## California Farm Equipment Magazine

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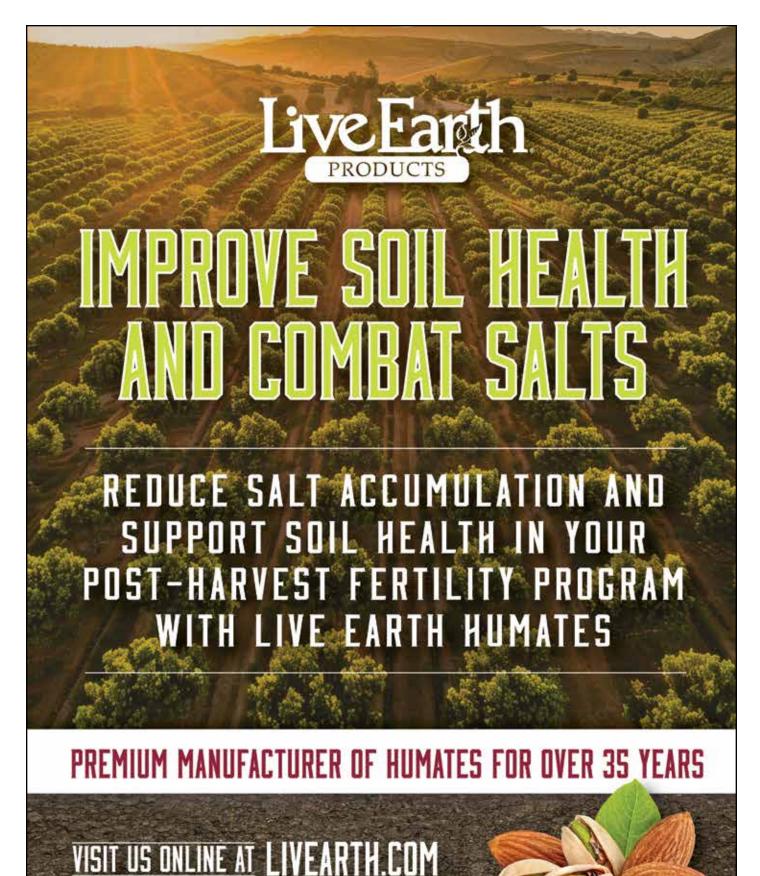
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The MK-V Advantage – Daily Payback in Savings, Data & Efficiency.

- 100% ELECTRIC
- DRIVER OPTIONAL
- DATA DRIVEN Pages 4–5

## Electric Tractors: Are They Ready for California Farms?



faces mounting pressure to reduce emissions, improve efficiency, and adapt to labor shortages, electric tractors are emerging as a compelling solution. At the forefront of this movement is Monarch Tractor, a Livermore-based company whose flagship model, the MK-V, is redefining what farm machinery can do.

As California agriculture

Monarch MK-V electric tractor operating in a California vineyard.

#### Monarch MK-V: A Smart, Sustainable Workhorse

The Monarch MK-V is the world's first fully electric, driver-optional, smart tractor, designed for specialty crops, vineyards, orchards, dairy, and solar operations. With zero emissions, autonomous capabilities, and advanced AI integration, the MK-V is engineered to meet California's evolving agricultural needs.

#### Key features include:

- 70 HP peak motor power and 40 HP PTO
- Autodrive<sup>™</sup> technology for autonomous operation
- Wingspan Ag Intelligence (Wingspan AI  $\!\!\!^{\text{\tiny T}}\!\!\!^{\text{\tiny T}}$  for real-time data tracking and fleet management
- Mobile power bank with 12V, 110V, and 220V outlets
- Up to 14 hours of runtime on a single charge

The MK-V is currently available in two configurations: Standard and Dairy. Both work as a compact tractor compatible with multiple implements for tilling, mowing, and vegetation management. The MK-V Dairy is armed with a feed push blade.

#### Financial Incentives for California Growers

Thanks to California's Clean Off-Road Equipment (CORE) Voucher Incentive Program, farmers can receive up to 67% off the retail price of a Monarch MK-V. Monarch handles the entire application process, making it easy for growers to access high-performance, zero-emission equipment without the paperwork burden.

Co-owner of Lolonis Family Vineyards, Athan Poulos, shares, "We got two new Monarch tractors through **CORE** for about the same cost as buying another used diesel tractor. Monarch took care of everything—100%".

Additionally, Monarch offers 0% financing for 24 months with other flexible options up to 60 months, helping farmers overcome high interest rates and upfront investment barriers.

#### **Autonomous Innovation for Dairy Farms**

The MK-V Dairy model introduces a groundbreaking feature: autonomous feed pushing. This task, typically repeated 12–18 times per day, ensures cows have constant access to feed, directly impacting milk production. Monarch's Autodrive™ system allows farmers to monitor and manage feed routines remotely, freeing up labor for other critical tasks.

CEO of Monarch Tractor, Praveen Penmetsa, explains, "Autonomous feed pushing offers immense value to dairy farmers by improving operational efficiency while increasing milk production. It allows farmers to focus on what matters most—the health and well-being of their animals".

