

Riverside County AGRICULTURE

The official publication of Riverside County Farm Bureau, Inc.
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.

MEET YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dr. Marlene Salazar Pongs, DDS



In our continuing series that introduces you to the Riverside County Farm Bureau's (RCFB) Board of Directors, we are delighted to feature Dr. Marlene Salazar Pongs, DDS. Returning as a newly elected Director, Dr. Salazar Pongs previously served on the Board from 2009 to 2015. Her deep connections to the agricultural community and her dedication to land stewardship make her a valuable asset to the RCFB.

A Legacy of Farming

Dr. Salazar Pongs hails from a family with very long roots in San Bernardino, Riverside, and Santa

Barbara Counties of California. Her paternal ancestors, the Salazar family, were among the first settlers of the Agua Mansa settlement, alongside the notable Bandini family. These pioneering families received land parcels and engaged in shepherding and livestock farming between New Mexico and Southern California. On her maternal side, Marlene's family managed vineyards for the Barton family in Loma Linda, further cementing their agricultural legacy.

Passion for the Land

Growing up farming in the Colton area, Marlene developed a profound appreciation for the land. Today, she and her husband, Carl, own and operate a thriving wholesale nursery in the Greenbelt District of Riverside. Marlene emphasizes the importance of maintaining the benefits of the land within the community, expressing her passion for land stewardship and instilling this love in her children. She proudly states, "I'm happy to be a part of the Riverside County Farm Bureau because it is a grassroots organization."

A Compassionate Dentist

In addition to her agricultural pursuits, Dr. Salazar Pongs excels in her career as a dentist. With 30 years of experience, she is known for her compassion and commitment to her patients. Her dedication to her profession is evident in her long-standing relationships with those she serves.

Family Life

Marlene and Carl are proud parents of four adult children, aged 29, 28, 25, and 21. The values of hard work and community service are clearly reflected in their family life, underscoring the significance of their contributions to the agricultural and local communities.

We are thrilled to have Dr. Marlene Salazar Pongs rejoin the Board and look forward to her continued positive impact on the Riverside County Farm Bureau. Stay tuned for next month's highlight of another dedicated Board member!

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Western Growers Hosts Ag TechX Education Event at College of the Desert



At the end of March, Western Growers Center for Innovation & Technology, with support from California Women for Agriculture (Coachella Valley Chapter) and the Riverside County Farm Bureau, hosted an exciting two-day Ag TechX Education event aimed at bridging the gap between agriculture and education. The event brought together local leaders, educators, and industry professionals to explore the future of farming and the important role that education plays in preparing the next generation of agricultural professionals.

Held at College of the Desert, Indio Campus, the first day featured engaging panel discussions where speakers emphasized the importance of classroom-field collaboration. Panelists shared how real-world experience and hands-on learning are vital to helping students understand the possibility of careers in agriculture.



The second day offered a more immersive experience as 75 students from Coachella Valley and Indio High School took part in field tours that brought agriculture to life. Their journey included stops at Peter Rabbit Farms, Olson Engineering, West Coast Turf, and Prime Time International's farm shop and pepper packinghouse. From exploring carrot fields and turf operations to witnessing farm equipment maintenance and tech-driven ag innovation, students were introduced to the varied and growing opportunities within the agricultural sector. They talked directly with farmers, engineers, accountants, mechanics, fabricators, and ag tech professionals—showcasing the multitude of roles

that go far beyond traditional fieldwork.

“This was a special day,” shared Indio High School ag instructor Mamie Powell. “It really helped my students see what their futures can look like.”



Today's agriculture industry is rapidly evolving, creating a growing need for tech-savvy professionals. The integration of technology is transforming the field, opening up careers in drone operation, precision irrigation, data analytics, ag software development, robotics, automation, and GIS mapping. These roles blend science, technology, and problem-solving—making them ideal for students passionate about STEM and food security.

For the Indio High School students, this was more than just a field trip—it was an eye-opening exploration of careers they hadn't previously considered.

