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22 Educating today's students about the importance of California agriculture is critically important to protecting the future of farming and ranching in the Golden State. For nearly 40 years, the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom has been a leader.



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On The Cover N&S TRACTOR

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See Ad On Page 31

Farmers invited to test robots, high-tech solutions at Sept. 17 soil-health field day.

Free event, organized by VINE Connect and UC Merced, showcases ag tech startups, sustainable farming tools.

Autonomous weed-killing robots, AI-powered plant-health scanners, and farm waste converters will take center stage Wednesday, Sept. 17, when University of California, Merced hosts a VINE Connect Field Day.

Seven ag tech startups will demonstrate market-ready solutions designed specifically for the challenges the California agricultural industry has identified as top priorities: rising costs, shrinking resources and persistent pest and labor challenges. This field day is free and open to the public.

The event, running from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., will give farmers, advisors and agricultural professionals hands-on access to innovations vetted specifically for California's complex growing conditions. Each participating company is part of VINE Connect, a program that helps commercially available ag tech solutions scale into California agriculture through field trials, mentorship and localized market support.

"Our goal is simple: get proven solutions into farmers' hands faster," said Nat Irwin, director of VINE Connect. "This field day lets growers observe these technologies in real conditions, ask questions and make informed decisions about what will work for their operations."

VINE Connect is a component of The VINE, a statewide innovation platform run by UC ANR Innovate (the innovation arm of UC Agriculture and Natural Resources) and Farmhand Ventures (a social impact innovation firm specializing in labor-focused solutions for agriculture).

"Water, labor, pests: these are the issues we hear about from growers, again and again," said Hannah Johnson, industry lead at UC ANR Innovate. "This field day is designed to address those priorities head-on. When growers can see these tools in action and talk directly with the people behind them, it builds the trust necessary for adoption."

The cohort includes:

- Aigen – Solar-powered robot providing chemical-free autonomous weed control
- Almondry – UC Merced innovation reducing harvest dust with off-ground almond drying system
- Amiga (Bonsai Robotics) – Electric field robot automating weeding, seeding and crop monitoring
- Good Agriculture – Digital platform streamlining farm finances and grant applications
- Senseen US – NutriScope™ handheld scanner diagnosing plant health with AI and spectroscopy
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- VGrid Energy Systems – Biomass gasifiers converting farm waste into biochar and bioliquid products

Guided by a statewide Innovation Advisory Board, The VINE uses data and stakeholder feedback to prioritize



One of the ag tech startups at the Sept. 17 field day is Aigen, which has developed a solar-powered robot that provides chemical-free autonomous weed control. Photo courtesy of Aigen

California's top agricultural challenges, then runs global searches to identify and scale solutions that are relevant and ready.

"The VINE creates a complete pipeline from lab to field," said Gabe Youtsey, chief innovation officer for UC ANR. "We're proving that when you start with farmers' actual problems, not what we think they need, you get technologies that scale because they solve real challenges from day one."

Attendees will meet at the UC Merced Conference Center, 5200 North Lake Road, Merced, California, 95343. They will then proceed to the Experimental Smart Farm, a living laboratory where researchers, students and industry partners can collaborate in real time.

Attendees will rotate through live equipment demonstrations, see data dashboards and mobile tools in action, and hear directly from the startup teams about how their products work in California farm settings. The program also includes opportunities to engage with UC researchers, Cooperative Extension advisors and fellow growers during Q&A and networking sessions.

"Healthy soil is the basis for life," said Leigh Bernacchi, executive director of Valley Institute for Sustainability, Technology & Agriculture: Farms, Food, Future. "When diverse organisms come together in the right environment in healthy soil, transformation happens. This field day is where farmers, companies, students and academics grow into the future of farming."

Register at <https://eventbrite.com/e/1359065965889>.

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World Ag Expo® Opens Applications for 2026 Top-10 Products and Seminar Series

World Ag Expo® offers a look into the latest in innovation and education through the return of the Top-10 New Products competition and seminar sessions. Exhibitors and industry experts can now apply to put their mark on the 2026 show.

The Top-10 New Products Competition at World Ag Expo provides a glimpse into cutting-edge technology and innovation. Open to exhibitors, the innovation contest showcases the latest in a competitive field of new products ranging from groundbreaking technology to simple solutions. Previous award winners have pointed to the Top-10 New Products Contest as a catalyst for success.

"Since winning the Top Ten New Product Award in 2025, we've leveraged that recognition to successfully promote our latest innovation—the Synergy Blower," shared Seth Richmond, Director of Product at Flory Industries. "Our marketing team has capitalized on the momentum, driving strong industry interest and rapid adoption, both domestically and internationally. The Synergy Blower is now officially launched and in full production, with many new units already at work in this year's almond harvest."

The Top-10 New Products Competition information and application can be found at bit.ly/WAE26TOP-10. Applicants must be exhibitors at the 2026 World Ag Expo and products released anywhere in the world between February 9, 2025 and February 10, 2026 are eligible. The application deadline is October 31, 2025 and winners will be announced in December.

World Ag Expo also provides a platform for learning through educational seminars. Attendees can enjoy seminars, which are included with general show admission, featuring some of the most knowledgeable professionals in their respective sectors. Each year, tracks include Dairy & Livestock, Technology, Irrigation & Water, Demonstrations, and more.

Educational seminars are held in the Seminar Center on the southeast side of the grounds throughout all three days of the show. Experts, including exhibitors, universities, government agencies, and more, provide valuable insights, aiming to expand producer knowledge and practices.

More seminar information and the application is available at bit.ly/WAE26Seminar. The final seminar schedule and speaker information will be available online and in the official show app. The application deadline is October 31, 2025 and speakers will be notified in December.

World Ag Expo is the largest annual outdoor ag tradeshow in the world. In 2025, the show saw over 100,000 attendees from 49 states and 80 countries. More than 1,200 exhibitors on 2.6 million square feet of exhibit space make World Ag Expo a premium platform for networking, education, and business in one of the most productive ag counties in the United States.