#### Is It Ready for Your Farm?

Electric tractors like the MK-V are ideal for:

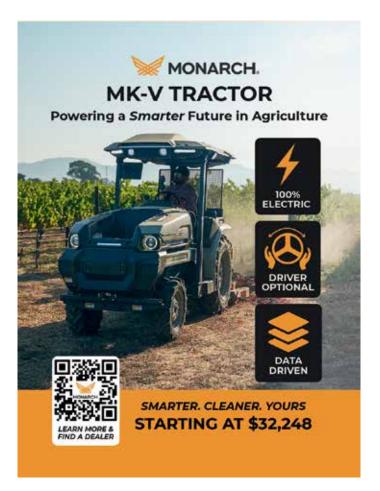
- Vineyards and orchards with predictable terrain
- Dairy farms needing autonomous feed pushing
- Organic and sustainable operations aiming to reduce emissions

While larger row crop farms may still rely on diesel for heavy-duty tasks, Monarch's technology is evolving rapidly. The company anticipates electric tractors exceeding 120 HP within the decade.

#### **ROI** and Environmental Impact

Farmers using the MK-V are reporting savings up to \$10,000 – \$12,000 annually in fuel costs and eliminating 40–50 tons of carbon emissions. With rising fuel prices and labor shortages, electric tractors offer compelling economic and environmental benefits.

Conclusion: Monarch Tractor's MK-V isn't just a machine—it's a platform for smarter, cleaner farming. For California growers ready to embrace innovation, the future is smart and electric—and it's already here.





## New Durum Variety Creates Exciting Opportunities for U.S. Farmers and Baking Enthusiasts

By Maribel Alonso

The USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) released a new variety of durum wheat with a novel commercial appeal that opens new markets for U.S. farmers while still providing a healthy and high-quality baked product for consumers.

Durum wheat, also known as pasta wheat, is often cultivated in the U.S. Northern Plains because it grows well in challenging terrain with little rainfall. This crop provides a high source of protein, carbohydrates, and fiber. However, its use in the U.S. food industry is somewhat limited because its kernel texture limits commercial end-uses, which is why durum wheat is most commonly associated with just pasta and noodles.

A new USDA-ARS Soft Spring Durum wheat, being released as USDA 'Morris' in honor of the late ARS Scientist Dr. Craig Morris, who spearheaded soft durum research, represents a new variety of soft spring durum that not only grows well in harsh environments typical of durum wheat, but also features novel end-use traits that allow it to be milled conventionally, producing flour instead of the more coarse semolina.

USDA Morris features novel baking quality genes that

will allow baking enthusiasts to use Morris' yellowish flour to bake it all—bread, cookies, and pasta—while still benefiting from the same health traits associated with traditional durum, such as high protein and carotenoids. The yellow pigmentation (due to its carotenoid content) of the soft spring durum bread makes it novel, intriguing, and appealing to bakers, consumers, and culinary enthusiasts.

"The unique quality genes found in USDA Morris were purposely introduced to enhance both milling and baking," said Jeffrey Boehm Jr., a research geneticist with the Wheat, Sorghum and Forage Research Unit in Lincoln, Neb. "Morris' grain can be milled conventionally like hard red spring or soft white winter wheat to produce flour while retaining its pasta-making ability. Soft durum presents a new wheat market class option for U.S. farmers, who may recognize its potential demand for new culinary uses, commercial applications, and even international markets."

Boehm is currently working on developing new soft winter durum lines, so this new variety can be cultivated in both spring and winter wheat cropping systems.

Expanding the end-use market for durum wheat can bring efficiency and agricultural prosperity to U.S. farmers.

## Edna 4-H of San Luis Obispo celebrates 100 years of 'good, wholesome, family fun'

Lawmakers, UC ANR leadership recognize club's history of community service



Current Edna 4-H members helped support the anniversary celebration by serving food, distributing pins and selling merch. Photo by Caroline Champlin

The story of this 4-H club starts with pigs. In 1925, boys and girls from the Edna Valley – a region tucked between San Luis Obispo and Arroyo Grande – raised a litter of swine together under the supervision of local ranchers and a University of California Cooperative Extension agricultural advisor.

That humble effort transformed into Edna 4-H, the longest-running 4-H club in San Luis Obispo County, now celebrating its 100-year anniversary. Over that time, dedicated adult volunteers have guided youth through all sorts of projects centered on building life and leadership skills.

Richard Enfield served as the 4-H youth development advisor for the San Luis Obispo County UC Cooperative Extension for a third of the club's history, from 1980 to 2013. Enfield noted that Edna 4-H has been through a lot over the years; when the club started, the local economy was almost entirely agricultural, and the first members graduated right into the Great Depression.

"It was hard times, and it became harder times, but the Edna 4-H club stayed active and actually grew during that time," Enfield said. "It's just wonderful the club was able to pull through that."

He credits the club's longevity to its deep roots in the

community, with families tracing their participation across multiple generations, and its ability to continually evolve.

"One of the reasons Edna 4-H has been so successful for a hundred years is because of its openness to new ideas," Enfield said.

Since the 1920s, the club has expanded its offerings far beyond pigs to include other agricultural and livestock projects, as well as food, textile, community service, environmental and other science projects. Current activities include mountain biking and beekeeping.

Spending time with friends and animals

This month, Enfield helped organize a celebration at La Lomita Ranch in the Edna Valley to honor the club's significant milestone. The response was overwhelming – 312 people signed up to attend, reaching capacity for the venue.

