

# Riverside County AGRICULTURE

The official publication of Riverside County Farm Bureau, Inc.  
A private, nonprofit organization serving farmers throughout Riverside County since 1917

Our 79th Year of Publication: Volume LXXIX, Number 2, February 2025.



Photo by Lucinda Hershberger on Unsplash.com

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## **Welcome New Members**

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

## **Riverside County Fair & National Date Festival Returns for 13 Days**

The Riverside County Fair and National Date Festival is back, bringing 13 days of family fun, entertainment, and delicious date treats! Held annually at the Riverside County Fairgrounds in Indio, this beloved event showcases a variety of activities, live performances, carnival rides, and, of course, the celebrated Medjool dates.



This year, the festival kicks off on Thursday, February 13, and runs through Sunday, March 2, on select days. Whether you're a longtime visitor or experiencing it for the first time, there's something for everyone to enjoy.

Don't miss out on this exciting tradition—mark your calendars and get ready for a sweet time! National Date Festival 46350 Arabia St., Indio [www.datefest.org](http://www.datefest.org)

## **2024-25 Agricultural Vehicle, Equipment, and Infrastructure Survey**

The Air Resources Board (CARB) and California Energy Commission are working along with California Farm Bureau on 2025 Agricultural Vehicle, Equipment, and Infrastructure Survey. This survey will continue to support incentive programs, air quality planning efforts at CARB, and can help inform energy and infrastructure planning at CEC and CPUC for future electrification needs across the state.



The 2025 agricultural survey covers all on-road vehicles and off-road (mobile) agricultural equipment of all fuel types, including electric equipment, used by producers in the field, custom operators, and first processing facilities.

Receiving accurate and representative data across the state and from different commodities is incredibly critical to painting the right picture for CARB and others about energy needs. The data will be modeled by the Energy Commission and then used by utilities for future planning around grid upgrades.

Be prepared the survey will take approximately 30 minutes and requires input of your equipment, etc. Results from the previous survey informed the distribution of hundreds of millions of dollars of subsequent incentive funding across California, including state, federal and regional incentive programs.

As before, all of the data is anonymous and confidential, and identifying information will never be seen by a government body. A Spanish version of the survey will be available in January. The survey will be open until February 21, 2025. Go to [https://calpolycafes.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_bEJ6KsCwxHuo1P8?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://calpolycafes.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bEJ6KsCwxHuo1P8?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

# Assemblymembers Greg Wallis and Jeff Gonzalez Introduce President Ellen Way on the Capitol Floor



Photo L-R: Josh Pickering, Mary Pickering, RCFB President Ellen Way, and Assemblymember Greg Wallis.

Sacramento, CA – On Monday, February 3rd, Assemblymembers Greg Wallis (R – Rancho Mirage) and Jeff Gonzalez (R – Coachella) had the honor of welcoming Riverside County Farm Bureau President Ellen Way to the Capitol. President Way was recognized for her leadership and dedication to the region’s agricultural community, which plays a vital role in the economy.

In addition to introducing President Way, Assemblymember Wallis also had the privilege of welcoming Josh and Mary Pickering of Pickering Events. The Pickering’s are now overseeing the operations of the Riverside County Fair and National Date Festival, an event that celebrates the region’s rich agricultural heritage. Riverside County is responsible for producing approximately 75% of the nation’s date fruit, making this festival a vital tradition in the community.

The introductions highlighted the significance of both leadership and community, showcasing the ongoing efforts to support regional traditions and economic growth.

## Cal/OSHA Initiates Regulatory Process on Workplace Violence

The California Legislature passed SB 553 The California Legislature passed SB 553 (Cortese) in 2023, mandating virtually all California employers to adopt complex and detailed plans for preventing workplace violence and protecting those in the workplace from violence and threats of violence. The Legislature also mandated that the state’s workplace safety agency, Cal/OSHA, propose additional workplace violence prevention regulations by December 31, 2025.