Teachers noted the visit sparked enthusiastic conversations about college and career planning, while students expressed genuine interest in pursuing pathways in agriculture.

Events like Ag TechX Education are a powerful tool for cultivating student curiosity and building a strong talent pipeline for California's ag industry. These collaborations reflect the commitment of Coachella Valley's agricultural and education communities to developing the future workforce and ensuring students are prepared to lead and innovate.



This event also spotlights the groundbreaking efforts of Carrie Peterson and the Next Gen Ag Workers Program. Peterson launched the initiative by identifying critical skill gaps between agricultural needs and current workforce capabilities. She has collaborated with 10 California Community Colleges to implement updated agricultural curriculum aligning with industry demands.

Interested in Supporting the Next Generation of Ag Professionals? Contact Carrie Peterson at (209) 602-4288 and learn about hosting an intern through the Next Gen Ag Workers Program.



Summit to showcase California agritourism best practices, May 14-15

Ag producers, other stakeholders invited to register for event in San Diego County

Given market fluctuations and climate volatility, many agricultural producers are seeking additional sources of farm-related revenue to pay their bills. Agritourism is one avenue, and it could take the form of offering event venue space, on-farm educational tours and classes, or experiences to work on a farm or ranch.

On May 14-15, 2025, the California Agritourism Summit will provide farmers, ranchers and other key stakeholders a unique opportunity to explore agritourism ventures and develop productive partnerships. Interested parties are encouraged to register by April 30 for this gathering in San Diego County.

The event will feature practical tools to start or expand an agritourism business, expert panels, roundtable discussions, presentations, networking opportunities and tours of successful agritourism operations. The summit is organized by the University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SAREP) and UC Cooperative Extension in San Diego County.

"This is an exciting time for agritourism in California – in 2025, California Jobs First and Visit California both released plans in which the majority of regions across the state specifically identified agritourism as a priority area for economic and tourism development," said Rachael Callahan, statewide agritourism coordinator for UC Agriculture and Natural Resources and SAREP.

"With a legacy of on-the-ground agritourism efforts and this recent recognition of agritourism's importance at the state level, the summit is an important opportunity to bring everyone together to begin shaping a collective future of agritourism in California," Callahan added.

She noted that representatives from producer and community-based organizations, state and local governments, and destination marketing organizations are all encouraged to attend – as well as tourism and economic development professionals.

The second day of the summit begins with a panel featuring Karen Ross, secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture; Caroline Beteta, president and CEO of Visit California; Paul Towers, executive director of Community Alliance with Family Farmers; and leadership of the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz).

"The summit will not only highlight the diversity and creativity of local agritourism but also spark conversations about how tourism organizations can better support and showcase these experiences across California," said Darlene Ruiz, one of the summit organizers at the UC Cooperative Extension office in San Diego County. "It's an opportunity to foster partnerships that strengthen both local economies and community pride."

The first day of the summit comprises tours of exemplary agritourism businesses in the area, and culminates in a special evening reception, hosted by California Grown, at The Flower Fields at Carlsbad Ranch.

"UC Cooperative Extension values the partnerships developed over the years with agritourism businesses throughout the region," said Jan Gonzales, community education supervisor with UCCE in San Diego County. "We're excited to coordinate with several of them and share with summit participants some of the diverse agritourism industry in our county."

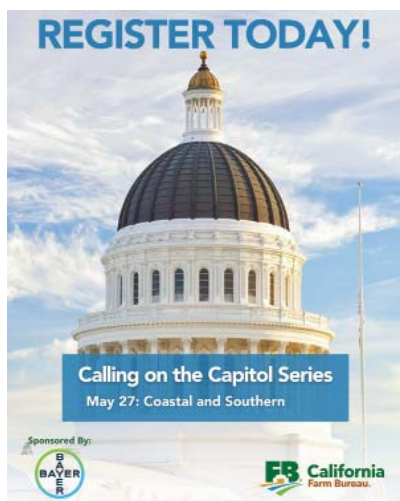
Register for the California Agritourism Summit at <https://bit.ly/2025CAAgTourismSummit>.