Edna 4-H members active back in the 1940s turned out, including descendants of the club's very first president. Current members, ranging from 8 to 18 years old, lent their hands to host the event, serving appetizers, collecting trash and introducing guest speakers.

Local lawmakers and Farm Bureau leadership presented

See Edna 4-H of San Luis Obispo page 19

## California Farm Equipment

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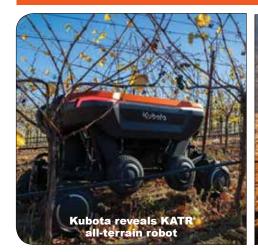
## USDA to forecast grape production

Starting at the end of July, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will mail the Grape Inquiry – August 2025 survey to approximately 2,000 U.S. growers. The survey asks for grape acreage and projected production. NASS will forecast 2025 grape production based on the information collected.

"The information from this survey directly impacts U.S. grape growers," said USDA NASS Administrator Joseph L. Parsons. "Growers can use the forecast data when making business plans and marketing decisions. The data can also inform programs and projects provided by agencies, Cooperative Extension, state and local governments, and other industry groups in service to our nation's growers."

Growers can respond to the survey securely online at agcounts.usda.gov, by mail, or fax. For assistance with the survey, please call 888-424-7828.

## Agriculture Goes High-Tech: Smart Equipment **Drives the Future of Farming**







Agriculture is evolving faster than ever, and the latest wave of technology in farming equipment is setting the stage for a more efficient, sustainable, and resilient industry. Innovations like autonomous tractors, Al-powered analytics, and precision robotics are changing the face of farm work—and California growers are leading the charge.

The adoption of autonomous machinery is one of the most transformative developments. These driverless tractors use GPS, sensors, and artificial intelligence to navigate fields, plant seeds, and spray crops with remarkable accuracy. Farmers can now remotely control tasks once performed manually, cutting labor costs and optimizing yields.

"Smart farming isn't science fiction—it's happening right now in our fields," says Mia Thompson, Technology Director at AgriTech Alliance. "We're seeing incredible results in productivity and sustainability."

Artificial intelligence continues to revolutionize operations behind the scenes. Modern harvesters embedded with AI can detect ripeness levels in crops and plan optimal routes across a field, minimizing waste. Predictive maintenance tools monitor machinery health in real time, notifying operators before breakdowns occur saving time and money during busy seasons.

Another game-changing trend is the rise of drone technology. Equipped with advanced imaging sensors, drones survey large areas quickly, identifying problem zones like pest hotspots or irrigation gaps. Some models even offer precision spraying, treating plants with pinpoint accuracy while using fewer chemicals.

Meanwhile, robotics are quietly transforming everyday tasks. Automated weeding machines use computer vision to eliminate unwanted plants without chemicals.

Robotic milking systems, now common in dairy farms, monitor cow health and ensure consistent output with minimal stress to animals.

Water conservation is also getting a smart upgrade. Intelligent irrigation systems combine soil moisture sensors and weather forecasts to fine-tune watering schedules. These setups reduce water waste and provide crops with optimal hydration—critical in droughtprone regions like California's Central Valley.

Farmers are embracing digital tools that bring all this tech together. Platforms for farm management software now compile weather data, crop conditions, and machine usage into dashboards that guide real-time decisions. Emerging use of blockchain technology provides transparency in produce tracking, ensuring better food safety and trust across supply chains.

As global food demand rises and climate pressures intensify, smart agricultural equipment offers a sustainable path forward. With the latest tools at their fingertips, farmers are redefining what it means to grow—and the industry is poised for a smarter, greener future.

Pelican Spray is an autonomous electric crop spray UAS designed and built by Pyka in Alameda, CA.





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## **AgSafe Expands Training Sessions, Works to Meet Emerging Needs**

Farm Credit support helps nonprofit reduce costs and maximize participation



AgSafe training specialist Juan Muniz (in blue shirt) provides safety training for working around tractors.

For more than 30 years, AgSafe has been a trusted source for safety training and compliance support within the agricultural sector. Now, with expanded programming and deeper regional reach, the nonprofit is answering the call to meet the industry's evolving needs.

AgSafe's Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Natalie Gupton, reports significant growth: "In just one year, we increased our training sessions by over 35%—from 204 sessions reaching 3,667 participants in 2022–23, to 278 sessions reaching 5.664 in 2023-24."

While continuing to offer essential instruction in worker safety, human resources, and pesticide handling, the organization is now investing in specialized programs for agricultural supervisors. "We've spent the past five years really focusing on supervisors," said Theresa Kiehn, AgSafe President and CEO. "They're instrumental in executing our industry's work, so we're sponsoring 'Train the Trainer' courses covering equipment safety—including tractor, forklift, ATV/UTV accident prevention and HR topics like wage and hour compliance and harassment prevention."

To further professionalize supervisory roles in agriculture, AgSafe launched its Supervisors Development Academy, a 20-hour program emphasizing leadership, team management, communication, and people skills.

Support from Farm Credit has played a pivotal role in AgSafe's ability to broaden access and keep training affordable. "We never want cost to be a barrier," said Kiehn. "Farm Credit's support allows us to reduce participant costs, grow and maintain our helpline, and share valuable industry information."