The agency kicked off that regulatory effort with an online stakeholders meeting on January 24. The agency’s initial draft imposes even broader mandates than SB 553, including a requirement that employers furnish post-event trauma counseling that arguably would be more effectively furnished as a compensation benefit for injured workers. This is important because, while workers’ compensation is already a significant cost item for California employers, the workers’ compensation system has the benefit of providing no-fault coverage for employees’ treatment and lost wages.

## FARM TEAM ALERT



## Don't Let Fish and Game Take Away Tools to Protect Farmers and Ranchers

Fish and Game Commissioners are considering removing coyotes from a section of code that allows for their take regardless of the situation. This tool gives farmers and ranchers the ability protect their livestock and crops before there is an incident.

The item was not noticed on the meeting agenda correctly and did not encourage proper public participation from those affected. Even now, as consideration of the item is scheduled for February 12 at the next Commission meeting, there is no mention of the removal of coyotes from the code section.

Every coyote is a potential threat to life and property. The current code section, as written, gives farmers and ranchers a tool that if lost will continue the state’s mantra of making it harder to farm and ranch in California.

According to Fish and Game data, we know that the human-coyote conflict is increasing. We need to keep a control mindset rather than removing tools that mitigate the conflict.

The Department staff is already having enough trouble meeting the basic functions of the department. Commissioners and staff know they are overworked and resources are scarce and this will only increase their workload.

Go to <https://cxbf.quorum.us/campaign/109372/> to fill out the form and ask Fish and Game Commissioners to send the item back to the Wildlife Resources Committee for more analysis.

# California Farm Bureau stands with agricultural workers and farmers, calls for workforce stability amid reported concerns

Sacramento, CA – While there have been news reports of unease among some farm employees, the California Farm Bureau has been in contact with numerous farmers across the state and has not heard of any widespread workforce disruption.

Bryan Little, senior director of policy advocacy at the California Farm Bureau, which represents more than 26,000 farm and ranch families in the state, clarified that while concerns exist, farmers are continuing operations. While it's unclear if all farms are fully operational, Farm Bureau has not received reports indicating otherwise, and efforts are always underway to ensure workforce stability.

"We recognize that some workers may feel uncertain right now, and we want to be very clear: California agriculture depends on and values its workforce," Little said. "Farm employees are not just workers—they are partners in this industry. They are people with families, dreams, and an incredible work ethic that keeps food on tables across America. We understand the uncertainty some might feel right now, and we want to be absolutely clear: California's farmers stand with you. We respect you. We value you. And we will do everything in our power to ensure that agriculture remains a place where you are safe and supported."

With one-third of the nation's agricultural workforce located in California, farm employees play an indispensable role in food production. These skilled workers plant, cultivate, and harvest the crops that make California the leading producer of fruits, vegetables, and nuts in the United States.

"Without these employees, crops would go unharvested, rural businesses would suffer, and food prices could rise for families across the country," Little said. "This is not just a farm issue—it's a food security issue, an economic issue, and a community issue."

The interdependence of agriculture and rural economies is without question, according to Little. Thousands of employees in ag-adjacent industries—including food processing, transportation, and equipment suppliers—depend on the steady flow of agricultural work to sustain their livelihoods.

Little addressed the urgent need for immigration policy reform, noting that California's agricultural workforce challenges are not new.

"Farmers and ranchers have struggled with chronic labor shortages for years, and uncertainty surrounding immigration policy only exacerbates the problem," he said. "California's farmers and ranchers are ready to work with the administration and Congress to advance real, bipartisan workforce reforms this year," Little said. "This isn't just about filling jobs—it's about ensuring security and stability for the agricultural workforce and the farmers who depend on them."

## **To provide a long-term solution, Little outlined three key priorities for workforce reform:**

- Modernizing the H-2A agricultural visa program to make it more flexible and responsive to the labor needs of farmers and ranchers.
- Providing earned legal status for current agricultural workers, recognizing their longstanding contributions to U.S. food production.
- Crafting immigration policies that reflect the reality of agriculture in a diverse state like California, where workforce stability is essential to feeding the nation.

While supporting lawful immigration policies, the Farm Bureau cautioned against indiscriminate enforcement actions that do not account for workforce stability.