Limited exhibit spaces are still available. To learn more about World Ag Expo® and request space, please visit <https://www.worldagexpo.com/exhibitors/>.



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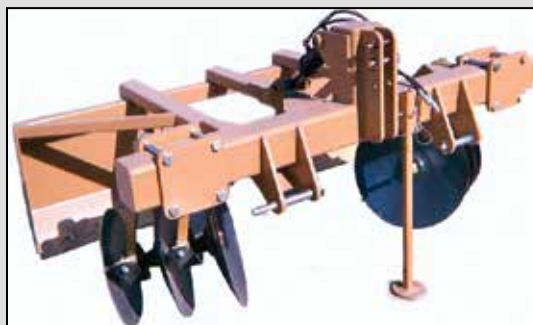
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Detector Dogs: Agriculture's Best Friend



wan to supply guidance, training and testing of canine detection. There are even detector dog teams on the job at cargo airports throughout countries in the Pacific, tasked with identifying invasive species and stopping them from reaching Hawaii. The work these dogs and their handlers do is critical to help stop the spread of invasive plant and animal pests and diseases that could ravage America's agriculture.

A detector dog's career spans 6-8 years before they retire at 9 years old. At retirement age, 90% of dogs are adopted by their handler. In the rare case they are not, the handler will recommend a good home and a successful

Family Features

They may be cute, fluffy and friendly, but some dogs also have an important job: protecting America's food supply.

By deploying specially trained beagles, Labrador retrievers and Jack Russell terriers, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal Plant Health Inspection Services' (APHIS) Detector Dog Program puts elite canines to work on the front lines at international airports, mail facilities and border crossings throughout the nation. These furry sleuths maneuver between passengers and luggage to search, locate and respond to the presence of banned fruits, plants and meats that may harbor damaging insects and diseases that threaten the country's agricultural production and natural resources.

The program was started in 1984 and soon grew in demand. By 2009, APHIS opened a 17-acre National Detector Dog Training Center near the Atlanta International Airport. At the center, dogs and their handlers go through an 8-10-week training program to learn how to inspect passenger luggage and handbags for agricultural goods such as fruits, vegetables, beef and pork.

Detector dogs patrol ports of entry, borders and airports to keep harmful pests, like invasive fruit flies, out of the country. For example, labrador retrievers and their handlers protect the nation's fruit by patrolling citrus orchards along the Texas-Mexico border in search of infested or diseased crops.

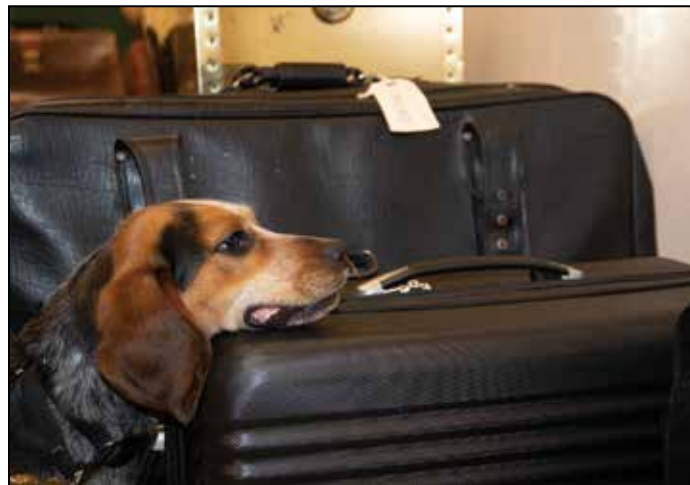
Safeguarding U.S. agriculture and natural resources is part of the program's mission, but APHIS' Detector Dog Program also partners with countries like Canada and Tai-

wan to supply guidance, training and testing of canine detection.

Constantly on the lookout for new pups, APHIS works closely with animal shelters, rescue groups and private individuals to find the right dogs for the job from anywhere in the country. New recruits are 1-3 years old, heartworm negative, have high food drive and are environmentally and socially friendly. The ideal candidate is often that high-energy, hard-to-handle pooch who simply needs a job and a purpose.

If you or someone you know would like to help the program grow its squad of super sniffers, email usdacanine-adoptions@usda.gov, call (887) 797-3899 or learn more at aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/planthealth/ppq-program-overview/nddtc.

Content courtesy of USDA



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Tiny Tags, Smarter Farms: How Fruit Fly Tracking Could Protect California Crops

By Todd Silver, USDA Agricultural Research Service

California growers know the damage fruit flies can cause—especially the invasive Tephritidae species. These tiny pests feast on fruits and vegetables, threatening harvests and export markets alike. But new research out of Hilo, Hawaii, offers a promising tool to fight back: harmonic radar tagging.

At the Daniel K. Inouye U.S. Pacific Basin Agricultural Research Center, entomologist Matthew Siderhurst and his team are using radar technology—originally developed to locate avalanche victims—to track fruit fly movement with surprising precision. Their goal? Help farmers anticipate outbreaks and adapt pest control strategies before damage is done.

This directional persistence, revealed through radar tracking, challenges long-held assumptions. Instead of random movement, fruit flies respond to wind cues and navigate with intent. That insight could reshape how growers deploy traps, sprays, and surveillance.

How It Works

Each fly is fitted with a tiny reflector tag made from a 4-centimeter wire and diode, secured with UV-acti-

vated adhesive and conductive silver paint. The tag reflects radar signals back to a receiver, allowing researchers to map flight paths in real time—no battery required.

Though the tagging process requires a steady hand, the equipment is affordable and accessible. Transceivers are available off the shelf, and the technique doesn't require custom builds.

Why It Matters for California

If Tephritid fruit flies were to establish themselves on the mainland, the consequences would be severe. Crop losses could soar, and international trade restrictions would tighten, blocking exports to key markets. By understanding how flies move—especially in response to wind—farmers can better contain outbreaks and reduce food waste.