Businesses interested in supporting the summit can learn more here: <https://na.eventscloud.com/website/83086/becomeasupporter/>.

Funding for the California Agritourism Summit was made possible, in part, by a grant agreement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Services and supported by USDA/National Institute of Food and Agriculture under Award number 2023-70027-40445.



This lavender garden tour is an example of an agritourism venture that can help agricultural producers in California diversify their revenue streams to better weather climate and market volatility. Photo by Rachael Callahan



CALLING ON THE CAPITOL

California Farm Bureau is making it easier than ever for members to engage in the policy process. Every Tuesday in May 2025, we're hosting regional and legislative visits in Sacramento—giving you the chance to make your voice heard.

Join us at the Capitol on Tuesday, May 27, for the final stop in our Calling on the Capitol Series. We'll meet with lawmakers to discuss key agricultural issues and advocate for policies supporting our farms and ranches.

Who's invited? Members from Imperial, Kern, Los Angeles, Monterey, Orange, Riverside, San Benito, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Tulare, and Ventura counties.

Make your voice heard! Secure your spot today. The deadline to register is May 9. Register today at cxfb.com/capitol



Jaylah Coulter Reflects on FFA State Officer Candidacy and Bright Future in Agriculture

Perris FFA’s own Jaylah Coulter recently took part in the highly competitive California FFA State Officer selection process, where more than 60 candidates from across the state vied for one of 12 prestigious positions. While Jaylah did not advance to the final slate of candidates, she proudly made it into the top 34 and had the opportunity to introduce herself on stage, engage with industry professionals, and connect with fellow student leaders.

“This experience was truly one-of-a-kind,” said Jaylah. “From intensive interview rounds to professional panels, it helped me reflect deeply on my time in the blue jacket and who I’ve become through FFA. Even though I didn’t ‘win,’ I gained something far more valuable—confidence, growth, and clarity about my future.”

Currently studying elementary education at UC San Diego, Jaylah shared that this experience rekindled her passion for agriculture and helped her decide to transfer to Chico State to pursue a degree in Agribusiness with an emphasis on agricultural sales and marketing. She also plans to stay involved in the industry by working at livestock shows throughout the summer and looks forward to earning her American FFA Degree this fall.

“I’m incredibly grateful for everyone who supported me during this process,” she added. “I especially want to thank Miss Rachael Johnson and those who shared their time and knowledge with me. I feel so blessed to have had such great resources and mentors along the way.”

Jaylah’s journey reminds us that leadership isn’t just about titles—it’s about growth, resilience, and staying connected to your roots. We’re proud of her accomplishments and can’t wait to see where her ag career takes her next!

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SENATE BILL 628

OVERTIME TAX CREDIT BILL A PLUS FOR FARMERS, WORKERS



In 2016, the California Legislature revised overtime rules for agricultural employees, prompting warnings from the California Farm Bureau about negative impacts on employees, families, and rural communities, which have since become reality.

For decades, agricultural employees earned overtime for working over 10 hours in a day, up to six days a week, due to the seasonal nature of their work. They need to maximize their hours during peak seasons to compensate for periods without work after harvest and in winter.

Dr. Alexandra Hill from UC Berkeley found in 2023 that changes to agricultural overtime rules led to reduced weekly working hours and earnings for employees, confirming warnings from 2016 about the potential impact.

The cost for agricultural employers in California for each hour worked beyond eight hours a day or 40 hours a week has increased by 50%. This rise in labor costs cannot be offset by simply raising market prices for their produce. Consequently, employers are seeking to manage their production costs in areas they can control, as they have limited influence over expenses for fuel, fertilizers, and other essential inputs.

Senate Bill 628, introduced by Sen. Shannon Grove, reimburses California agricultural employers for overtime premium wages by allowing them to claim a credit against state payroll taxes. This tax credit does not benefit employers financially, as it is only available after they have already paid employees for both overtime and regular hours.

