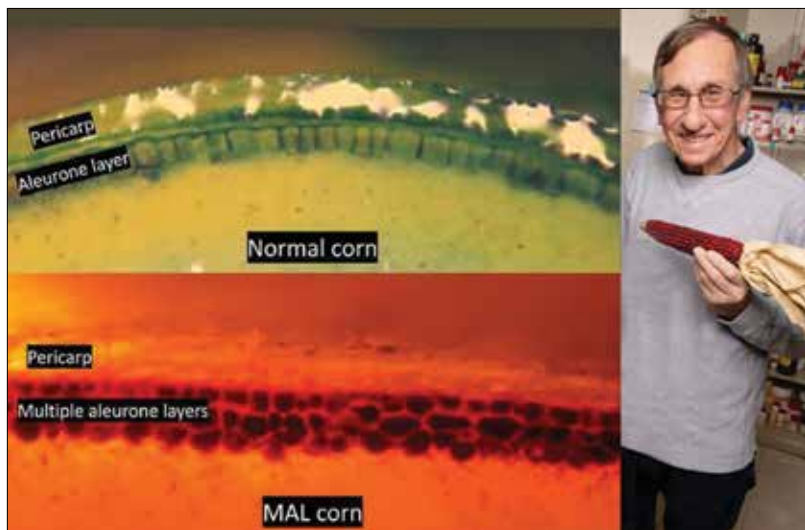
The Amiga also benefits from gps-denied navigation technologies developed by farm-ng, the company behind the Amiga, for landing NASA rockets on the moon. Precise lunar landings require vision navigation technology, which farm-ng has developed for agricultural applications. As Rublee explains, navigating on the moon shares similarities with working in an almond orchard from a roboticist's perspective.

Public-Private Partnerships for Nationwide Deployment

In the coming months, universities across the U.S. will develop solutions using the farm-ng Amiga to benefit farmers. UC Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR) has issued a nationwide challenge, co-sponsored by prominent tech and agricultural companies, to showcase these innovations at the FIRA USA conference in Salinas, California, from September 19-21 2023. "The goal of the challenge is not just to build the next robots in agriculture, but to develop the next generation of agricultural innovators." said Gabriel Youtsey, creator of the UCANR challenge.

Today, more than 50 Amigas are operational across the U.S. in agricultural and educational settings. The rapid growth of farm-ng is supported by a diverse team of robotics experts and AI pioneers dedicated to building a farm-to-table food supply at global scale. When asked about the future of the Amiga and farm-ng, Ethan's only comment was "I'm not doing all my own farming with robots yet, I believe there's more to do."

Simple addition to corn bran could boost grain's nutritional value 15-35%



Jack Juvik with a micrograph showing corn's aleurone layers

What if, by adding a couple of cell layers inside a corn kernel, the grain could become significantly richer in essential nutrients like iron, zinc, and protein? Such an improvement could benefit people who rely on corn for a large portion of their diet, as in many parts of the global south.

In a new study, University of Illinois scientists show it's possible to increase iron up to 35% and zinc up to 15% compared to parent lines simply by adding cell layers in the bran.

"People have been using traditional means to breed corn with higher micronutrients and protein for many, many years. It takes a lot of effort and time. For us to show increases like this with just a single trait, it's like, why didn't we do this a long time ago? It's so simple," says study co-author Jack Juvik, professor in the Department of Crop Sciences, part of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) at U of I.

Juvik and co-author Michael Paulsmeyer, now a post-doctoral scientist with the USDA, focused on the aleurone layer, typically a single layer of cells sitting just inside the outer coating of a corn kernel. Although it only makes up about 2% of the total volume of the kernel, the aleurone is rich in proteins and micronutrients.

A few rare corn varieties produce multiple aleurone layers (MAL) naturally, but until now, no one had looked at how these extra layers could be manipulated to affect the nutritional quality of the grain. Juvik and Paulsmeyer sourced two MAL lines – a yellow variety, with five to six aleurone layers; and a blue variety, with three aleurone layers – from the Maize Genetics Cooperation Stock Center. They quickly started making crosses with normal corn varieties to learn how the MAL trait is inherited and how it can change the grain's nutritional value.

By looking at how MAL was expressed in offspring of those crosses, the team traced MAL to a small section

on corn chromosome 8, but also found other gene regions that contributed to the trait. The researchers then developed molecular markers to identify MAL genes quickly for future breeding programs.

"Using molecular markers, we can take a little sample of the seed, do a DNA analysis, and identify whether the seedling will have the trait we want," Juvik explains. "It saves a great deal of time and energy compared to traditional breeding where you have to plant all the seeds you have and wait until they mature to see if the trait is there."

The researchers also tested the nutritional quality of MAL offspring compared to the single-aleurone-layer parents. In addition to higher iron and zinc, offspring from the blue MAL parents produced 20-30% more anthocyanin, a

red to purple pigment prized in the food manufacturing industry as a natural alternative to artificial colorants.

Juvik has been working to increase anthocyanin content in corn for years, but he had mainly focused on the pericarp, the outer layer of the kernel. When he realized some corn varieties also carry anthocyanin in their aleurone layers, a light bulb went off.

"In some cases, the aleurone will have genes that can create anthocyanins. We thought if we can increase the number of layers of aleurone as well as the pericarp, we could increase the amount of color we can extract from corn kernels. That was actually our original intent for this project," Juvik says. "But when we sent our samples to be analyzed for micronutrients, lo and behold, there was a very significant increase in iron and zinc."