Keith Hesterberg, President and CEO of Fresno Madera Farm Credit, underlined the importance of AgSafe's mission: "Safety remains a top priority in ag. AgSafe has trained over 150,000 individuals in the past 34 years, and today's workforce faces broader challenges. Their holistic, expanded programs are more vital than ever."

AgSafe's annual Safety Conference, held in Monterey, brings together more than 500 attendees for over 50 classes covering health, safety, HR, and leadership—offered in both English and Spanish. "AgSafe includes Spanish-speaking experts from key regulatory agencies to share updates and prevention strategies," said Kevin Ralph, California President of AgWest Farm Credit. "It's an incredible resource, and Farm Credit is proud to be a long-standing partner."

AgSafe was founded in 1990 amid growing state and federal regulatory demands. It transitioned to a nonprofit organization in 1991 and became membership-based in 1994. Looking forward, the group is launching initiatives in stress management and safety protocols for emerging ag technologies, including robotics and autonomous equipment.

"Farming is tough—owners and workers alike face immense stress," said Gupton. "Providing tools to manage mental health improves well-being and productivity. As ag tech advances, we're proactively developing safety training to ensure smooth, responsible adoption."





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## **UC ANR shares prospects for sustainably** farming the 'agave rush'



Ofelia Lichtenheld shared her recipe for brewing organic compost 'tea' out of bat quano, kelp, molasses and vermicompost. Photo by Rob Padilla

By Caroline D Champlin

We're living in a modern gold rush. That's according to Samuel Sandoval Solis, a University of California Cooperative Extension specialist and UC Davis professor in the Department of Land, Air and Water Resources. But don't get your pickaxe yet, he's not talking about minerals. He's interested in the latest must-have crop.

"We have gone through the pistachio rush, the avocado rush, the almond rush. There is always a rush," said Sandoval Solis. "We are now in the agave rush."

The popularity of farming agave has taken off in the last few years, with climate change motivating growers to consider planting drought-tolerant crops. Before 2023, only 50 acres of agave were grown statewide, according to a UC Davis study. Now, that's quadrupled to more than 200 acres.

With all that buzz, the UC Organic Agriculture Institute hosted a field day on June 4 for current and prospective growers at an organic agave farm in Campo, part of San Diego County. Through a series of bilingual lectures and site tours, experts from the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources shared farming techniques that respect the environment and the cultural significance of the agave plant.

Sandoval Solis, a water resources expert, delivered his talk in Spanish, retelling a Mexican creation story featuring agave. He hoped to inspire growers to reflect on the historic significance of the plant, which has been cultivated and studied in

Mexico for thousands of years. With that background, he presented attendees with a choice for how they approach growing the plant.

"We are at a crossroads," Sandoval Solis said. "We can expand the conventional, environmentally aggressive practices, or we can be a little bit more gentle and socially responsible."

Spilling the compost tea Ofelia Lichtenheld demonstrated those gentle, regenerative practices on her farm, Rancho de los Espíritus Contentos, where the event was held. She invited attendees to join the process of brewing a "compost tea."

The murky cocktail is a mixture of organic nutrients including kelp, molasses, bat guano and vermicompost (aka, worm poop), which will be used to water the various test plots of agave growing on the property.

Each agave species is evaluated for its suitability to the local microclimate, and Lichtenheld hopes to set every plant up for success by holistically investing in the farm.

"Chemical fertilizers feed the plants, not the soil. I am very concerned about getting the diverse microbiome in the soil," Lichtenheld said. "You can tell in the plants - they are very happy."

Reduction in pesticides and herbicides presents some inconveniences, however. Squirrels and rabbits nibble on Lichtenheld's plants, drawn to their natural sweetness. Coyotes have damaged her irrigation system by chewing through the plastic tubing.

"I have a lot of challenges. That's why I wanted to have all these people here so they can learn," Lichtenheld said.

The farm is experimenting with solutions like enclosing the agave with gopher baskets. Meanwhile, Lichtenheld is installing even more wildlife habitat on her site with help from Point Blue Conservation Science.

She's confident the long-term benefits of pollinators and other wild visitors will outweigh the frustration during this research and development phase. That's why she appreciates the guidance shared by UC ANR advisors. She's also sharing her findings as part of the organic hub of the California Farm Demonstration Network, which supports the exchange of sustainable knowledge and practices between demonstration sites.

See Sustainably Farming page 14



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#### **Sustainably Farming**

continued from page 12

"A farmer should not be farming alone," Lichtenheld said. "They should be farming with other farmers."

To that point, agricultural experts from UC ANR and UC Davis are conducting a survey for agave farmers to share their experience growing the crop. The survey is available in English and Spanish. Results will be used to create an agenda for applied research, educational training and manuals of strategies that address current challenges.

Investing in long-term growth

Technically, field day attendee Christopher Konrad has been an agave grower for over a decade. His uncle introduced him to the plant as a water-saving ornamental in his garden.

"They're easy to propagate," Konrad said. "He would hand them off to me. I would start growing them and enjoy them in my yard."

Now, Konrad is thinking about the plant differently – turning the corner from home gardener to entrepreneurial agave grower. He's watched the crop gain a foothold in California, marked by the establishment of the California Agave Council, a trade group dedicated to the plant.