Every tax credit claimed by agricultural employers directly benefits employees, providing millions for essentials like gas, groceries, clothing, and utilities. This financial support will support struggling rural communities in California.

California farm employees report that the 2016 overtime policy change limited their work and earnings. They communicate this to the Farm Bureau members who employ them daily. SB 628 is a practical solution that aims to provide farmworkers with more opportunities to earn and support their families and communities.

In Sacramento, policymakers emphasize affordability for living, working, and starting businesses in California. However, farming in the state is challenging and expensive, making it hard for California farmers to compete with producers from other states and countries.

For nearly 20 years, researchers at California Polytechnic State University have monitored food production costs in California. They found that a lettuce producer in Monterey County has seen regulatory compliance costs rise by 63.7% since 2017 and 1366% since 2006, now totaling \$1,600 per acre (12.6% of production costs). In contrast, the value of their lettuce increased only 0.37% from 2017 to 2024.

To sustain food production in California while maintaining high labor, occupational safety, and food safety standards, the current situation is unsustainable.

SB 628 allows California farmers to provide more financial support to the essential workers who grow food for the state and beyond.

The California Legislature can enhance sustainability in agriculture, benefiting employees' families and rural communities, ensuring California remains a leading agricultural hub for future generations.

Stay updated at cbbf.com/sb628



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2025 FARM DOG OF THE YEAR CONTEST IS NOW OPEN

Enter For A Chance to
Win Cash Prizes!



The "Farm Dog of the Year" contest, hosted by the California Farm Bureau in collaboration with Nationwide, is an annual event celebrating the hardworking farm dogs across the state. The campaign invites farm dog owners to showcase their loyal companions and their contributions to farm life. Participants can submit photos, stories, and videos highlighting their farm dogs' skills, dedication, and unique personalities.

The contest emphasizes the special bond between farmers and their dogs, showcasing how these four-legged friends play a vital role in agriculture. Winners receive recognition and a cash prize of \$1,000, making it a fun and rewarding opportunity for farm dog enthusiasts to share their love and appreciation for their furry companions.

Grand Prize \$1,000

1st Runner-Up \$500

2nd Runner-Up \$250

3rd Runner-Up \$100

APRIL 14 – JUNE 27, 2025

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS



May 14, 2025 ~ 5:30 PM, Riverside County Farm Bureau Board of Directors meeting. In person at Farm Bureau Office, Moreno Valley and via Zoom Conference. Please call our office at (951) 684-6732 for more information.

Food and Farm News

Courtesy of CFBF

California dairies make progress in cutting emissions

At their current pace, California dairy farmers are expected to meet the state's goal for reducing methane emissions from their farms ahead of schedule. Though methane digesters are often credited for doing most of the heavy lifting, California dairy farmers have been implementing other technologies and conservation practices that help them move the needle toward sustainability. An analysis by researchers at the University of California, Davis, shows that incentive-based programs that drive voluntary efforts by dairy farmers should by 2030 achieve the 40% dairy methane reduction that state lawmakers called for without the need for more regulations.

Researcher develops tool to deter spread of bird flu on farms

Maurice Pitesky, University of California Cooperative Extension poultry specialist, has developed a Waterfowl Alert Network to provide data to farmers and agricultural agency staff about the locations of waterfowl roosting and feeding. Pitesky developed the tool to help poultry and dairy farmers limit contact with the migrating birds, as they can carry the virus that causes bird flu. The network uses data from satellites, weather radar and land-based environmental sensors. "One thing we need to consider in the medium- to long-term is the concept of waterfowl habitat shifting away from food animal production," he said.

Easter lily producers prepare to ship flowers for spring holiday

California's Easter lily producers are gearing up to ship flowers for the holiday, with deliveries expected to start around April 7, ahead of Easter on April 20. Rob Miller, a nursery operator in Del Norte County, the nation's Easter lily capital, explained that Easter lilies naturally bloom in the summer to make lilies bloom in time for Easter, growers must manipulate greenhouse temperatures. Warmer temperatures force earlier blooms, while cooler temperatures can delay them.