Juvik says MAL is a simple and promising trait to increase nutrition and anthocyanin content in corn but notes it's not quite ready for prime time. In the study, the team crossed MAL corn lines with corn with low iron and zinc values. If they introduced the MAL trait into hybrids with higher levels of those micronutrients, would the increase seem less dramatic or more? Juvik isn't sure, but he's working to find an answer.

He is currently using genetically identical corn hybrids to further isolate the effect of MAL on nutritional quality and anthocyanin content. After that, he plans to introduce the trait into hybrids that are locally adapted to areas of the global south where a nutritional boost would be most beneficial.

"We hope we can improve zinc and iron content to a level where staple diets, which can be upwards of 50-70% maize, can provide enough micronutrients to overcome nutritional problems, particularly in pregnant women and very young children. That's the target. It's a big if, but it looks promising enough to continue this work," Juvik says.

California FFA's Increased Diversity Bodes Well for Future of Agriculture

\$600,000 in Farm Credit donations over the years have helped FFA grow and provide vital leadership development for future ag leaders

Roberto Lopez, a senior at Oakdale High School in Stanislaus County, is a strong believer in the value of FFA. Lopez is the president of both the school's FFA Chapter and the organization's central region, encompassing the area between Yolo and Merced counties.

His drive is so strong that he hopes to take a gap year between high school and college and be elected next month to serve as one of six FFA statewide student officers, who will interact with business and industry leaders, thousands of FFA members and teachers, corporate sponsors, government and education officials, local FFA leaders, and the public.

The team will lead personal growth and leadership training conferences for FFA members throughout the state and help set policies that will guide the future of FFA in California and the next generation of leaders.

"I was always an individual who was quiet and kept to himself," Lopez recalls. "But my ag teachers all introduced the idea of how FFA can turn a student into a leader. That really sparked me. What better way to take my passion for ag than to be an advocate for industry?"

Lopez's ascent into leadership roles is representative of the growth of Latino membership in the California FFA. For decades after its inception in 1928, FFA – then the Future Farmers of America – was an all-male, all-white organization. During the 1960s, that began to change. Black members joined in 1965 when FFA merged with the segregated New Farmers of America, and women were first allowed to join in 1969.

But today, while 45% of members nationwide are female, nearly two-thirds of the membership is white.

California, however, is different. Twenty years ago, FFA membership in the Golden State was still roughly 60% white and 60% male. But according to FFA's 2021-22 Fact Sheet, 45% of members were Hispanic, 40% were white, 10% were of two or more races, and 2.5% each were Black and Asian. In addition, 73% of its 98,912 members were women. Although these changes are significant, FFA officials recognize that there is still work that needs to be done.

"FFA may not have radical changes, but change happens," said Katie Otto, executive director of development for the California FFA Foundation. "And that's not lost on our students and our leadership. We ask, are we providing opportunities for all students? Are we accessible? And how can we better meet kids where they're at?"

Mark Littlefield, President and CEO of AgWest Farm Credit, said FFA's growing diversity is crucial for the future of California agriculture.

"Farm Credit is a strong supporter of FFA and has donated over \$600,000 in the past 30 years to help FFA fulfill its mission," Littlefield said. "Farm Credit is committed to encouraging diversity and inclusion, and FFA's evolution is especially important to reflect the current make-up of California farms. This will ensure that our farms and ranches and

the rest of the ag industry continue to grow and prosper in the years to come."

Farm Credit Alliance members AgWest Farm Credit, American AgCredit, CoBank, Colusa-Glenn Farm Credit, Fresno Madera Farm Credit, Golden State Farm Credit and Yosemite Farm Credit are proud supporters of FFA. The organizations are part of the nationwide Farm Credit System – the largest provider of credit to U.S. agriculture.

Charles Parker, statewide FFA Advisor for the California Department of Education, said it took time during the 1980s and '90s to help Hispanic families understand that having their children participate in FFA was not just a pathway to working in the fields.

"The parents were farm laborers for the most part and the families didn't understand what we did. We said we want your children to grow and to go to college and we can help you get there," Parker said. "The students always wanted to be in it. Like all kids, they love to learn with their hands. But now we can show them that FFA students are going to college, and having those success stories is what drives parental support."

Otto said the growing Latino and female membership reflects the expansion of FFA from its farming and ranching origins. Members must be enrolled in an ag course at their middle school or high school to be involved. Classes include biology, chemistry, floriculture, welding and mechanics and are as diverse as ag is in California.

Parker agreed.

"We let them know that FFA is about more than working in the fields. It's building the next robot; it's doing engineering, developing new ways to sort fruit. Those are the alternatives we're looking at."

Lopez, who plans on being the first member of his family to attend college, is a perfect example of how FFA grows and develops members, said Isaac Robles, the ag department chair at Oakdale High and an FFA advisor.

"When he was a freshman, he was just another student. But through hard work and sticking to the program, I've seen him really develop into a young leader. We always have superstars from day one, but for Roberto it wasn't easy – he worked his tail off, and you see the potential that develops out of hard work," Robles said.

Developing tomorrow's ag leaders is another reason why Farm Credit backs FFA so strongly, said Jeana Hultquist, Vice President of Legislative Affairs with American AgCredit and a member of the California FFA Foundation Board of Directors.

"Roberto is a great example of how FFA develops great leaders. His long-term goal is to graduate from Cal Poly with a degree in ag business," Hultquist said. "There are thousands of other California FFA members who will become leaders in farming, in finance, in the sciences and in advocacy in the years to come. Many of them would not have had these opportunities without FFA."



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American Agri-Women Decide Legislative Policy Positions *Mid-Year Policy Meeting Held Recently in Nashville, Tenn.*

American Agri-Women members updated the organization's legislative policy positions at its Mid-Year meeting held recently in Nashville, Tenn.