Siderhurst's team is now expanding the research to wild flies and more complex environments. Future studies will explore how habitat, vegetation density, age, diet, and time of day affect flight behavior.

For more information, visit the Daniel K. Inouye U.S. Pacific Basin Agricultural Research Center.

New Online Tool Will Help California Growers Meet Regulatory Requirements and Production Goals



Pomology and Water/Soils Farm Advisor, Doug Amaral

As citrus growers in California's Central Valley grapple with significant water quality and quantity issues, the need for precise fertilization and irrigation practices is more critical than ever. Currently, citrus growers in the valley lack access to a specialized, free decision-support tool that could guide them in making informed decisions about fertilizer application. The crops' physiological characteristics are unique amongst commodities grown in the valley, adding a layer of complexity to developing such a tool.

According to a recent study conducted at University of California-Davis funded by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA FREP), fertilizer rate decisions in citrus orchards should be based on nutrient export in expected yield while fertilizer application rates and timings should be based upon the pattern of nutrient accumulation in fruits. Yield potential determines fertilizer strategy and there is a large negative impact on overall efficiency that occurs in years or orchards of poor yield in which standardized fertilization strategies are used. Therefore, fertilizing according to predicted yields will dramatically enhance nutrient use efficiency. The methodology used in this research allowed the researchers to estimate the annual amounts of nutrients that field grown orange and mandarin trees absorbed and allocated to above ground organs improving nutrient use efficiency from around 50% up to 90%. Thus, knowing the dynamics of nutrient

uptake during the season is a requirement to allow the management of the timing of nutrient supply with nutrient needs and to avoid nutrient losses, especially N-Nitrate.

To make this information accessible to growers, a new project funded by CDFA FREP will aim to develop a free decision-support tool that will guide farmers in making informed decisions about irrigation and fertilizer application. This project builds off years of research, experimentation, and software development efforts and will culminate in the development of three new citrus-specific modules for UC's CropManage online platform (oranges, mandarins, and lemons). This project stands to positively impact a diverse group of thousands of citrus growers in California's Central Valley, as California citrus growers supply over 90% of the nation's fresh citrus, and export to over sixteen foreign countries, in harvests valued at over \$2 billion per year according to USDA. 75% of that production is in two Central Valley basins, the San Joaquin Valley and Tulare Lake Basin (also referred to as the Southern San Joaquin Valley), where growers are often farming in nitrate-affected areas with intense competition for groundwater resources.

The potential impact of this initiative is significant. By providing citrus growers with access to a refined decision-support tool, this project can lead to increased adoption rates, resulting in more efficient fertilizer and water use. This, in turn, enhances the likelihood of regulatory compliance with the ILRP and



Photo by siulesoj on Freeimages.com

SGMA and contributes to the long-term sustainability of California's citrus production. Ultimately, this project not only addresses the immediate needs of citrus growers but also supports the broader goal of preserving the quality and quantity of California's water resources for future generations.

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'I feel so much better': CalFresh Healthy Living, UC programs boost health of older adults

Partner organizations help healthy habits take root in underserved LA communities

By Diana Cervantes

In neighborhoods across Los Angeles, something powerful is growing — not just in community gardens, but in kitchens, classrooms and everyday choices.

CalFresh Healthy Living (CFHL) brings free nutrition education and wellness support to people eligible for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), focusing on helping families and older adults build healthier habits.

As California's version of the SNAP-Ed program, CFHL is implemented statewide by four agencies: the California Departments of Public Health and Aging, Catholic Charities of California, and the University of California (CFHL, UC). Together, these agencies reached 1.8 million Californians in FFY 2024 with direct education and local changes that make healthy choices easier by improving the access to, and appeal of, healthy eating and physical activity.

In counties across the state, the CFHL, UC program is delivered by UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE). CFHL, UCCE partners in Los Angeles County with trusted local organizations like the Hope Through Housing Foundation and All Peoples Community Center. Together, they bring resources into communities often overlooked, delivering nutrition and wellness classes that are making a real difference in people's lives.

The heart of the program lives in the neighborhoods it serves — one shared recipe, one family meal, one small change at a time. One such site is Oaks on Florence, an affordable housing community for seniors in the city of Bell. This community serves mostly Hispanic older adults, many of whom face barriers such as limited access to healthy foods, chronic health conditions and a lack of culturally relevant nutrition education.

Services tailored to local needs

Bilingual CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE community education specialists launched the Food Smarts curriculum, a series of interactive classes that encourage participants to share their experiences, explore new ideas and adopt sustainable, healthier habits.

"It's incredibly rewarding to see how small changes in diet and daily habits can have a big impact on health and well-being," said Daisy Valdez, community education supervisor with CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE in Los Angeles County. "Our goal is to help older adults and families make informed, sustainable choices."

Valdez also highlights the food access disparities across the county. "Some areas have plenty of high-quality food options, while others are flooded with fast food and ultra-processed products," she said.

Before starting each new class cycle, the CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE team meets with participants to understand their interests and needs. These conversations have led to lasting changes — like the development of community gardens and more welcoming dining environments in the centers.

Real stories, real transformation

The CFHL, UC program's impact becomes clear through the

voices of participants who've experienced change. In federal fiscal year 2024, CFHL, UC — in collaboration with over 850 community partners — reached 181,700 people across California, improving health, habits and community connection.

One resident of Oaks on Florence living with diabetes shared that she used to consume large amounts of fast food and sugary drinks. After attending the classes, her habits changed significantly. "Now I love salads and fruits — I feel so much better," she said.

Another resident described how her traditional diet based on rice and beans evolved. "I started adding spinach, lettuce and carrots," she said. "I used to think that wasn't 'real food' — but now I love it!"

A participant from All Peoples Community Center, recovering from gallbladder surgery, joined the classes with his five-year-old daughter to learn more about healthy eating. "My wife and I now plan meals together, cook more at home and avoid fast food," he said. "Even my daughter knows which foods are good for her."

