

Riverside County AGRICULTURE

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A private, nonprofit organization serving farmers throughout Riverside County since 1917

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Welcome New Members

We would like to "Thank You" for becoming part of the Farm Bureau Family.



The Riverside County Farm Bureau has secured additional stock of disposable masks, please contact our office for availability and to arrange pick-up.

Call our Office (951) 684-6732

Qualifying for Social Security as a Farmer or Rancher

For many Americans, Social Security makes up a sizable amount of their income in retirement. In 2018, 63 million Americans received approximately one trillion dollars in Social Security benefits, with a majority of those funds going to retired workers. However, due to the way in which many farm operators utilize the tax code to adjust their income, many farmers run the risk of not qualifying for Social Security retirement benefits.

What does it take to be eligible for Social Security retirement benefits? For any individual to qualify for Social Security retirement benefits, they must have earned a minimum amount of either wages or net profit for a given year (or quarter). Individuals earn one credit per quarter in which an annually-set minimum required wage or net profit is achieved. For 2019, the minimum earnings per quarter are \$1,360. Individuals can earn up to four credits per year, making the total minimum earnings equivalent to \$5,440 for 2019. To qualify for future benefits under Social Security, an individual must have earned 40 quarters (or, 10 years) of wages or net profits. If an individual does not have at least the 40 required earned credits, they will not be able to collect Social Security retirement benefits.

Your farm business structure matters. For those individuals that own and operate a farm as either a C-corporation or as an S-Corporation, it is highly likely they will already be paying themselves wages. Any wages of \$1,360 per quarter (or, \$5,440 per year) will receive their max of four credits for benefit calculations. For those farmers that run their operation through an LLC or are filing their taxes as a sole proprietor under a Schedule F return, credits will be earned on net farm income. Net farm income in excess of \$5,440 per year will result in four credits being earned. However, farmers who utilize tax deductions and expenses that result in an income loss for the tax year (reported on a Schedule F IRS tax form) should be aware that this action will result in zero credits being earned for that tax year.

Who pays the Social Security tax is another key issue. Individuals employed by an employer will have 6.2% of their pay withheld for Social Security tax and 1.45% withheld for Medicare tax, while the employer pays the other half of the total tax. For many farmers, these two taxes will both be paid by the individual, generally referred to as self-employment tax, for a total of 15.3%. Get the most out of your Social Security benefits. Register for one of our online webinars at www.nationwide.com/cfbf to learn more or call Nationwide for help at 855-863-9636.



Partnerships Help Recover Stephens' Kangaroo Rat

Species Will Be Reclassified From Endangered to Threatened



After more than 30 years of conservation efforts by federal, state and local partners, today the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the reclassification of the Stephens' kangaroo rat from endangered to threatened under the Endangered Species Act. A concurrent 4(d) rule will provide additional management flexibility for landowners within the species' range to conduct weed and fire management activities, and other beneficial actions outlined in approved management plans.

The Service made the determination using the best available science which evaluated current and future threats to the species, with the most significant impact being habitat loss. The final rule incorporates comments and information submitted on the proposed rule, including updated habitat modeling from the Conservation Biology Institute.

“The Stephens' kangaroo rat habitat conservation plan, managed by the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency, has minimized threats to the species by conserving 19,000 acres of habitat,” said Scott Sobiech, field supervisor of the Service's Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office. “This type of planning in Southern California, along with extensive conservation actions by multiple partners has been critical to moving this native mammal toward recovery.”

The Stephens' kangaroo rat was discovered at four additional geographical locations since being listed as endangered in 1988, and its status has improved to the point that it is not currently in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

The threat of habitat loss has been significantly reduced through the development and implementation of two habitat conservation plans (HCP), and management efforts by three military installations.

The historic range of the kangaroo rat includes portions of Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego counties. Lands supporting the kangaroo rat include federal, state, local and privately owned lands. Although there are documented occurrences of Stephens' kangaroo rats on Tribal land, the Service has not relied on any Tribal land in the recovery of the species.

In Riverside County, eight core reserves for the species are supported through the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency's (RCHCA) Stephens' kangaroo rat HCP, while additional habitat is protected under the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority's (RCA) Western Riverside County Multiple Species HCP.

RCHCA acquired and manages the core reserves for the benefit of Stephens' kangaroo rat. This past year RCHCA partnered with the Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the Conservation Biology Institute to develop a range-wide management and monitoring strategy to guide long-term conservation for the species. RCHCA also worked with the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance to facilitate new research. Additionally, the RCA continues to acquire and conserve SKR habitat, and track species population densities.

The Department of Defense is also managing habitat for the species on Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, on Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach Detachment Fallbrook, and within Navy Base Coronado's Remote Training Site Warner Springs in San Diego County. Each of the installations have developed integrated natural resources management plans that support the long-term conservation of the species through measures such as providing undeveloped land and maintaining suitable habitat through vegetation management using rotational cattle grazing and mowing.

Other partners contributing to the long-term conservation of the species include the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Cleveland National Forest, and the United States Geological Survey.