American Agri-Women (AAW) updated its legislative policy positions in the areas of natural resources, commodities and education, and ag business and economics at its annual mid-year meeting held recently in Jordan, Utah. AAW, a national coalition of farm, ranch and agribusiness women, is in its 48th year of advocating for agriculture.

The 2023 AAW Mid-Year meeting was held in beautiful Nashville, Tenn., April 12-15 at the Embassy Suites Hilton - Nashville Airport. Women nationwide gathered to discuss current agricultural issues and policies and voted to create the 2023 AAW Position Statements.

The meeting began with an afternoon session on April 12, with both the Executive and Foundation committees holding their meetings, followed by a joint planning session between the two committees.

April 13, began with the Board of Directors meeting followed by mid-year orientation. Following orientation, the group traveled downtown Nashville to the RFD-TV studio. After the RFD-TV tour, we heard about Media

Strategies from Genevieve O'Sullivan, VP of Marketing CropLife America. For the remainder of the afternoon, members worked on updating the AAW Position Statements.

Members finished the position statement on the final day and voted to accept them along with fly-in orientation.

The AAW Foundation held the mid-year silent auction, where members donated items to be used for the fundraiser. The Foundation promotes and develops educational and leadership programs and opportunities relevant to agriculture.

About American Agri-Women - American Agri-Women (AAW) promotes the welfare of our national security through safe and reliable food, fiber and energy supply. Since 1974, AAW members have worked together to educate consumers, advocate for agriculture, and offer networking and professional development opportunities. Go to the AAW website for more information and to join www.americanagriwomen.org. Find AAW on social media at: Facebook.com/AgriWomen/, Twitter.com/Women4Ag/ (@Women4Ag) and Instagram.com/americanagriwomen/ (@americanagriwomen. #standupspeakout4ag

Foxconn Completes Production of the First Five Monarch MK-V Tractors in Ohio



Hon Hai Technology Group (“Foxconn”) (TWSE:2317) announced the start of production in Ohio of the Monarch MK-V, the first fully electric, driver-optional, smart tractors, in Ohio with the initial five tractors rolling off the production line for delivery to customers. In June 2022, Foxconn signed a contract manufacturing agreement (CMA) with Zimeno Inc. D/B/A Monarch Tractor (“Monarch Tractor”) to build Monarch Tractor’s next-generation agricultural equipment and battery packs at the Foxconn Ohio facility.

“We’re very pleased with the product quality ahead of full-rate production,” said Foxconn Technology Group. “This milestone is achieved thanks to our employees and the strength of our ongoing partnership with Monarch Tractor. Foxconn prides itself on our partnerships, and we believe the shared goal of promoting sustainability and safety in agriculture is one of the many reasons we have found the right partner in Monarch Tractor.”

Launched to the public in 2020, Monarch Tractor has transformed the agriculture industry with next generation EV technology and unparalleled automation capabilities to meet farmers’ most pressing needs. The MK-V brings to life Monarch Tractor’s mission to elevate farming practices to enable clean, efficient, and economically viable solutions for today’s farmers and the generations

of farmers to come. The MK-V, a fully electric, driver-optional, smart tractor combines electrification, automation, and data analysis to help farmers reduce their carbon footprint, improve field safety, streamline farming operations, and increase their bottom lines.

“As a leader in manufacturing some of the world’s most influential electric and autonomous technologies, Foxconn is the ideal partner for us as we look to rapidly expand production of the MK-V,” said Praveen Penmetta, Co-Founder & CEO, Monarch Tractor. “Today’s farmers need solutions like the MK-V now that will increase farm profitability and sustainability and we’re the first company that is able to fulfill the global demand for these solutions. This is also a massive opportunity to produce large volumes of smart tractors in this class. We are excited to partner with Foxconn as we forever change the future of electrified farming.”

Setting a new standard for farm safety – a top priority for Foxconn and Monarch Tractor – the MK-V also includes technology that will help prevent farm-related injuries whether the tractor is being driven or performing driverless tasks. Each MK-V is produced with collision prevention, human detection, and power take-off (PTO) protection. The tractor will stop moving if it detects a human within six feet of the tractor, and the PTO will automatically shut off if the system detects a person within one foot of the PTO.

Foxconn began commercial production of Monarch Tractor’s MK-V Series in the first quarter of this year as scheduled. After the official delivery, the next steps of the partnership include continued tuning of production line(s) and material sourcing in preparation for full-rate production.

To learn more about Monarch Tractor, visit www.monarchtractor.com.

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The 2023 California Avocado Season Is Officially Here

The California Avocado Commission shares tips on how to maximize enjoyment of in-season California avocados



Photo courtesy of the California Avocado Commission.

The California Avocado Commission announces the kickoff to the 2023 season with fresh, delicious fruit available now through summer. From smoothies and salads to dips and desserts, everyone's favorite California avocados are packed with flavor and nutrients, and are a versatile staple in any diet.