Health data illustrate need for nutrition education

Recent data underscore the importance of these efforts. According to the study "Food Insecurity in Los Angeles County: Fall 2024 Update" by the USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research, nearly 30% of Los Angeles County residents experience nutrition insecurity, meaning they lack consistent access to healthy, nutritious food. This has serious health implications: in Los Angeles County, 1 out of 10 adults has type 2 diabetes, according to the Department of Public Health. Their data also show that 27.8% of residents have hypertension.

For new habits to stick, access to affordable fresh food is essential. That's why CFHL, UC integrates initiatives that support nutrition education. One example is the collaboration with GrowGood Farm, which brings low-cost seasonal fruits and vegetables to communities like Oaks on Florence once a month. Residents can use their SNAP benefits to buy fresh produce without leaving their neighborhood — reinforcing the lessons from the classroom with real-world access.

Programs empower stronger, healthier communities

This transformation is not limited to participants. Staff at these centers also have experienced personal growth.

Karla Amsk, a services coordinator at three community sites, reflected on the connection residents are building with gardening. "They feel like they're doing something good for themselves," she said. "CalFresh Healthy Living, UC has been a tremendous help for the community."

Yvette Sánchez, coordinator at All Peoples Community Center, also saw changes in her own health. "I had stomachaches every day; I decided to learn more about nutrition and ended up losing weight," she said.

She took part in a workshop led by CFHL, UCCE community education specialist Ingrid Alarcón, who showed her how to build balanced meals in a practical way. "I remember being told, 'Make sure your plate has color,'" Sánchez recalled. "Now I include more vegetables and variety to stay healthy."

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How Plants are Learning to Spot Sneaky Bacterial Invaders

With Help From AI, Researchers Upgraded Plants' Internal Alarm System to Fend Off Pathogens



Ralstonia solanacearum in a potato plant. The bacterium destroys the vascular system in plants, causing them to succumb to wilt disease. (Credit: Amilcar Sanchez)

by Amy Quinton

Ralstonia solanacearum is shown here in a potato plant that has wilted. The bacterium destroys the vascular system in plants, causing them to succumb to wilt disease. (Credit: Amilcar Sanchez)

Ralstonia solanacearum in a potato plant. The bacterium destroys the vascular system in plants, causing them to succumb to wilt disease. (Credit: Amilcar Sanchez)

Scientists at the University of California, Davis, used artificial intelligence to help plants recognize a wider range of bacterial threats — which may lead to new ways to protect crops like tomatoes and potatoes from devastating diseases. The study was published in *Nature Plants*.

Plants, like animals, have immune systems. Part of their defense toolkit includes immune receptors, which give them the ability to detect bacteria and defend against it. One of those receptors, called FLS2, helps plants recognize flagellin — a protein in the tiny tails bacteria use to swim. But bacteria are sneaky and constantly evolving to avoid detection.

"Bacteria are in an arms race with their plant hosts, and they can change the underlying amino acids in flagellin to evade detection," said lead author Gitta Coaker, professor in the Department of Plant Pathology.

To help plants keep up, Coaker's team turned to using natural variation coupled with artificial intelligence — specifically AlphaFold, a tool developed to predict the 3D shape of proteins and reengineered FLS2, essentially upgrading its immune system to catch more intruders.

The team focused on receptors already known to

recognize more bacteria, even if they weren't found in useful crop species. By comparing them with more narrowly focused receptors, the researchers were able to identify which amino acids to change.

"We were able to resurrect a defeated receptor, one where the pathogen has won, and enable the plant to have a chance to resist infection in a much more targeted and precise way," Coaker said.

Why it matters

Coaker said this opens the door to developing broad-spectrum disease resistance in crops using predictive design.

One of the researchers' targets is a major crop threat: *Ralstonia solanacearum*, the cause of bacterial wilt. Some strains of the soil-borne pathogen can infect more than 200 plant species, including staple crops like tomato and potato.

Looking ahead, the team is developing machine learning tools to predict which immune receptors are worth editing in the future. They're also trying to narrow down the number of amino acids that need to be changed.

This approach could be used to boost the perception capability of other immune receptors using a similar strategy.

Other authors of the study include Tianrun Li, Esteban Jarquin Bolaños, Danielle M. Stevens and Hanxu Sha of UC Davis and Daniil M. Prigozhin of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

The research was supported by the National Institutes of Health and the United States Department of Agriculture's National Institute for Food and Agriculture.



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Family-owned farms account for 95% of U.S. farms, according to the Census of Agriculture Typology Report



Photo by Comstock on Freemages.com

Family farms comprise 95% of all U.S. farms, according to the 2022 Census of Agriculture Farm Typology report released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

The farm typology report primarily focuses on the "family farm," defined as any farm where the majority of the business is owned by the producer and individuals related to the producer. The report classifies all farms into unique categories based on two criteria: who owns the operation and gross cash farm income (GCFI). GCFI includes the producer's sales of crops and livestock, fees for delivering commodities under production contracts, government payments, and farm-related income.

"Classifying America's 1.9 million farms to better reflect their variety is critical to evaluating and reporting on U.S. agriculture," said NASS Administrator Joseph Parsons. "Typology allows us to more meaningfully explore the demographics of who is farming and ranching today as well as their impact on the economy and communities around the country."

The data shows that small family farms, those farms with a GCFI of less than \$350,000 per year, account for 85% of all U.S. farms, 39% of total land in farms, and 14% of the

value of all agricultural products sold. Large-scale family farms (GCFI of \$1 million or more) make up less than 4% of all U.S. farms but produce 51% of the value of all agricultural products.

The data also shows that the number of family farms decreased by 8% (almost 159,000 farms) since 2017. Mid-size, large, and very large farms experienced increases of 2%, 40% and 65%, respectively. The number of small family farms fell 10% (low sales) and 7% (moderate sales),

respectively.

Other key findings from the 2022 Census of Agriculture Farm Typology report include:

Farm specialization varied between the farm size groups. The majority (56%) of small farms specialized in cattle (31%) or other crops such as hay and forage production (25%). Over 60,000 (55%) of mid-size farms specialized in grains and oilseeds, while large-scale farms were more varied in production specialization.