This year, Konrad purchased 40 acres of remote farmland close to the Cleveland National Forest, with the intention of planting agave and selling them to distillers or landscapers. He envisions a farm that's integrated with the environment, even enhancing the site's biodiversity.

Touring Lichtenheld's farm gave Konrad a role model for

turning that vision into reality. He took notes on the compost tea recipe and a possible brand of irrigation system to consider purchasing. He's even hoping to buy agave plants from Lichtenheld, in addition to the free agave seedlings handed out to every attendee of the field day.

Besides absorbing those technical tips, Konrad left the event reflective of his place in the ecosystem of agave growers.

"I'm trying to get clear with myself: why am I doing it? What are my values? What do I care about? If I can be clear with that, then I can know my path forward," Konrad said.

Agaves are slow-growing – some species take over a decade to mature. From Konrad's perspective, a lucrative outcome isn't guaranteed. Over that time, he plans to experiment alongside experts like Lichtenheld and other UC affiliates to ensure these culturally significant plants are well cared for and don't compromise the environment around them.

Soon enough, he may have his first harvest to show for it. "I'm going 2032," Konrad said. "It sounds like a nice number to me."



#### Scientists Find a "Silver Lining" to Adult House Flies' Filthy Behavior

Researchers Use House Flies to Track Livestock Disease **Bv Maribel Alonso** 

USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists are investigating the microbial communities carried by house flies to improve disease monitoring and reduce the transmission of fly-borne pathogens among livestock—an effort aimed at protecting the nation's food supply and public health.

House flies can transfer harmful bacteria, viruses, and other microbes among cattle and may also spread pathogens between farms and into nearby residential areas. With their constant contact with farm waste, manure, and animal excretions, flies can pick up dangerous microbes and transfer them across locations—impacting livestock health, welfare, and operational productivity. The resulting diseases can contribute to substantial economic losses. In fact, a previous study estimates that U.S. producers spend over \$1 billion annually on fly control alone.

Effective fly management not only protects animal health but can also reduce risks to human populations. That's why ARS researchers, university collaborators, and cattle producers are studying the microbial loads of adult house flies to better understand how these insects function as mobile sources and spreaders of bacteria and viruses within confined dairy farms and beyond.

In a collaborative study with Kansas State University (KSU), scientists found that analyzing genomic DNA—the full genetic material—extracted from pools of individual adult female house flies provides a clear snapshot of the microbes they've encountered in a given location. The flies act as "flying swabs," gathering microbes from sources such as sick animals, waste, and surrounding materials. This hands-on surveillance method could evolve into a useful tool for microbial tracking in agricultural environments.

"The number of animals, their health status, the volume and makeup of manure, and environmental changes at dairy farms all affect the types and abundance of microbes accessible to house flies," said Dr. Dana Nayduch, entomologist and research leader at ARS's Arthropod-Borne Animal Diseases Research Unit in Manhattan, KS.

"By examining what flies carry on and inside their bodies over time, we can assess what's happening across their environment. If a farm has a sick animal, a fly can find it—among thousands—and pick up its microbes, almost like locating a needle in a haystack," Nayduch explained.

This ability makes flies uniquely suited for real-time monitoring. Because they interact with numerous farm components daily, they provide researchers with consistent microbial samples that mirror farm health. Flies' natural behaviors—feeding, flying, breeding turn them into effective sampling tools, allowing scientists to detect shifts in microbial presence early.

For producers, these insights are critical. Early microbial detection can inform decisions that reduce disease risk, limit outbreaks, and improve herd wellbeing. With proactive fly management and microbial surveillance, farms can better safeguard animal welfare while maintaining economic efficiency.

The ARS-KSU study offers more than data—it provides strategy. By aligning microbial findings with operational patterns, researchers can help farmers predict and prevent disease spread. This dual approach merges entomology with epidemiology, highlighting house flies as both pests and diagnostic allies.

"Tracking microbial profiles in flies opens a path toward smarter disease prevention," Nayduch added. "It's not just about controlling flies—it's about understanding what they can tell us."

Through ongoing field research and producer engagement, ARS and its partners aim to advance agricultural disease management using the ordinary house fly as an extraordinary surveillance tool.

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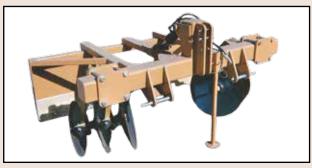
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### **Edna 4-H of San Luis Obispo**

continued from page 6 awards of recognition to the club, including representatives for State Senator John Laird and Assemblymember Dawn Addis. San Luis Obispo County Supervisor Dawn Ortiz-Legg and Statewide 4-H director Kimberly Holmes from University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources were also in attendance.

**UC Vice President for Agriculture** and Natural Resources Glenda Humiston, a 4-H'er herself, gave a speech sharing her admiration for Edna 4-H.

"There's a reason a club like this stays vital for a hundred years," Humiston said. "We would not be able to deliver these programs without our volunteers."

Club members of all ages took the mic to reflect on the impact of Edna 4-H. One person gave a shoutout to someone who helped care for her injured chicken. Another thanked the group for supporting a member's mother, who was diagnosed with cancer. Others disclosed hijinks from county fairs of yore.

One young 4-H member, Hazel, encapsulated her feelings about Edna 4-H simply: "I like to be able to spend time with my friends and be able to spend time with my animals."