Stephens' kangaroo rats are small mammals that live in warm, arid environments. They have fur-lined external cheek pouches used to transport seeds and large hind legs used for jumping.

The final downlisting rule is available for public view in the *Federal Register*, at which time all documents and supporting information will be available at www.regulations.gov by searching **Docket No. FWS-R8-ES-2019-0113**.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information about their work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov/cno or connect with us via Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr

Bee thefts mount as the pollination season intensifies

By Christine Souza, assistant editor of California Farm Bureau Ag Alert

It happens every year. As soon as pallets loaded with honeybee colonies hit the soil in California orchards to pollinate the almond crop, they are targeted by thieves. Authorities and others in the business say the culprits tend to be other beekeepers.

Thieves are after the pollination rental income, which this year is \$200 to \$220 per hive, according to beekeepers.

"Unfortunately, it's other people in the beekeeping industry who are desperate during almond pollination, and they steal from other beekeepers to fulfill their contracts, and it's disgusting," said Claire Tauzer of Tauzer Apiaries. "It's a horrible violation of our industry and all of our hard work. The majority of our industry are honest, hardworking people, and there is a small, desperate minority who steals from people this time of year, and it's got to stop."

Tauzer Apiaries, a family beekeeping business in Northern California, reported that 384 of its hives were stolen from the Hopland area in Mendocino County between Jan. 19 and Feb. 1. Those hives are valued at \$150,000, plus \$80,000 in pollination rental income.

A day after the hives were reported missing last week, a tip led law enforcement to a residence in Yolo County, where they recovered the stolen colonies. The suspects were allegedly transferring the frames of Tauzer's bees into their own boxes, Tauzer said. Law enforcement also located the company's custom, \$50,000 forklift, stolen a year ago in Woodland. An arrest was made in connection to the alleged theft of the forklift. The investigation is ongoing.

"I'm just tired of this happening to our community," Tauzer said. "I don't care if it's five hives. These are our livestock. We have invested a year, at least, in every hive."

With California almond orchards buzzing with activity between now and bloom, Butte County Sheriff's Deputy Rowdy Freeman said of the thefts, "It's difficult, because it's the perfect crime—it is beekeepers stealing from other beekeepers, and it's very difficult to tell the owner from the thief."

"Someone that comes in and steals 144 hives overnight, they know how to do it. They're most likely beekeepers and have the right equipment," said Freeman, president of the California Rural Crime Prevention Task Force. "If you think that something might be out of place, make the phone call and let authorities check it out."

Tauzer Apiaries wasn't the only victim last week. South Dakota beekeeper Ryan Maxwell of T&D Honey transported colonies to California to pollinate almonds. His placed bees sat in a Kern County orchard near Wasco for about a day and, in a flash, they disappeared.

"We went through all the bees on Friday and when we went back to check them on Sunday, they were gone," said Maxwell, who added that the theft is significant for their family-run business. "We're a small operation, and 12% of our hives were stolen."

Maxwell said his family fell victim to a theft of 144 hives, of which he said the pollination income alone is valued at \$29,000. He said the company's hives are painted white and olive green and stenciled with the company name "T&D Honey."

Another 160 hives were reported stolen from a Madera County almond last week.

Theft of honeybee colonies, Freeman said, is often difficult to prove.

"The problem that we have is that it's always after the fact, whether it's a few days, a week or two weeks," Freeman said. "The longer it goes before it gets reported, the harder it is to track down people and preserve evidence."



These honeybee colonies belonging to South Dakota beekeeper Ryan Maxwell were delivered to a Kern County orchard. A day later, 144 of his hives were reported stolen. Photo/Ryan Maxwell

CONT. ON PAGE 6.....

Avocado growers to get irrigation tools, strategies from UC ANR's Montazar

CDFA grant supports research to optimize water use for iconic California crop



California growers, who account for more than 90% of avocado production in the U.S., will soon be getting some help in weathering the extreme fluctuations of climate change.

Ali Montazar, a University of California Cooperative Extension irrigation and water management advisor, recently received a grant to develop tools and strategies that optimize growers' irrigation practices across Southern California – the state's avocado belt. California avocados are valued at more than \$411 million, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

"This region faces uncertain water supplies, mandatory reductions of water use, and the rising cost of water – while efficient use of irrigation water is one of the highest conservation priorities," Montazar said. "Water is the most critically important input to avocado production."

Montazar will be conducting field experiments in six commercial fields of Hass avocados, located in San Diego, Riverside and Orange counties, in collaboration with the California Avocado Commission and supported by a California Department of Food and Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant.

At the California Avocado Commission's suggestion, Orange County was added to the study to better capture the range of climates and cropping systems across the region, Montazar said.

He hopes to develop "crop coefficients" that avocado growers can use to determine the optimal irrigation for their crop based on a host of factors: soil type and salinity, canopy features, row orientation, slopes, soil and water management practices, and more.

"Growers are unclear on how much water the crop actually needs under those conditions," Montazar said.