Small family farms account for 44% of all direct sales to consumers, compared to 18% for mid-size family farms and 19% for large-scale family farms.

Compared to producers on mid-size and large-scale family farms, small family farm producers are more likely to be women, age 65 or older, and report living on the farm operation. They were also more likely to report having served in the military, to work off the farm, and to be a new/beginning farmer (farmed 10 years or less).

Access the full farm typology report and additional information such as maps and data highlights on the nass.usda.gov. Typology data is also available in the NASS quickstats. nass.usda.gov

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Grape Day shows San Joaquin Valley growers 'what works in our area, for our crops'

UC scientists provide updates on innovations in managing water, nutrients, pests, disease in vineyards

Grape Day at the Kearney Agricultural Research and Extension Center – a time-honored learning event dating to the late 1960s – was convened again on Aug. 12 for wine, table and raisin grape growers to hear about the latest field trials and innovations.

"The primary purpose of Grape Day is to showcase research that University of California faculty, specialists and advisors are doing to benefit the California grape industry, and particularly for growers in the San Joaquin Valley," said Matthew Fidelibus, UC Cooperative Extension specialist in the UC Davis Department of Viticulture and Enology.

Fidelibus has been organizing the biennial Grape Day at Kearney REC – operated by UC Agriculture and Natural Resources and located in Parlier, Fresno County – since 2005. The first Grape Day was held in Davis in 1951, and the first at Kearney REC took place in 1967.

Bill Chandler, whose family farm has been growing a variety of crops in the area since the 1880s, has attended many Grape Days. He said the research projects, which reflect local growing conditions, provide invaluable insights.

"All the growers here are appreciative of the Kearney field station; there's good people here and we want to support them," said Chandler, whose wife Carol serves on the UC President's Advisory Commission on Agriculture and Natural Resources. "They've really helped us out with knowing what works in our area, for our crops."

The Kearney Grape Day in the summer and the San Joaquin Valley Grape Symposium in the winter are the longest-running grape meetings in the valley, according to George Zhuang, UCCE viticulture farm advisor for Fresno County.

"These events provide all the cutting-edge viticultural information, ranging from water and nutrient management to cultural practices and vineyard mechanization," Zhuang said. "Those two meetings are well-attended and their impact has been revolutionary."

Growers learn more about old nemesis, new variety

After a burrito breakfast courtesy of American Vineyard magazine, the 50 attendees – growers, industry professionals, researchers and collaborators – boarded a tram. During the first part of the day, they visited experimental vineyard blocks at Kearney REC.

At the first stop, Andreas Westphal, professor of Cooperative Extension in the Department of Nematology at UC Riverside, provided an overview on the biology of nematodes – microscopic roundworms that can rob grapevines of vigor and yield.

Westphal summarized the feeding habits and life cycle of this notorious pest. "Vineyards can concurrently host multiple nematode species," he said.

An efficient way of managing these populations is through resistant and tolerant rootstocks. In Westphal's work

on rootstock development in collaboration with various breeders, some elite rootstocks look promising.

Because it is challenging to identify rootstocks that concurrently cope with several nematode species, Westphal also investigates pre- and post-plant treatments for nematode management. He emphasized the importance of monitoring for these soil-dwelling pests to guide management decisions as post-plant tools become available.

"If you can commit to annual sampling, that will do you a world of good," he said.

Next, Fidelibus took attendees to see several rows of Sunpreme dry-on-vine (DOV) raisin grapes. He explained his plans to study, at a physiological level, one of the primary problems with the Sunpreme variety that was released in 2017 – preharvest fruit drop, or "shattering." With a better understanding of that process, he hopes to develop more useful management strategies.

Sunpreme research is especially important, given the relatively small number of grape varieties that can produce acceptable raisins, said Luke DeBenedetto, a grower support and research coordinator for Sun-Maid Growers of California.

"As of right now, Sunpreme is the only tried-and-true self-drying variety out there – where we can potentially do the mechanical harvest and pruning practices – that will hopefully keep the raisin industry alive for the foreseeable future, with older varieties being pulled out left and right," DeBenedetto explained.

He added that he continues to work with the UC Cooperative Extension scientists to refine cultural practices and farm management techniques.

"Matt [Fidelibus] and George [Zhuang] have been very influential in some of the decisions I'm making at our own research facility," DeBenedetto said. "We're actually planting Sunpreme out there this fall, and we're trying to build off their existing research."

UCCE advisors share tools and tips, test innovations for grapes

At the next stop, Zhuang displayed several instruments on a table, including a flowmeter, tensiometer and data logger. Pointing to a 4G LTE antenna, Zhuang explained it can provide real-time data to power the CropManage decision-support tool.

He encouraged growers to explore the online tool and apply for grants (such as through the State Water Efficiency & Enhancement Program, or SWEET, from the California Department of Food and Agriculture) so they can install additional equipment to existing weather stations.

That way, Zhuang said, growers not only have access to the powdery mildew index that can help determine the appropriate response to disease pressure – but also key data on soil moisture and climatic conditions that inform more effective irrigation management.

"To quote UC Davis Professor Emeritus Larry Williams:

See Grape Day page 20

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Grape Day

continued from page 18

'If you can't measure, you can't manage,'" said Zhuang, who added he is planning a hands-on CropManage workshop at Kearney REC for the fall.

Joy Hollingsworth, UCCE table grape advisor for Tulare and Kings counties, showed the attendees her experiments with red-colored panels from Opti-Harvest, a company that says their Opti-Panels can reduce labor costs associated with training, pruning and leaf removal.

"We wanted to see exactly what effect these panels have on the vines," said Hollingsworth, who affixed the shade-like panels to trellises of Valley Pearl green table grapes in March.

She has been looking at the temperature, humidity and light levels for exposed vines and the vines under single panels and double-thick panels – as well as the physical characteristics of the grapes and vines under the different conditions.