Several people mentioned Edna 4-H's commitment to community service – from the club's first project constructing a fence around a local farm center, to later projects collecting coats for homeless people, raising funds for cancer research and organizing countless toy drives over the years.

The event was chaired and emceed by Edna 4-H beef project leader Kristin Beljean, who welcomed attendees and even led the audience in several 4-H camp songs.

"What I feel is most important is the memories it brought back to the people there, and the memories it made," Beljean said. "It was just good, wholesome, family fun."

The club's history is recorded in reporters' books dating back to the 1920s, which were on display at the barbecue. Prior to the anniversary celebration, those handcrafted wood and leather bound books had been stored in tack boxes in barns. Now, they're getting the treatment they deserve, as the newest artifacts to be added and preserved indefinitely at the History Center of San Luis Obispo.

Life lessons, from chickens

One of the headlining speakers at the anniversary celebration was Aria Olsen, who served as club president before her recent graduation from high school. She traces her memory of Edna 4-H back to when she was 9 years old at a local farmer's market with her family. That's where she spotted young people in green uniforms.

"At first I thought they were Girl Scouts, and where there are Girl Scouts, there's usually cookies, right?" Olsen recalled. "So I went to investigate and there were no cookies, but there were a lot of interesting projects."

As it turned out, they were Edna 4-H members. With some encouragement from her parents, Olsen got involved and wound up caring for two miniature pure-bred Bantam Wyandotte chickens named Polka and Dot.

"I thought I was getting the short end of the deal because I didn't get a dog, but they really grew on me," Olsen said.

Over her time in the club, that flock included other hens: Pip Squeak, Pepper and Chichi. Showing those chickens at the California Mid-State Fair taught Olsen all kinds of life lessons. "Stuff happens, and it's just good to have an extra backup chicken," Olsen said.

Other takeaways had broader application. "4-H teaches you skills about being an adult, being mature in the world and being able to speak up for what you believe in," she said.

This fall, Olsen will attend UC Berkeley, where she plans to major in ethnic studies and pursue a career in law.

"Even if agriculture isn't necessarily what I want to go into, it was still an invaluable experience," Olsen said. "Trying to represent historically marginalized communities and be a good advocate for other people – those skills of leadership and communication were built through 4-H."

## **Understanding Educational Needs of Dairy Industry During the Bird Flu Outbreak**

In 2024, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1, also known as bird flu, emerged as a new threat to dairy cattle. Nationwide, 1,074 cases were confirmed in cattle across 17 states. Recently, the number of new cases has declined; only one new case has been reported in California over the past 30 days. To better understand the dairy industry's educational needs regarding HPAI, UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) conducted a survey in collaboration with the California Dairy Quality Assurance Program (CDQAP) and the California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB).

Respondents included 11 dairy producers (40.7%) and 16 allied industry professionals (59.3%). Producers represented a range of herd sizes: three had over 2,000 cows, five had 1,000

to 2,000 cows, and three had under 1,000 cows.

Before the outbreak reached California, only one-third of respondents (33.3%) felt well-informed about HPAI. Information was obtained through online channels such as webinars (63.0%), written materials such as newsletters or fact sheets (59.3%), and one-on-one conversations (70.4%) with trusted advisors. including veterinarians, nutritionists, UCCE, and peers.

Regarding preparation before the outbreak, most dairy producers had a treatment protocol (72.7%), acquired equipment and supplies to drench and treat cows (72.7%),

provided biosecurity training for employees (72.7%), acquired personal protective equipment for workers (63.6%), and implemented enhanced biosecurity measures (63.6%).

Nearly 60% of respondents attended HPAI-related webi-

nars hosted by UCCE, CDQAP, CMAB, and UC Davis. All these attendees considered the webinars informative. Overall, the three topics rated as most interesting were the HPAI overview (81.2%), producer perspectives (75.0%), and veterinarian perspectives (75.0%; Fig. 1).

When asked what topics they would like more training or information on, the top priorities among all respondents were the long-term health impacts of HPAI on lactating cows (73.1%), calves and heifers (65.4%), and vaccination updates (65.4%; Fig. 2). Among producers, the most selected

topics were financial assistance programs (90.9%), long-term health impacts on calves/heifers (72.7%), and on lactating cows (63.6%), updates on HPAI transmission (63.6%), and

treatment strategies (63.6%).

UCCE will use this information to refine its outreach programs, with the goal of improving preparedness, strengthening biosecurity practices, and supporting the dairy industry's ability to respond to current and future challenges related to

Rúbia Branco-Lopes1, Daniela Bruno1, Betsy Karle1, Randi Black1 and Noelia Silva-del-Río1.2

1University of California Cooperative Extension, UC Agriculture and Natural Resources

2School of Veterinary Medicine, UC Davis

Acknowledgement: We thank all survey participants for their contributions.

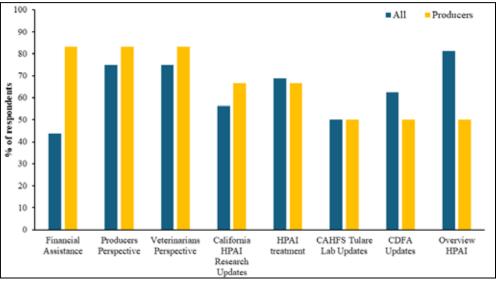


Figure 1. Proportion of webinar attendees that rated topics as "very interesting". There were 16 attendees, and 6 of those were dairy producers.