In celebration of the new season, CAC encourages consumers to experience all that California avocados have to offer, while sharing some knowledge along the way. Ever wonder when, where and how to shop for California avocados? Curious about the best way to cut an avocado? To ensure you make the most of this delicious fruit, CAC is rounding up the top five things to know about California avocados so you're prepared all season long:

1. Although you may see avocados in stores all year round, it's important to know that California avocados are only available from spring through summer
2. Look for California on the label to ensure you're enjoying locally grown California avocados. And if you can't find conventionally grown California avocados, don't forget to check the organic section!
3. Locally grown California avocados are meticulously cared for by about 3,000 growers and picked at their peak, resulting in fruit that is consistent in taste and texture. Since they are grown close to home, California avocados go from tree to table in just a few days
4. California avocados are a sodium- and cholesterol-free heart-healthy superfood. The greatest concentra-

tion of beneficial carotenoids is in the dark green fruit of the avocado closest to the peel. To get to the heart-healthy nutrient-dense fruit directly under the peel, peel the skin from the avocado, instead of scooping. Learn more about CAC's "nick and peel" method here

5. From smoothies and salads to dips and desserts, CAC's website offers unlimited access to unique and versatile recipes featuring in-season California avocados, such as this Dungeness Crab Stuffed California

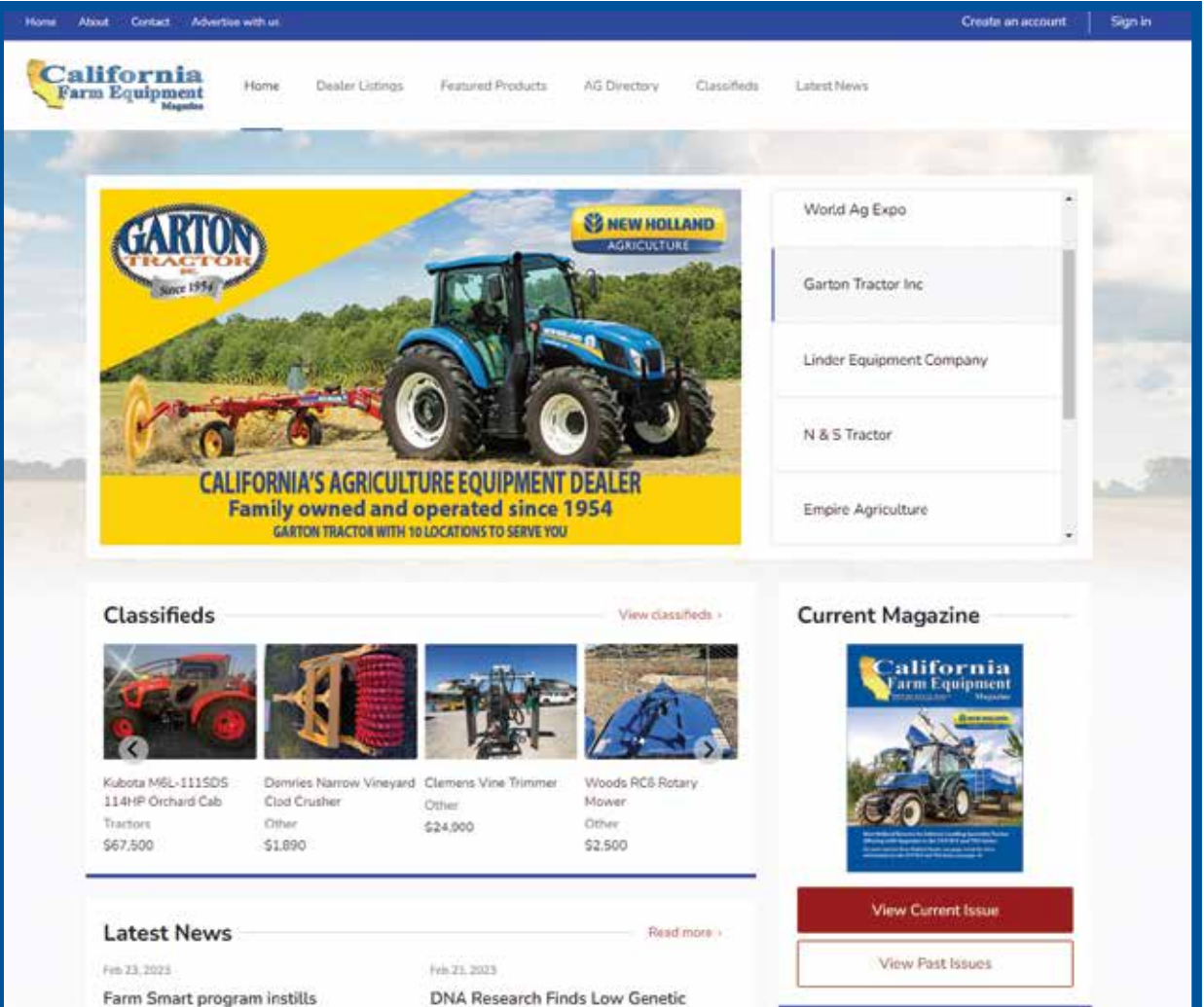
Avocado recipe and this Strawberry, Watermelon, Avocado and Mint Smoothie recipe, perfect for the warmer months

"We're all pros when it comes to eating avocados, but knowing where to find California avocados and understanding the benefits of buying local are the first steps to a consistent experience," said Terry Splane, vice president of marketing of the Commission. "We hope you find these tips helpful the next time you're shopping for California avocados, and we encourage you to take advantage of fresh, in-season California avocados to help elevate every meal for any occasion."

For additional tips and tricks, delicious seasonal recipes, avocado nutrition and more, California avocado enthusiasts can visit CaliforniaAvocado.com, and follow along on Facebook at Facebook.com/CaliforniaAvocados, and on Twitter and Instagram at @CA_Avocados.

About the California Avocado Commission

Created in 1978, the California Avocado Commission strives to enhance the premium positioning of California avocados through advertising, promotion and public relations, and engages in related industry activities. California avocados are cultivated with uncompromising dedication to quality and freshness, by about 3,000 growers in the Golden State. The California Avocado Commission serves as the official information source for California avocados and the California avocado industry. Visit CaliforniaAvocado.com.