Although Hollingsworth noted that she only has preliminary observational findings, she said there was a small but discernable difference in berry color, with the grapes under the panels appearing to be more green than the exposed ones.

Wrapping up the field tour portion of the day, Jorge Angeles – UCCE weed management and ecology advisor for Tulare, Kings and Fresno counties – lined up a row of grapevines in containers, each treated with low amounts of various herbicides to mimic the level of exposure from herbicide drift.

Angeles pointed out the different modes of action for each product, as well as typical symptoms, such as cupping of leaves and necrotic tips on the vines. He also emphasized that growers should note when symptoms first start appearing and how they progress.

"Accurately diagnosing possible herbicide injury in vineyards is difficult since many biotic and abiotic factors can cause similar symptoms," Angeles said. "But knowing the herbicides used, evaluating symptom progression, injury patterns in the field, environmental conditions and soil characteristics can help confirm or rule out herbicide involvement."

Researchers discuss AI modeling, study of products to mitigate heat stress

Attendees then moved to a Kearney REC classroom, where they heard from Alireza Pourreza, UC Davis associate professor of Cooperative Extension in the Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering.

Pourreza challenged everyone to guess – by sight and intuition alone – which of three grape leaves had the highest nitrogen content. Then he used a handheld spectral scanner on the leaves to obtain measurements within seconds (most attendees picked the correct leaf).

That sensor data can now be used, Pourreza said, to predict a broad range of plant characteristics, including crucial mineral nutrient levels. He and his team at the UC Davis Digital Agriculture Laboratory had obtained 1,000 leaf samples, measured their "spectral reflectance" with the sensor, and determined how various traits are correlated with each other. They developed an AI model, hosted in the cloud, to crunch

the numbers from a sensor reading and then display a full profile of estimated leaf traits on a mobile app.

Pourreza also discussed how that reflectance data can be obtained by drones equipped with multi-spectral cameras, and how the use of virtual or "synthetic" imagery can help further train and enhance the AI model.

Then Ashraf El-kereamy, UCCE specialist in the Department of Botany and Plant Sciences at UC Riverside, shared the results of testing two products aimed at mitigating heat stress on table grapes.

"Vines are like us – they have feelings; they have a nervous system, it is called the signal transduction pathway," said El-kereamy, who is also director of UC ANR's Lindcove REC.

He found that the two treatments – when applied at the manufacturer's recommended full rate – were effective in bolstering the vines' protective cuticle layer and boosting heat tolerance.

El-kereamy also emphasized the importance of other practices in mitigating the effects of heat (such as shade management) – and prioritizing overall plant health. "Try to avoid any other kind of stress on the grapes, so when the heat wave does come, it doesn't affect the vine," he said.

The research projects led by El-kereamy and Pourreza received support from the California Table Grape Commission. Maha Afifi, director of the viticulture research program at the commission, attended Grape Day to hear updates on the work.

"Both projects have provided useful findings that could enhance cultural practices for California table grape growers, to improve grape quality and productivity," said Afifi, who noted that the commission is collaborating with UC scientists on multiple research priorities.

To close out the day, Karl Lund, UCCE viticulture advisor for Madera, Merced and Mariposa counties, gave a presentation he titled "Canopy Management: What Could Go Wrong." He had conducted two trials investigating the impact of shoot thinning and "skirting" the canopy at a vineyard north of Madera.

Lund found that shoot thinning had very few or inconsistent effects on fruit size, yield and quality for the limited number of varieties he studied in the first season. In the second season, he observed a more consistent tradeoff of slightly higher Brix (sugar) levels for major loss of yield.

"After seeing the second year of data the grower and I quickly concluded that this was not a good tradeoff, and we moved to the next trial," Lund concluded.

The "skirting" trials looked at removing the lower portion of a sprawling canopy. Lund found that removing all of the canopy between the ground and a line two feet below the cordon wire did not affect fruit chemistry. However, he also found that these treatments didn't improve berry health by preventing issues such as bunch rot.

"The treatment didn't seem to be a bad thing, but it also isn't something you should be paying extra to do," said Lund, who self-deprecatingly lamented that his hard work over three years did not appear to result in concrete "how-to" recommendations.

A grower in the audience assured Lund that learning what not to do was just as helpful.



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New Online Tool Will Help California Growers Meet Regulatory Requirements and Production Goals

California growers are embracing digital tools to improve their operations and meet regulatory requirements. A new online tool, the California Grower Compliance Tool (CGCT), is designed to help growers track and manage their compliance with various regulations, including those related to water quality, labor, and safety. The tool is user-friendly and provides real-time updates on regulatory changes. Growers can use the tool to generate reports, track compliance scores, and receive alerts for upcoming deadlines. This tool is a valuable resource for growers looking to streamline their compliance efforts and ensure they are meeting all requirements. For more information, visit www.cfemag.com.

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Innovative Ag Education Program Reaches Over 1 Million California Students

With support from Farm Credit, Ag in the Classroom Foundation sparks interest in farming, food systems, and ag careers

Educating today's students about the importance of California agriculture is critically important to protecting the future of farming and ranching in the Golden State. For nearly 40 years, the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom has been a leader in that effort and is continuing to innovate to meet the needs of California classrooms.

"We've been around since 1986, and our whole mission is to support teachers and students in incorporating agriculture into their classroom because agriculture affects our daily lives. It's the food we eat; it's the clothes we wear – it affects everything that we do," said Amanda Fletcher, the Foundation's executive director.

During 2024, Fletcher said the Foundation's programs reached over 1 million pre-K to high school students by engaging more than 34,000 teachers across California. Among the Foundation's most-used resources was the 22nd annual issue of What's Growin' On, a 16-page interactive student newspaper funded in part by Farm Credit. More than 100,000 copies were distributed.

Kevin Ralph, California President for AgWest Farm Credit, said California's Farm Credit organizations have supported the Foundation's work for many years.