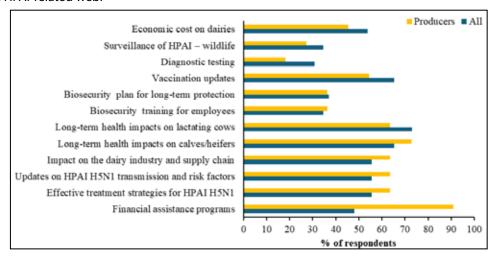


Figure 2. Proportion of survey participants that would like to receive additional information on HPAI. There were 27 total respondents and of those 11 were dairy producers.



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## **UC ANR Cultivates California's Agritourism Boom:** From Pumpkin Patches to Policy Partnerships



UC ANR organized the agritourism symposium in the city of San Diego, where farmers from all over the state took part in tours and workshops designed to answer questions and explore the challenges of participating in the agritourism industry. Photos by Diana Cervantes

California's \$59 billion agriculture industry is not just feeding the nation—it's inviting it in. Thanks to the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR), agritourism is flourishing across the state, transforming farms into vibrant destinations and empowering producers to diversify their income while strengthening community ties.

Once a modest side venture, agritourism now contributes significantly to rural economies, offering experiences like farm stays, cheese tastings, and flower picking tours. UC ANR has spent more than 25 years building the infrastructure to support this movement, providing farmers with technical assistance, regulatory guidance, and marketing strategies.

"Agritourism is not just an economic strategy—it's a community strategy," said Rachael Callahan, UC ANR's statewide agritourism coordinator. "We're building relationships, understanding, and long-term support for California agriculture."

UC ANR's signature programs—including its intensive workshops, multilingual resources, and statewide summit prepare farmers to safely and successfully welcome guests. The results speak for themselves.

In Modoc County, Heather and Bryon Hadwick turned a dream into a beloved tradition after attending UC ANR's Agritourism Intensive in 2016. Their seasonal pumpkin patch has grown into a local favorite.

"We've watched our visitors grow up over the past decade," said Heather Hadwick. "It's become part of their family memories—and a vital piece of our business."

Across California, similar stories are unfolding. Graduates of UC ANR's programs have hosted farm-to-table dinners, opened seasonal markets, and collaborated with Cooperative Extension offices to bring farmers together. In San Diego County, one graduate even hosted a regional networking event for new agritourism entrepreneurs.

"It's powerful to see someone go from learner to leader in their own community," Callahan added.

These efforts proved especially valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic, when traditional supply chains collapsed and small farms faced dire challenges. Agritourism emerged as a resilient alternative, allowing producers to maintain operations and connect safely with customers.

"Farms became open-air lifelines," Callahan said. "U-picks, tours, and farm stands gave families a chance to engage with local food and outdoor recreation."

Today, agritourism in California is more robust than ever. In 2017, 1,130 farms reported agritourism income; that number has now surpassed 2,000. The 2025 California Agritourism Summit, organized by UC ANR, gathered statewide stakeholders to share innovations and challenges.

"Agritourism helps us protect small farms, strengthen rural economies, and reconnect people to the land," said Callahan.

California's diversity sets it apart. From Napa vineyards to San Luis Obispo olive groves, UC ANR customizes agritourism support to match each farmer's vision and environment.

"We're not replicating one model," Callahan emphasized. "We're helping farmers bring their stories to life."

That storytelling is vital, said Glenda Humiston, UC Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources.

"Agritourism isn't just profitable—it's meaningful," Humiston said. "It helps people understand where their food comes from and why small farms matter."

With partners like Visit California and California Grown, UC ANR continues to fuel momentum in agritourism. Its resources—in multiple languages—ensure accessibility, equity, and sustainability across the state.

To learn more and explore agritourism opportunities near you, visit https://ucanr.edu/site/california-agritourism.



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9-10: Gravenstein Apple Fair. Celebrate Sonoma's heirloom apples with tastings, demos, and live music. Sebastopol, CA. For more information: https://www.visitcalifornia.com/experience/august-events-california/

10-11: CAIA Fall Meeting. Join irrigation professionals for technical sessions, tours, and roundtables at the SeaCrest Oceanfront Hotel, Pismo Beach, CA. For more information: calagirrigation.com/events/

14-15: Midyear Meeting and Cattle-PAC Auction + Dinner Dance. The meeting AND the Cattle PAC fundraiser will be held at the Paso Robles Event Center (California Mid-State Fairgrounds). For more information call (916) 444-0845 or visit: https://calcattlemen.org/event/2025-midyear-meeting-and-cattle-pac-auction-dinner-dance/

#### SEPTEMBER 2025

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.

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/agintheclassroomconf.asp

#### 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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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW: DWR's LandFlex Pilot Program has saved over 100,000 acre-feet of groundwater and protected 16,500 drinking water wells in California's frontline communities. Enrolled lands are now in compliance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act well ahead of the 2040 deadline.