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KIOTI Introduces New CK20 and DK20 Series Tractors

New models include integrated joystick control, LED lights for added productivity



CK20 and CK20SE Series

Ranging from 25 to 40 horsepower, the high-performance CK20 Series compact tractors pack impressive power and smooth handling into one dependable workhorse. The CK20 Series includes the CK2620, CK2620 HST, CK3520, CK3520 HST, CK4020 and CK4020 HST models. The CK20 Series comes standard with power steering, wet multi-disc brakes, and a joystick valve with third-function controls. Buyers have the option to purchase the third-function valve

KIOTI Tractor, a division of Daedong-USA, Inc., announces the addition of the CK20 and DK20 Series models to its tractor lineup. Now available at KIOTI dealerships across the United States and Canada, many of the new models incorporate new features for enhanced productivity, including integrated joystick controls, LED headlights and updated steel hoods.

Front-end loader work is made easier with the new integrated joystick that also houses standard third-function controls. The joystick enables the operator to perform all loader functions with a single lever, and when combined with the optional third-function valve kit and attachments, unlocks additional capability. Select CK20SE Cab and DK20SE models arrive factory-prepped for the optional RPM Raise feature. With this feature, operators can temporarily increase to maximum engine RPMs at the push of a button when lifting heavy loads, and return to the preset RPMs once completed, making tasks more efficient.

Other features include new LED headlights, increasing nighttime visibility for long days on the job. Additionally, a new steel hood increases machine durability, along with improved branding and a more modern look.

"The new CK20 and DK20 models build upon our tried-and-true equipment features to deliver enhanced productivity and performance," said Joel Hicks, KIOTI product development manager for tractors. "We know operators perform tough jobs that require power and precision, so these new workhorses are designed with those needs top of mind."

kit needed to power front-mounted hydraulically-actuated attachments.

The CK20SE Series includes seven powerful models, ranging from 25 to 40 horsepower: CK2620SE HST Cab, CK3520SE, CK3520SE HST, CK3520SE HST Cab, CK4020SE, CK4020SE HST, CK4020HST Cab. The SE Series includes many of the features found on non-SE models, and comes standard with dual remote hydraulic valves, along with tilt steering and joystick valves.

DK20 and DK20SE Series

Ranging from 40 to 55 horsepower, the DK20 Series offers comfort and durability for tough jobs.

The DK20 Series includes three models: DK4520, DK5020 and DK5520. Each machine is powered by a dependable, liquid-cooled, fuel-efficient, 3-cylinder KIOTI diesel engine.

The new DK20SE models, ranging from 40 to 58 horsepower, feature the largest fuel tank capacity of the line at 12.7 gallons and reach a top speed of 18.45 mph. These models also feature performance-proven, heavy-duty hydrostatic transmissions that deliver both power and efficiency. The three-range transmission with dual pedal operation makes tackling jobs easier, smoother and safer. Operators can choose from DK4220SE HST, DK4220SE HST Cab, DK4720SE HST, DK4720SE HST Cab, DK5320SE HST, DK5320SE HST Cab, DK6020SE HST or DK6020SE HST Cab models.

To learn more about the new models, contact your local dealer or visit KIOTI.com.

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*Offer available April 5, 2023 – May 31, 2023. Rebates and/or financing based on the purchase of eligible equipment defined in promotional program. Pricing and rebates in US dollars. Additional fees including, but not limited to, taxes, freight, setup and delivery charges may apply. Financing must be through DLL using one of the available financing options. Financing is subject to credit approval. Customers must take delivery prior to the end of the program period. Some customers will not qualify. Some restrictions apply. Offer available on new equipment only. Prior purchases are not eligible. Offer valid only at participating Dealers. Offer subject to change without notice. See your dealer for details. 6 Year Warranty for Non-Commercial, residential use only. 6 Year Warranty applies to CS, CK, DK10, DK10, NS and NX model KIOTI tractors and must be purchased and registered between September 1, 2016 – June 30, 2023. Offer valid only at participating Dealers. Offer subject to change without notice. See your dealer for details. © 2023 KIOTI Tractor Company a Division of Daedong USA, Inc.

Don't Pass on Those Veggies! Eating the Right Amount Can Improve Mental Health and Happiness

When healthy adults consume the daily amount of vegetable servings recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) it has a positive effect on how happy the person feels, according to a study completed by scientists at the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS).

Many studies show that eating the DGA-recommended daily amounts of fruits and vegetables is good for our general health, but only a few studies have demonstrated the role that vegetable consumption (separate from fruits) has on one's mental health.

A group of scientists at the Grand Forks Human Nutrition Research Center in Grand Forks, North Dakota, conducted an eight-week study to evaluate the impact of increasing daily vegetable servings to match DGA recommendations on how happy one perceives themselves to be, a key measurement of psychological well-being.

The study divided healthy men and women between 18 and 65 years old into two groups. The first group of participants [the vegetable intervention group] received daily servings of DGA-recommended number and variety of vegetables, including dark green, red, and orange, and starchy vegetables, based on their energy needs during the course of the study. The vegetable servings were minimally processed (raw and diced), making it simple for participants to include in their meals. The second group of participants [the control group] received the same number of interactions and attention from the researchers while maintaining a diet without adding vegetables.

Sliced cucumbers, yellow squash and tomatoes. Colorful

harvest of cucumbers, yellow crookneck squash, and tomatoes. (Peggy Greb, D4654-1)

All participants completed a questionnaire called the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS). This is a subjective assessment that provides a mean overall score of a person's state of happiness based on the respondent's perspective. The study included measurements taken before and after the eight-week intervention.