"Farm Credit has been proud to support What's Growin' On for more than 15 years – and in fact increased our support this year – because it's proven to be an innovative and effective way of educating third through eighth graders about all the aspects of California agriculture," Ralph said.

Jacob DeBoer, Regional Marketing Manager with American AgCredit, agreed that the Foundation continues to do great work.

"What makes the Foundation's efforts so successful is that it comes up with ways to really reach students," DeBoer said. "This year, the theme is 'Imagine Your Future in Agriculture,' which is especially important given the need to attract students to consider careers in ag-related fields. Besides information about farming, the newspaper and other programs discuss careers in fields including tech, marketing, soil science and ag mechanics. There's nothing like drones to capture a young student's imagination."

All seven Farm Credit organizations serving California – AgWest Farm Credit, American AgCredit, CoBank, Colusa-Glenn Farm Credit, Fresno Madera Farm Credit, Golden State Farm Credit and Yosemite Farm Credit – are financially supporting the Foundation's work. They are all part of the nationwide Farm Credit System – the largest provider of credit to U.S. agriculture.

Fletcher said the Foundation got its start in 1981 as a program launched by the California Farm Bureau Federation. It was spun off five years later as an affiliated 501(c)3 nonprofit. Today, seven – soon to be eight – employees develop age-appropriate curricula using a wide range of distribution methods.

For example, a popular part of the program is the virtual California Farm Day. This year, 31,000 students watched one of two age-appropriate, hour-long programs including video and live Q&A sessions with ag experts. One segment showed a pest advisor walking through a broccoli field examining plants for insects. He explained that some insects were beneficial, and others weren't and talked about the steps he took to become a pest advisor.

"We had over 800 questions asked of the live hosts. A lot of the kids who were on that broadcast were from urban and more

disadvantaged schools who don't always have the ability to go on field trips, so this offered a little window into agriculture and how it affects their lives," she said.

"We probably work with 60% urban classes and 40% from the agricultural areas. Our target demographic is those urban and disadvantaged schools because we want to get into schools in L.A. and the Bay Area to make sure they're getting the same education about agriculture that students in counties that have that rich agriculture history have access to."

This year, a grant from the California Department of Food and Agriculture allowed the Foundation to develop an interactive website called KnowinWhatsGrowin.com. Fletcher said it matches the state's fourth-grade curriculum and focuses on specialty crops grown in different parts of the state.

Santa Clara County students can learn about mushrooms, for example – how they're grown and harvested, nutritional information, products that use mushrooms and even recipes.

Because the Foundation strives "to keep growing, because if you stay stagnant that doesn't work when the goal is to get the information out to the populace," the staff is currently beginning a four-year project to develop a monthly curriculum for high school students that outlines ag-related careers. The lesson plans will tie into math, science and ag mechanics.

"Then we are going to be working on developing an internship program that will go along with that. It'll be exciting in the next couple of years once that gets off the ground," she said.

"We want to create materials that are easy and quick for teachers to implement so they have good programming for their students and to make sure that the next generation is informed about where their food and fiber comes from."

About Farm Credit:

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About the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom:

California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to increasing agricultural awareness and understanding among California's educators and students. AITC develops accurate, teacher-tested educational materials, provides training and programs for educators, and collaborates with organizations to highlight the importance of agriculture in daily life. Through initiatives such as comprehensive lesson plans, the What's Growin' On? student newspaper, the Imagine this... writing contest, Virtual Farm Day, the annual teacher conference, and many more programs, AITC fosters agricultural literacy and supports the future of agriculture – impacting over 1 million students annually. For more information, visit www.learnaboutag.org.



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UPCOMING EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 2025

6-7: Ag Booster BBQ & Statewide Meeting. Fresno County Farm Bureau & George's River Ranch. Hosted by: California Women for Agriculture. Activities: BBQ dinner, silent auctions, local produce tastings, and networking with ag professionals. For information: Website: www.cwawomen4ag.com Email: statecwa@gmail.com Phone: (916) 441-2910.

11-12: California Poultry Federation Annual Conference and Meeting, Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa Monterey, CA. The Board Meeting is Friday, September 12th. For questions about the conference, please contact the CPF office at (209) 576-6355.

18-21: Draft Horse Classic. We've lowered the price for arena performance tickets for 2025! See the beautiful draft horses at the 2025 Draft Horse Classic and Harvest Fair! This is all a part of the Annual Draft Horse Classic and Harvest Fair at the Nevada County Fairgrounds in Grass Valley, CA. The Classic has grown to become the premier draft horse show in the western United States. For information: www.nevadacountyfair.com/p/draft-horse-classic

26-28: Ag in the Classroom Conference. Empowering educators with hands-on tools to bring agriculture into every subject. Sacramento, CA. For more information: www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/aginthe classroomconf.asp

NOVEMBER 2025

7-9: California Women for Agriculture is Turning 50! The Golden Weekend Celebration is for the 50th Anniversary of the California Women for Agriculture (CWA). The celebration will be held in Coachella Valley. The hotel for the event is the Embassy Suites Hotel in La Quinta, CA. For more information you can email CoachellaValleyCWA@gmail.com.

DECEMBER 2025

3-5: 109th Annual CCA/CCW Convention. The 2025 California Cattlemen's Association and California Cattlewomen's Convention and California Cattle Industry Tradeshow. For the first time, our largest gathering of the year will be held at the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa in Reno, Nevada. For information call (916) 444-0845 or visit: <https://calcattlemen.org/event/109th-annual-cca-ccw-convention/>

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USDA to Gather Conservation Data to Assess Trends and Improve Programs and Services

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), in partnership with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), is reaching out to farmers, ranchers, and agricultural landowners to gather in-depth information about the conservation practices they use.

Nearly 23,000 operators nationwide will receive the 2025 Conservation Effects Assessment Project survey. Data obtained will support the third set of national and regional cropland assessments delivered by USDA's Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP), a multi-agency effort led by NRCS to quantify the effects of conservation practices across the nation's working lands.

