

Notes from the CEO

By John Krist

As we announced May 18 at Farm Bureau's annual meeting, incumbents Brian Benchwick, Scott Klittich, David Schwabauer and William Terry were all re-elected to new three-year terms during this year's Board of Directors election.

It was a strong field of candidates, with Monica Houweling and Melinda Beardsley Wiseman also on the ballot.

The FRP [Farmworker Resource Program] proposal is an outgrowth of a series of meetings ... [initiated] out of concern about the increasingly vituperative tone of attacks leveled against the agricultural community by advocacy groups over the past two years.

Monica is product manager at Houweling's Group, a family owned greenhouse tomato grower with operations in Camarillo, Utah and Canada. Melinda is vice president of sales and operations for Beardsley & Son, Inc. a family-owned fertilizer dealer specializing in conventional and organic fertilizers, custom blending and tractor application.

Farm Bureau cannot have credible elections unless it has more candidates than seats, and it would be impossible for us to meet that obligation without the willingness of industry leaders such as Monica and Melinda to step forward. We're grateful they

agreed to do so, and we look forward to seeing them serve the organization in a leadership capacity in the future.

County to launch Farmworker Resource Program

Despite opposition by agricultural organizations in Ventura County, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors voted June 6 to establish a Farmworker Resource Program (FRP), and to allocate up to \$200,000 in the 2017-2018 budget to fund it.

The proposal was brought forward by supervisors Steve Bennett and John Zaragoza, and was the culmination of a process begun nearly a year earlier. In July 2016, after months of pressure by labor advocacy groups – which alleged widespread mistreatment of farm employees and demanded county adoption of a controversial

"Farmworker Bill of Rights" as the remedy – the supervisors convened a fact-finding workshop.

During that session, it became clear that there was little if any factual evidence to support the advocacy group's claims, and that state and federal regulatory agen-

cies provided a wide range of support services for workers seeking help enforcing their legal rights. It also became clear, however, that navigating the bureaucratic maze is confusing and difficult. One of the objectives of the FRP is to simplify that for local farm employees.

The FRP proposal is also an outgrowth of a series of meetings involving a small group of growers, and representatives of Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE) and the Mixteco Indigenous Community Organizing Project (MICOP). Those discussions were initiated by Reiter Affiliated Companies, out of concern about the increasingly vituperative tone of attacks leveled against the agricultural community by advocacy groups over the past two years, and by frustration over the fundamental misunderstanding and frequent misrepresentation of industry practices often embodied in those allegations.

Over the following months, representatives of MICOP and CAUSE met with a core group of growers: Ellen Brokaw, president of Brokaw Ranch Co.; Yissel Barajas, chief human resources officer for Reiter Affiliated Companies; and Dave Murray, with Good Farms/Andrew & Williamson Fresh Produce. Calling themselves "The Miracle Group" – a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement that it would be a miracle if they could agree on anything – they met numerous times, trying to overcome mistrust, correct misunderstandings, resolve conflicts and identify common objectives.

Among their early accomplishments was identifying a need for better training for front-line field supervisors and securing a pledge from the administration at Ventura College to develop a certificate program designed for that purpose. (The program, which will be rolled out this fall, was the subject of a piece in the March-April 2017 issue of this newsletter.)

To avoid having those delicate initial conversations trigger a backlash that might derail them before they'd had a chance to accomplish anything – a reasonable concern given the intensity of emotions surrounding allegations of widespread worker mistreatment – the group kept its meetings largely out of public view for several months.

Having made significant progress in identifying areas of common interest, the growers in the group began sharing information about their efforts with the wider agricultural community. But that outreach had barely begun when supervisors Bennett and Zaragoza abruptly dived back into the

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Don't fight it, bite it

By Ben Faber

Rain is unusual in that it germinates weed seeds and then the need to manage them in some fashion arises. Many subtropical tree growers do not like the potential impact of pre-emergent herbicides on tree growth due to potential damage to shallow roots. Lemon growers rely fairly heavily on the post-emergent glyphosate, especially since there are cheap generic versions available. I don't know of many avocado growers who use a pre-emergent, instead using the natural mulching effects of fallen leaves, introduced mulch, the natural shading of the canopies and glyphosate.