"We observed an increase in SHS scores in participants from the group that followed the DGA recommendations for vegetable intake, whereas SHS scores stayed the same for the control group, who didn't change their diet," said ARS Research Biologist Shanon Casperson.

"Results suggest that increasing the amount of vegetables you eat every day may benefit your mental health," added Casperson.

The eight-week study was part of a parent study, a more extensive study conducted at the Grand Forks Human Nutrition Research Center that sought to determine whether adults with overweight and obesity would become more motivated to eat vegetables if they increased the number of servings they ate every day. Unlike very tasty less healthy foods, which become more reinforcing if you eat them every day, increasing the amount of vegetables eaten daily does not make them more reinforcing, highlighting the difficulty of increasing vegetable consumption in adults. However, focusing on the benefits eating more vegetables has on psychological well-being may provide a more salient reason for people to increase their vegetable consumption.

Pesticide Use Declines in California, Newly Released Data Confirms

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) released its annual Pesticide Use Report for 2021 which confirmed preliminary data that showed a more than 10% statewide decline in pesticide use compared to the prior year.

In 2021, 191 million pounds of active ingredients – the chemicals that make pesticides work – were applied in California, and 95 million acres were treated. That was a decrease of 24.8 million pounds, and 10.9 million acres, compared to 2020.

Pesticides classified as cholinesterase inhibitors, which can damage the nervous system, and those classified as groundwater contaminants saw the biggest percentage declines. Other high-risk pesticide declines included those classified as carcinogens, biopesticides, toxic air contaminants and fumigants.

Declining use of the higher-risk pesticides is a longer-term trend. Since 2012, the use of pesticides classified as groundwater contaminants has declined by 81%, reproductive toxins by 58%, cholinesterase inhibitors by 40%, toxic air contaminants by 22%, fumigants by 18% and carcinogens by 17%, the report shows.

Notably, lower risk biopesticide and horticultural oil use increased during the ten-year timeframe.

"We applaud growers and others for moving to safer, more sustainable pest management alternatives, including oils and biopesticides, while decreasing overall pesticide use in the last decade," said DPR Director Julie Henderson. "We will continue to support grants, funding and other opportunities to expand access to alternatives and decrease the use of higher-risk pesticides to accelerate the adoption of sustainable pest management across the state."

Earlier this year, the state joined a diverse group of leaders to unveil the Sustainable Pest Roadmap for California with the goal of eliminating the use of high-risk pesticides and adopting systemwide sustainable pest management by 2050 to better protect the health of all California communities and the environment.

DPR's Pesticide Use Reports are based on reported pesticide use for many agricultural and nonagricultural sites, including on farms, parks, managed urban landscapes, rights of ways, roadsides and structures.

For more information on pesticide use reporting and past reports, see DPR's PUR website.

Scientists Evaluate Potential Human Cannabinol Exposure from Consuming Meat if Cattle is Fed Hempseed Cake



Scientists from the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and North Dakota State University (NDSU) recently found that when cattle were fed with the industrial hemp byproduct, hempseed cake, very low levels of Cannabis chemicals (cannabinoids) were retained in muscle, liver, kidney, and fat tissues.

Currently, hempseed cake cannot legally be used in food animal rations because the magnitude of cannabinoid (Cannabidiol [CBD] and Tetrahydrocannabinol [THC]) residues remaining in edible animal tissues have not been characterized.

To determine if hempseed cake could be safely used as a source of protein and fiber in cattle feed, a team of USDA-ARS and NDSU researchers, led by Research Physiologist David J. Smith, evaluated cannabinoid residues (CBD, THC) in edible tissues of cattle that were fed hempseed cake. Scientists found that the concentrations of these chemical compounds in meat products contributed only a small fraction of the total amount global regulatory organizations consider safe for consumers.

Products from Cannabis plants (hemp; *Cannabis sativa* L.) have been used for fiber, food (seeds and oil), and medicinal purposes for thousands of years. Although the plant contains over 80 naturally occurring compounds called cannabinoids, the best-known cannabinoids are CBD and THC which are biologically active. In the modern era, plant breeders have cultivated Cannabis plant varieties to produce high amounts of CBD and THC (used for recreational and medicinal purposes) and varieties used for fiber and oil seed production ("industrial hemp"), which contain relatively low CBD and THC concentrations.

In the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress authorized the legal production of industrial hemp in the United States (U.S.) with the stipulation that industrial hemp would contain less than 0.3% THC on a dry-matter basis. The low percentage of THC differentiates hemp products from marijuana or medicinal Cannabis varieties, which may contain greater than 5% THC.

As industrial hemp develops as an agricultural commodity in the U.S., companies are now producing hemp seed oil from cultivars with very low THC content (<0.01%). However, producers of hemp seed oil are hav-

ing difficulty finding a market for hempseed cake, a major byproduct formed during oil extraction from industrial hempseed.

Hemp seed cake and cattle in a field. Hempseed and hempseed cake. (Photos courtesy of USDA-ARS)

Hempseed cake is highly nutritious. In fact, a study completed by NDSU, in partnership with USDA-ARS, shows that hempseed cake is a viable alternative feed source for cattle.

In the study recently published in *Food Additives and Contaminants* led by Smith, groups of heifers were fed either a control diet or a diet containing 20% hempseed cake for 111 days. When the feeding period was completed, cannabinoid residues in the liver, kidney, skeletal muscle, and adipose tissue were measured in animals harvested 0, 1, 4, and 8 days after hempseed cake was removed from the diet to learn how quickly cannabinoids are cleared from tissues. The hempseed cake used in the study contained an average concentration of 1.3 ± 0.8 mg/kg of CBD and THC combined, which is 1/3000 of the legal threshold of 0.3% (3000 mg/kg) THC.