"Responding to the survey gives farmers the opportunity to provide the most accurate picture of conservation practices on their cropland," said NASS Administrator Joseph Parsons. "Information from CEAP – which is made stronger by robust survey response – will help inform programs that benefit producers by protecting the natural resources on which their livelihoods depend."

Local NASS representatives will visit farmers and agricultural landowners in August and September of 2025 to determine if their operations and properties meet the criteria to be considered eligible candidates for the survey. Eligible farmers and landowners may be contacted between November 2025 and March 2026 and asked to participate in the survey. Typical questions will discuss farm production practices; chemical, fertilizer, and manure applications; tillage; irrigation use; and installed conservation practices. NASS will provide survey data to NRCS, the agency

tasked with publishing findings.

CEAP Cropland Assessments quantify the environmental outcomes associated with implementation and installation of conservation practices on agricultural lands. Findings are used to guide conservation program development and support agricultural producers and partners in making informed management decisions backed by data and science.

Specifically, CEAP results may help:

Evaluate the resources farmers may need in the future to protect soil, water, and habitat.

Shed light on techniques farmers use to conserve healthy environments.

Improve and strengthen technical and financial programs that help landowners plan and install conservation practices on agricultural land.

Support the conservation programs that can help producers' profits while also protecting natural resources.

The CEAP survey is conducted through a cooperative agreement between NRCS and NASS. NRCS will couple survey results with modeling to report on trends in cropland conservation – and associated outcomes – from 2024 through 2026.

Information provided to NASS and analyzed by NRCS is kept confidential, as required by federal law. The agencies only publish data in aggregate form, ensuring that no individual respondent or operation can be identified.

The data from this survey will be published as a report on the CEAP Cropland Assessments webpage at nrcs.usda.gov/ceap/croplands. If you have questions about the survey, please contact us at 888-424-7828 or visit the NASS website.

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New Report Highlights the Delta Conveyance Project as the Single Most Effective Action for a Sustainable Water Future for California

The Findings are Part of a New Strategy from the Department of Water Resources to Modernize the State Water Project to Adapt to a Changing Climate

A new report released by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) examines how a combination of strategies, most importantly the Delta Conveyance Project, can help the State Water Project (SWP) maintain reliable water deliveries to 27 million Californians despite hotter temperatures, more extreme storms, more severe droughts, and higher sea levels.

This first-ever State Water Project Adaptation Strategy details over a dozen different actions DWR is already taking or evaluating. The plan concludes that while climate change makes a long-term decline in SWP annual average water deliveries likely, a portfolio of actions can offset much of the decline.

The plan focuses on five actions to help DWR understand which holds the greatest potential to help climate-proof the SWP. The most promising action to improve water supply reliability is the construction of the Delta Conveyance Project for the following reasons:

The project is the single most effective strategy on its own, but it also amplifies the impact of other strategies.

The proposed project would build two new intakes and a tunnel to move water directly from the Sacramento River to the existing SWP pumping plant in the Delta.

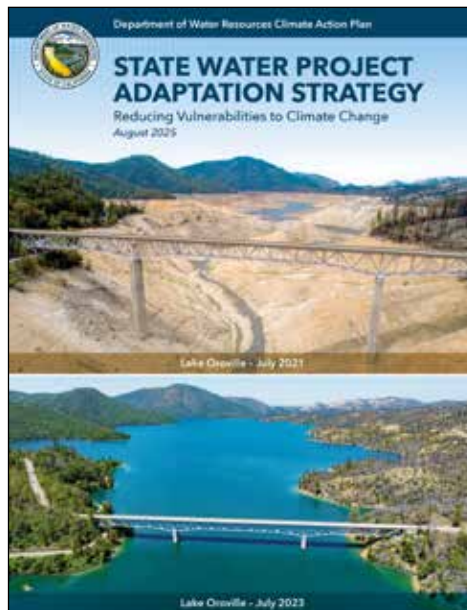
This would safeguard water deliveries from disruption in the event of levee collapse in the Delta and would enable the SWP to capture more storm runoff.

Additionally, the Project would help prevent water delivery disruptions by providing protection against earthquakes.

The SWP Climate Adaptation Strategy also finds that:

Continued maintenance and additional restoration of the infrastructure system, including repairing subsidence-damaged sections of the California Aqueduct, are first-priority measures.

Forecast-Informed Reservoir Operations, or FIRO, is a safe and effective strategy with low costs and few drawbacks, but the amount of water supply it can deliver is relatively small. It should be implemented as soon as possible in coordination with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approvals.



Additional South-of-Delta water storage is promising as a third priority strategy, but its benefits are limited without the Delta Conveyance Project.

A combination of responses is needed, because each strategy responds to a different climate stressor. Utilizing a combination of different strategies will result in greater climate adaptation capabilities.

"Anything that compromises the State Water Project poses a threat to public health and economic success," said DWR Director Karla Nemeth. "This analysis helps us understand the best science-based strategies to ensure continued SWP deliveries in the face of both great-

er aridity and more powerful storms. We need that not just for the public water agencies that pay for the State Water Project, but to continue the role the State Water Project plays in protecting Delta water quality during drought and upstream communities during floods."

DWR operates the SWP and manages water resources statewide. Since 2006, the department has been evaluating and planning for climate change. This latest effort, the SWP Adaptation Strategy, will guide executive decision-making about the future needs and capabilities of the SWP. The plan bundles potential strategies into portfolios and evaluates those portfolios over a range of potential climate conditions.

DWR will continue to update and optimize the adaptation strategies evaluated and innovate new strategies in partnership with the SWP contractors, other state and federal partners and local and regional agencies.

Built starting in the 1960s, the SWP stretches from Oroville to Riverside. The keystone SWP reservoir, Lake Oroville, helps manage floods in Northern California. SWP canals, hydroelectric generators, and pumping plants move water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to 29 public water agencies, largely based in the South Bay, Central Coast, South Coast, Inland Empire, and Kern County. The local public water agencies cover the costs of operating the SWP. Learn more at <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/State-Water-Project>



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