"We need policies that offer real solutions, rather than uncertainty," Little said. "It's like pulling the foundation out from under a house. If we want a strong agricultural economy and a secure food supply, we need solutions that reflect the reality of farming—not blanket enforcement measures that put the entire agricultural system at risk."

Little said the California Farm Bureau remains in close contact with worker advocates, policymakers, and agricultural leaders to monitor any reports of workforce disruption and to help ensure that California's farms continue to function smoothly during all of California's upcoming harvest periods.

"California Farm Bureau will continue to advocate for practical, compassionate solutions that protect our workforce, stabilize our industry, and secure America's food supply," Little said. "California agriculture is strong, and our message to farm employees is simple. You are essential. You are valued. And farmers will continue to stand with you. As harvest season approaches in key growing areas, we will do everything in our power to ensure a stable and secure workforce, a dependable food supply, and a strong agricultural economy for the future."

# KILLING H5N1 IN WASTE MILK — AN ALTERNATIVE TO PASTEURIZATION

## Milk Acidification Provides Easy Way for Dairy Farms to Contain Bird Flu Virus

By Amy Quinton | February 13, 2025

Pasteurization is the only widely recognized method of killing H5N1, the virus that causes bird flu, in milk. However, pasteurization can be expensive and fewer than 50% of large dairy farms pasteurize waste milk.

Waste milk includes colostrum, the first milk after calving; milk from cows treated with antibiotics or other drugs; or any other factor that can make milk unsuitable and unsellable for human consumption. On farms, raw waste milk poses a potential risk of spreading avian flu, which so far has been confirmed in dairy cattle in 16 states.

University of California, Davis, researchers have found that acidification can kill H5N1 in waste milk, providing dairy farmers an affordable, easy-to-use alternative to pasteurization of waste milk. The Journal of Dairy Science published the study.

“There can be a quite significant cost to have pasteurization as an option on the farm,” said co-corresponding author and veterinary epidemiologist Richard Van Vleck Pereira, with the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. “In our laboratory tests, we found that acidifying milk to a pH of 4.1 to 4.2 with citric acid effectively deactivates the virus.”

The UC Davis research team will next conduct on-farm testing of milk acidification in waste milk containing H5N1. They will develop practical guidelines for farmers to implement acidification of waste milk as a protocol on the farm.

### A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION

Pereira said citric acid is inexpensive. Acidified waste milk is also safe to be used to feed pre-weaned calves. The acidification process takes only six hours to fully kill the virus and doesn't require refrigeration, further reducing costs and increasing safety of farm workers handling milk.

Hobby farmers milking one or two cows or large commercial dairy farms could implement milk acidification without having to invest in large equipment.

“When we started this project, we were carefully thinking about not just deactivating the virus but developing a method that could be affordable, accessible and sustainable for farmers to use,” he said.

Some U.S. dairy farms already practice milk acidification. Lowering milk pH to a level unsuitable for bacterial growth can kill bad bugs and prevent contamination without causing health issues in calves.

“We believe acidification is a novel and effective way to contain the spread of H5N1 on dairy farms and help protect livestock, pets and people,” Periera said.

Other authors of the study include Beate Crossley and Daniel Rejmanek from the California Animal Health and Food Safety Lab at UC Davis, along with Craig Miramontes and Rodrigo Gallardo with the Department of Population Health and Reproduction at the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture and the United States Department of Agriculture funded the research.



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# SUPPORTING R’GARDEN AT UCR



Photo L-R: RCFB President Ellen Way, Agricultural Commissioner Delia Cioc, Assistant Ag Commissioner Misael Martinez, UCR Garden Supervisor and RCFB Board Member Richard Zapien, and Oscar.

At the beginning of February, RCFB President Ellen Way, Riverside County Agricultural Commissioner Delia Cioc, and Assistant Agricultural Commissioner Misael Martinez had the opportunity to visit R’Garden at the University of California, Riverside (UCR). They were welcomed by UCR Garden Supervisor Richard Zapien a dedicated advocate for supporting the UCR students that benefit from this community-based urban farming project.