He will incorporate data from the actual water use in the experimental orchards – including information from the newest soil moisture and canopy temperature sensors – to help ensure growers do not under- or overwater their crops. Overirrigating contributes to a devastating disease, avocado root rot, caused by the plant pathogen *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

Another component of the grant supports outreach in disseminating these resources and best practices to the broader agricultural community.

"Developing and adopting these tools and information may have a significant impact on water quality and quantity issues and bolster the economic sustainability of avocado production not only in the well-established production region of Southern California, but also in Kern and Tulare counties where new avocado plantings are growing," Montazar said.

Preliminary findings and recommendations are expected at the end of 2022.

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The sheriff's deputy also happens to be a beekeeper and is renting his honeybees for almond pollination. Freeman said he just moved all of his bees into the orchards, adding, "Even though I'm law enforcement, the theft of my hives is always in the back of my mind because it would affect me just like anybody else."

With any theft of bees, an almond grower is out the pollination services provided by the bees, Freeman said.

"Now, the farmer doesn't have those bees, and they have to try to scramble and find some more at the last minute if they're able to," Freeman said.

Butte County beekeeper Buzz Landon, president of the California State Beekeepers Association, said it is important for "all beekeepers and almond growers to be very cautious and aware of what is going on in the orchards." Also important, he said, is that beekeepers and growers develop a good relationship and maintain good, open communication.

Where cost-effective, beekeepers may strategically place GPS trackers in certain hives as a theft prevention measure. "We've used trackers, but you just never know which load they're going to take," Landon said.

Many beekeepers mark their hives with personal identifiers, Freeman said, and they must also register with the BeeWhere program, which tracks and safeguards hives using mapping tools. Beekeepers must register annually with the county agricultural commissioner, clearly mark hives with name, address and phone number, and notify the county within 72 hours of hive relocation.

Freeman said BeeWhere will not prevent theft, but it will allow law enforcement and the California Department of Food and Agriculture "to keep track of where hives are." He added, "If they find hives in a location that aren't registered, it gives them a reason to look into it a little bit more."

Tauzer Apiaries announced a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the recovery of the missing hives. CSBA offers up to \$10,000 for information that leads to the arrest and conviction of persons responsible for stealing bees and/or beekeeping equipment; information may be sent to calstatebeekeepers@agamsi.com.

California and out-of-state beekeepers move some 2.5 million honeybee colonies to pollinate the state's 1.3 million bearing acres of almond trees before bloom in late February. California beekeepers supply about 500,000 honeybee colonies, and the remainder is trucked in from out of state.



California Law Requires Beekeepers to Register Bees.

BeeWhere is a real-time mapping system where users can mark hives with a simple pin drop in the field.

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DID YOU KNOW FEBRUARY IS NATIONAL CHERRY MONTH

Since the cherry trees come to life in February, it's the perfect time for National Cherry Month! Throughout Washington D.C., the cherry blossoms burst to life just in time for the National Cherry Blossom Festival.

This annual event began in 1912. The people of Japan sent 3,000 cherry trees as a gift to the United States as a symbol of friendship between the two nations. A single cherry looks a bit like a little heart, and February is the month of love. Since Presidents Day is February and one particular president is paired with chopping down a cherry tree – folklore or not – February and cherries just go together.

In the United States, Washington, California, and Oregon produce the most cherries. This bright red fruit offers many benefits, too. Visit <https://nationaldaycalendar.com>

- Drinking tart cherry juice reduces the risk and lessens the symptoms of gout.
- A 1 cup serving of cherries contains 97 calories, 3 grams of fiber, and is packed with vitamin C, potassium, copper, and manganese.
- Eating cherries may help reduce inflammation in conditions like arthritis.
- They may also lower blood pressure and improve heart health thanks to the potassium they contain.

Besides all the health benefits, cherries just taste good. Eat them raw or add them to baked goods.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS



The next Board meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 9, 2022. More details will be announced at a later date.

Food and Farm News

Courtesy of CFBF

Citrus farmers face rising costs, smaller harvests

California citrus growers are facing increasing costs for bringing their crops to market. The California Citrus Mutual trade association says farmers are facing price increases in water, labor, fertilizer, pesticides and transportation. Amid drought and pandemic-related supply-chain challenges, 4% of last season's citrus crop was neither picked nor sold. This year, a down-year growing cycle, the navel crop is expected to drop by 20% and mandarins by as much as 45%.

Output drops for processing-tomato farmers amid challenges

California's anticipated tomato production shrank last year due to water shortages and higher production costs, farmers say. Some processing-tomato growers who once paid \$3,000 per acre on their crop say they're paying more than \$4,000. Last year, state processors intended to contract for 12.1 million tons of tomatoes. By the end of harvest, that figure had dropped by 1.3 million tons, as farmers adjusted production forecasts downward.

Feed costs, pandemic, drought impact dairy farmers

California dairy farmers may be earning a higher market price for their milk these days, but they're paying more to produce it. Water restrictions have caused the price of local feed to spike, as more growers reduce plantings of crops such as alfalfa hay and silage. Dairies around the nation also face challenges with rising production costs and market uncertainties due to the pandemic, which have led to a slowing of milk production in the U.S.

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