Cannabinoid residues were sporadically detected in urine and plasma of cattle during the feeding period, and low levels (about 10 parts per billion) of CBD and THC combined were measured in adipose tissue (fat) of cattle harvested with no withdrawal period. In liver, kidney, and skeletal muscle, however, CBD and THC were below detectable levels in the cattle fed hempseed cake.

"According to our exposure assessment, it would be very difficult for a human to consume enough fat from cattle fed with hempseed cake to exceed regulatory guidelines for dietary THC exposure," said, David Smith with the Animal Metabolism-Agricultural Chemicals Research Unit in Fargo, North Dakota.

"From a food safety view point, hempseed cake having low cannabinoid content can be a suitable source of crude protein and fiber in cattle feed while offering industrial hemp producers a potential market for this byproduct of hempseed oil extraction," added Smith.

Final determination and approval for the legal use of hemp products in animal feeds remain with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

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MAY 2023

16-18: California Beef Cattle Improvement Association and California Angus Association Central Valley Tour. Space is limited. For more information: www.calcattlemen.org/events.

JUNE 2023

5: 2023 Agri-Pulse Food & Ag Issues Summit. California Dept. of Food and Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross, California Dept. of Water Resources Director Karla Nemeth and Senator Anna Caballero, D-Merced, are just three of the confirmed speakers who will discuss key issues. Sacramento, CA.

20-21: 2023 Salinas Biological Summit. The 2023 Salinas Biological Summit will provide an opportunity for growers to increase their awareness of available biological solutions to address their soil and plant needs, as well as a chance for agricultural businesses to learn about the disruptive science and start-up activity led by innovators in the crop protection space. CSU Monterey Bay’s Salinas City Center, Salinas, CA. For more information, please contact: Ann Donahue at (949) 302-7600 or adonahue@wga.com

SEPTEMBER

19-21: FIRA USA 2023 hits the ground with farming robots in Salinas, CA. The California Rodeo Salinas is set to become the hub of agricultural innovation as it hosts the 2023 edition of FIRA USA. The three-day event will bring together the AgTech automation community for a showcase of the latest robotic farming solutions, exhibitions, presentations, discussions, and networking opportunities.

JANUARY

23-25: 2024 Unified Wine & Grape Symposium. Program features sessions and a two-day trade show. Safe Credit Union Convention Center, Sacramento, CA.

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NRCS invests \$75 million to assist producers transitioning to organic production.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced details around its \$75 million investment in conservation assistance for producers transitioning to organic production. As part of the multi-agency Organic Transition Initiative (OTI), USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will dedicate financial and technical assistance to a new organic management standard and partner with new organic technical experts to increase staff capacity and expertise.

The investment, which includes funds from the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), will help build new and better markets and income streams, strengthen local and regional food systems and increase affordable food supply for more Americans, while promoting climate-smart agriculture and ensuring equity for all producers.

"Producers transitioning to organic can count on NRCS for assistance through the process," said NRCS Chief Terry Cosby. "By strengthening our technical proficiency and providing technical and financial assistance through new tools and practices, we can better support producers through the challenges of organic transition."

Direct Farmer Assistance

NRCS will dedicate \$70 million to assist producers with a new organic management standard under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

NRCS will help producers adopt the new organic management standard, which allows flexibility for producers to get the assistance and education they need such as attending workshops or requesting help from experts or mentors. It supports conservation practices required for organic certification and may provide foregone income reimbursement for dips in production during the transition period.

Higher payment rates and other options are available for underserved producers including socially disadvantaged, beginning, veteran, and limited resource farmers and ranchers.

How to Apply

Eligible producers include farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, and other producers beginning or in the process of transitioning to organic certification.

NRCS will announce state-specific deadlines later this year, after which producers can apply through NRCS at their local USDA Service Center.

Notice of Funding for Seven New Positions

NRCS will dedicate \$5 million to partner with six organic technical experts through five-year agreements. The organic experts will develop regional networks and support NRCS staff who provide services to USDA customers. These services include hosting hands-on organic training and fielding organic-related staff questions. One organic research position will support this network.

A Notice of Funding Opportunity, closing on June 11, 2023, outlines requirements for proposals from regional organizations and partners.

About the Organic Transition Initiative

These NRCS investments are part of the OTI, a multi-agency \$300 million effort to support organic and transitioning producers. OTI also includes farmer-to-farmer mentoring, direct support for crop insurance, and market development projects.

In addition to NRCS, USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and Risk Management Agency (RMA) are the primary agencies supporting OTI and are closely collaborating on implementation. As part of OTI's cross-agency coordination, NRCS organic specialists will be closely connected with the AMS Transition to Organic Partnership Program regional partners, to align and share resources and best practices. NRCS and AMS's National Organic Program also plan to coordinate data collection activities, to prevent transitioning farmers from having to submit duplicative information as much as possible. AMS will also soon announce a funding program to support the creation of new and improved markets for domestically produced organic products and provide critical companion resources to existing and transitioning organic producers.

RMA reminds producers interested in the Transitional and Organic Grower Assistance Program, also part of OTI, to visit with their crop insurance agent for more information. Premium benefits for eligible policies will be automatically applied to the producer's billing statement later this year.

Other USDA Organic Assistance

OTI complements existing assistance for organic producers, including FSA's Organic Certification Cost Share Program which helps producers obtain or renew their organic certification.

RMA also administers federal crop insurance options, including Whole Farm Revenue Protection and Micro Farm, which may be good options for organic producers. The National Organic Program is a federal regulatory program, administered by AMS, that develops and enforces consistent national standards for organically produced agricultural products sold in the United States.