R’Garden serves as an innovative space for students, researchers, and community members to engage in hands-on agricultural practices. It plays a crucial role in fostering education and food security for UCR students. Students hold community events at the garden because it provides a valuable setting for agricultural learning and outreach.

Row crops are grown with educational outreach in collaboration with North High School. Future Farmers of America (FFA) students visit the farm once a week, where they have the opportunity to plant crops, learn about irrigation, pest management, weed control, and observe crop growth.

Crops that are harvested are reserved for students, providing fresh produce to both students and local food banks.

President Ellen Way, Commissioner Delia Cioc, and Assistant Commissioner Misael Martinez engaged in thoughtful discussions about expanding agricultural awareness and supporting innovative programs like R’Garden. Their visit highlighted the growing importance of urban agriculture as a tool for addressing food insecurity and educating future generations about agriculture.



Photo L-R: Assistant Ag Commissioner Misael Martinez, Agricultural Commissioner Delia Cioc, RCFB Executive Director Rachael Johnson (in Tractor), UCR Garden Supervisor and RCFB Board Member Richard Zapien, and RCFB President Ellen Way.

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The official publication of Riverside County Farm Bureau, Inc.



## “Farm Bureau Working for You”



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS



### Pesticide Safety Instructor Training VIRTUAL Workshops 2025

Update your knowledge of changing regulations!

The Train the Trainer workshop is designed to qualify participants to train fieldworkers and pesticide handlers in accordance with California pesticide regulations. The workshop covers the following topics: updates to handler training, pesticide exposure, signs and symptoms of pesticide-related illnesses, emergency medical care procedures, the proper use of personal protective equipment, safe handling and transportation of pesticides, as well as laws and regulations concerning labels and safety data sheets.

#### Who Should Attend?

- Ag supervisors • Growers • Farm Labor Contractors • Safety Managers/Coordinators
- Lab Managers, Pls who conduct field research • Safety Trainers

#### ENGLISH

|        |        |
|--------|--------|
| FEB 11 | MAR 11 |
| APR 15 | MAY 13 |
| AUG 12 | SEP 9  |
| OCT 14 | NOV 4  |

#### SPANISH

|        |        |
|--------|--------|
| FEB 25 | MAR 25 |
| APR 29 | MAY 27 |
| AUG 26 | SEP 23 |
| OCT 28 | NOV 14 |

6.5 L&R Continuing Education Units-pending

Registration closes one week before workshop

Please use link for online registration:

<https://surveys.ucanr.edu/survey.cfm?surveynumber=45372>

Questions

Contact us by email at [psep@ucanr.edu](mailto:psep@ucanr.edu)

March 12, 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

### Dairies decry draft waste discharge rules

To reduce nitrates and ensure that people have access to safe drinking water, the state has proposed tighter water quality requirements for all California dairies that collect dairy waste and apply it to land. The draft order, if adopted as proposed, establishes new precedential groundwater quality protection requirements that would apply to all California dairies that apply their dairy waste to land, said Kari Fisher, senior director and counsel of legal advocacy at the California Farm Bureau.

### California drops ‘Clean Fleets’ rule phasing out diesel trucks

California has dropped its landmark rule that would have phased out nearly all diesel trucks in the coming years, the California Air Resources Board announced earlier this month. The “first-in-the-world” rule, called Advanced Clean Fleets, was adopted in 2023 and was set to phase out the sale of new medium- and heavy-duty diesel trucks, including the big rigs that transport many agricultural products. State officials said this month they will not pursue that rule or another clean trucking rule after the Biden administration’s Environmental Protection Agency failed to approve waivers for them before President Donald Trump took office.

### Researchers study pesto profitability for small-scale basil growers

A team of University of California Cooperative Extension advisors at the UC South Coast Research and Extension Center grew seven basil varieties last year as part of a study to explore whether producing pesto could provide a useful revenue stream for small-scale growers. “The rationale was to provide a high-value crop and a value-added solution for urban horticulture, transforming a highly perishable product into something that can be conserved,” said Gerardo Spinelli, UCCE production horticulture advisor for San Diego County, who initiated the project.

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