Thanks to a collaborative and forward-thinking partnership with groundwater sustainability agencies and California farmers, the Department of Water Resources' (DWR) LandFlex Program has protected thousands of community wells, furthered California's groundwater recharge efforts, and protected critical water infrastructure from subsidence, all while keeping farms operational and sustainable.

LandFlexfirst launched in 2022 when California was in its third year of a severe drought and hundreds of drinking water wells were going dry in the Central Valley, impacting frontline communities. To address these impacts, DWR awarded \$23.3 million in grant funding to six groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) in the Central Valley. These GSAs distributed funds to small and mid-sized farms to help transition to more sustainable practices while eliminating groundwater overdraft and protecting drinking water supplies. In total, 52 farms participated in the program and enrolled 4,474 acres of farmland.

As a result, the program helped save over 100,000 acrefeet (AF) of groundwater, protected 16,500 drinking water wells, and reduced the over-pumping of groundwater on Central Valley farms.

During the program's pilot year, California experienced extreme weather swings from prolonged drought to sudden flooding in early 2023. LandFlex was able to redirect excess floodwaters from inundated rivers onto fallowed farmland to help recharge groundwater aguifers, demonstrating how working lands can play a critical role in protecting water supplies and communities during both drought and flood scenarios. By also strategically identifying farmlands near the California Aqueduct, LandFlex was able to eliminate groundwater overdraft on those lands, supporting statewide efforts to prevent land subsidence and safeguard California's vital water delivery infrastructure.

"The strength of the LandFlex program lies not only in its ability to conserve water, but also in its flexibility as a climate-resilient solution for both groundwater sustainability agencies and farmers," said DWR Director Karla Nemeth. "The future of California is one where communities that are dependent on groundwater wells have reliable and safe drinking water, farms can stay in production with sustainable practices, and critical water infrastructure is protected from subsidence."

These successes are chronicled in a recently released report and a short video series showcasing LandFlex's success in action.

The six GSAs awarded grant funding included Madera County, Greater Kaweah, Eastern Tule, Lower Tule River Irrigation District, Pixley Irrigation District, and Westlands



A drone view as groundwater pumping from production wells fill agricultural waterways to irrigate fields at Conaway Ranch in Yolo County, California. Photo taken August 5, 2024.

Water District. The elimination of groundwater overdraft on LandFlex enrolled lands marks a pivotal achievement in the program, bringing these lands into full compliance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) 15 years ahead of the 2040 deadline for critically overdrafted basins.

Part of LandFlex's success is thanks to the invaluable contributions provided by the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Self-Help Enterprises, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, Western United Dairies, and Almond Alliance who partnered with DWR to raise awareness about the program, identify communities in need, and demonstrate how the program could help farmers keep their lands in production while also complying with SGMA. These partnerships have been instrumental in shaping LandFlexinto a program that effectively supports vulnerable communities and farmers while addressing critical water resource challenges driven by California's increasingly extreme weather.

LandFlex is smart because it puts farmers into immediate sustainability when it comes to the requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, which need to be implemented by the year 2040," said Anja Raudabaugh, CEO of Western United Dairies. "We had a lot of farmers at the table with this process, and it really helped us come up with the formula that gave them incentives to move into sustainability almost overnight.

"LandFlex represents a new chapter in sustainable farming. It's about protecting the future of our water and our farms by adopting innovative practices today," said Blake Vann, Chairman of Almond Alliance. "The success of this program proves that when we work together, we can achieve lasting solutions for California's agriculture and communities."

For more information, visit water.ca.gov/landflex.

## Ag Directory

### Ag Internet Directory

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### **CNH** expands connectivity solutions with SpaceX's Starlink



Products from CNH brands New Holland and Case IH in the field

CNH (NYSE: CNH) announces that it has signed an agreement with Starlink, a subsidiary of SpaceX, to bring industry-leading satellite connectivity to farmers. This collaboration will provide customers of CNH brands, Case IH, New Holland and STEYR, with robust and affordable high-speed connectivity - further unlocking the benefits of a fully connected fleet - even in the most remote rural locations around the world.

"We're thrilled to offer our customers access to industry-leading satellite connectivity, enabling them to maximize the potential of our full suite of precision technology in even the most challenging rural environments," said Stefano Pampalone, Agriculture Chief Commercial Officer at CNH.

How Starlink supercharges the delivery of CNH's precision tech

Starlink's advanced satellite network offers reliable. low-latency internet. This enables our intelligent machines to communicate and coordinate efficiently, enhancing productivity and yield. It seamlessly integrates with our FieldOps™ digital platform, giving our customers visibility of their machines and providing data from anywhere, anytime. It also gives our customers greater data streaming capabilities by keeping their farm management devices consistently con-

nected, regardless of location.

Prescription spraying is another powerful use case where Starlink's fast and reliable transmission technology will benefit farming operations. The lack of connectivity in a market such as Brazil, for example, can make farm logistics challenging. CNH's FieldXplorer platform uses AI to transform drone images into a field map that distinguishes between weeds and crop. With Starlink we can now export that data near instantaneously to create a prescription spraying map for the machine. This enables farmers to apply crop protection products sooner, controlling weeds earlier, which ultimately helps improve crop yields.

This collaboration underscores CNH's ongoing commitment to equipping farmers with reliable, tailored solutions that meet the unique demands of agriculture, while amplifying the capabilities of precision technology from wherever they are.

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