For more information, visit farmers.gov/organic.

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USDA Announces Grassland Conservation Reserve Program Signup for 2023

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can begin signing up for the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) starting now and running through May 26, 2023. Among CRP enrollment opportunities, Grassland CRP is a unique working lands program, allowing producers and landowners to continue grazing and haying practices while conserving grasslands and promoting plant and animal biodiversity as well as healthier soil.

“Grassland CRP clearly demonstrates that agricultural productivity and conservation priorities can not only coexist but also complement and enhance one another,” said Zach Ducheneaux, Administrator of USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA). “The strength of this program lies in its many benefits — through annual rental payments, the program helps producers and landowners produce and maintain diverse wildlife habitat, sequester carbon in the soil, and support sound, sustainable grazing. These benefits help keep agricultural lands in production while delivering lasting climate outcomes.”

More than 3.1 million acres were accepted through the 2022 Grassland CRP signup from agricultural producers and private landowners. That signup—the highest ever for the program—reflects the continued success and value of investments in voluntary, producer-led, working lands conservation programs. The current total participation in Grassland CRP is 6.3 million acres, which is part of the 23 million acres enrolled in CRP opportunities overall.

Since 2021, USDA’s FSA, which administers all CRP programs, has made several improvements to Grassland CRP to broaden the program’s reach, including:

Creating two National Priority Zones to put focus on environmentally sensitive land such as that prone to wind erosion.

Enhancing offers with 10 additional ranking points to producers and landowners who are historically underserved, including beginning farmers and military veterans.

Leveraging the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to engage historically underserved communities within Tribal Nations in the Great Plains.

How to Sign Up for Grassland CRP

Landowners and producers interested in Grassland CRP, or any other CRP enrollment option, should contact their local USDA Service Center to learn more or to apply for the program before the deadlines.

Producers with expiring CRP acres can enroll in the Transition Incentives Program (TIP), which incentivizes producers who sell or enter into a long-term lease with a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who plans to sustainably farm or ranch the land.

Other CRP Signups

Under Continuous CRP, producers and landowners can enroll throughout the year. Offers are automatical-

ly accepted provided the producer and land meet the eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap. Continuous CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands.

FSA offers several additional enrollment opportunities within Continuous CRP, including the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative, the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Also available is the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers (CLEAR30) Initiative, which was originally piloted in twelve states but has since been expanded nationwide, giving producers and landowners across the country the opportunity to enroll in 30-year CRP contracts for water quality practices.

USDA hosts an annual General CRP signup. This year’s General CRP signup was open from Feb. 27 through April 7. The program helps producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is also available in the General signup.

More Information

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.

Privately owned grazing lands cover nearly 30 percent of the national landscape, and USDA recognizes the tremendous opportunity address climate-change through voluntary private lands conservation. In addition to CRP, resources are available at FSA’s sister agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Earlier this month, NRCS announced its \$12 million investment in cooperative agreements for 49 projects that expand access to conservation technical assistance for livestock producers and increase the use of conservation practices on grazing lands.

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60th Anniversary Conference American Society of Agricultural Consultants“ Go West! Stake Your Claim in Ag Consulting” November 5-7 in Fresno, California



The American Society of Agricultural Consultants (ASAC) 60th Anniversary Conference will be held in Fresno, California from November 5 - 7, 2023. The conference, themed “Go West! Stake Your Claim in Ag Consulting,” will cover a variety of topics relevant to the agricultural industry. The city was chosen as the venue because it is the site of the first Organizational Meeting that took place in 1963.

The conference will take place at the Wyndham Garden Fresno Airport, located at 5090 East Clinton Way in Fresno. Attendees will be welcomed to the conference with a reception on Sunday evening, followed by two days of educational sessions on Monday and Tuesday morning. On Tuesday afternoon, agricultural tours will be offered from noon to 6 p.m.

The conference will cover a variety of topics relevant to the agricultural industry. Although the program has not been finalized yet, the committee is currently considering sessions on macro-economic updates, climate and weather, hot topics in ag law, dairy pricing and markets, an overview of Fresno County agriculture, and a panel discussion on water rights and regulations.

Over the next six weeks, a conference theme and a program roster with speakers will be finalized. A hotel reservation link for the Wyndham will be made available soon.

“We are excited to celebrate the 60th anniversary of our organization in Fresno, where it all began,” said ASAC President Pete Weisenberger, Weisenberger Agricultural Services, LLC, Tyler, Tex. “This conference is an opportunity for attendees to gain valuable knowledge and connect with colleagues in the agricultural industry. We’re welcoming new members and others interested in agriculture.”

For more information about the 60th Annual Conference, please visit www.agconsultants.org or contact ASAC Executive Director Jean Merry at 262-502-9034 or email evp@agconsultants.org.

The American Society of Agricultural Consultants (ASAC) is a non-profit organization whose members represent a diverse range of disciplines in the agriculture industry. ASAC’s membership is composed of experienced consultants boasting a wide array of expertise across many disciplines and aspects of agriculture. Their business models range from sole proprietorships to leadership roles in larger, multi-consultant organizations, which cover a wide geographical area, internationally as well as in the United States..

Member benefits include such educational opportunities as “Notes from the Field,” “Shop Talk” virtual roundtables, webinars, and the annual conference. Society members adhere to a robust Professional Code of Ethics and have opportunities to achieve a Certified Agricultural Consultant (CAC) designation.

To learn more about how ASAC can help you grow your agricultural consulting business, go to www.agconsultants.org.

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