I am not aware of any field studies that have shown that pre-emergents can cause root damage or reduction of tree growth or yield. There are a number of registered chemicals with different modes of action, so one would expect to see more use as practiced in other tree crops, but there is a reluctance that is based on some possible damage to trees. So, a lot of glyphosate is used and to some extent another material, glufosinate, is also used in citrus.

One of the issues that has arisen with glyphosate use has been the resistance of some weed species to this material. There are some thirty-seven species of resistant weeds in the world. In California orchards, the biggies are hairy fleabane, horseweed and Johnson grass. Resistance means that you can spray the plants, even in their small stages, and there's little or no effect. A non-resistant species would just wither, turn yellow and die down to the roots.

There are always plants like horsetail or purslane which have a surface that does not absorb material very well. They appear to be

resistant, but aren't. Once you use the maximum dose, with a spreader-sticker or another adjuvant, the herbicide gets into the plant and it dies. Also, the key is timing, young plants being much more susceptible than bigger plants with a less absorptive surface.

This year, though, with all the rains, there've been calls about not just horseweed being tough to get, but also nutsedge. Nutsedge, as far as I know, has no documented resistance, but it does have a waxy surface that gets thicker with the age of the plant. With all the weeds, people have gotten behind and the weeds have gotten out of hand and the older plants are harder to spray out. It takes more tact to get at them when they get older.

Nutsedge also reproduces from swollen underground stems called tubers or "nuts". They aren't nuts - seeds - and some people mistake them for a grass, which they are not. They are a sedge. They reproduce primarily through the "nut" and they form lots of "nutlettes", each of which can form a new plant. If you pull the plant up and don't get all those nutlettes, you are actually increasing the number of plants that will form. It is tricky to deal with and a good thorough spraying can control them, if done at the right stage.

It turns out that these nuts are eaten by lots of animals - pigs, chickens, humans. In the South, pigs and chickens have been used to clear fields of nutsedge before planting rice. The presence of nutsedge around the world is quite likely due to humans having spread it around the world as a food - a poor person's nut.

So, this brings me to the title of this article. Why not grow it for sale? Intercrop it with lemon.

Drip irrigate the nutsedge separate from the trees and figure out the pesticide schedule and there's a new crop for sale. Foraging for malva, nettle, pursalane and other native plants has become a big deal in urban

agriculture. You see "wild plants" for sale in the farmers markets. Euell Gibbons has become not just fashionable but commercial. Kale has taken the country by storm. Who would have thought it?

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Notes from the CEO

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matter, placing on the May 16 board agenda a proposal to create two new county staff positions, to be housed in the Human Services Agency (HSA), "to develop and promote the reputation of Ventura County as a good place to work in agriculture, recruiting farmworkers to the area and responding to the needs of this vulnerable population to protect and advance their interest."

The agricultural community was taken by surprise - as were members of the Miracle Group, whose work was cited as the foundation of the board proposal - and reacted with alarm.

Under the proposal, a five-member advisory committee would have been established, composed of the county agricultural commissioner, growers and farmworker representatives, to "identify priorities, approaches and strategies." The job descriptions for the new positions would have been developed by HSA and Human Resources, with input from the advisory committee. The positions would have had no enforcement authority, but "would assist farmworkers in any complaint process, as well as providing referrals to social and health services."

This sounded ripe for abuse, the county providing dedicated staff that might be co-opted by the advocacy groups to ensnare agricultural employers in an endless series of complaint investigations, with or without cause. After an immediate outcry and opposition by the agricultural community - and a request from the Miracle Group to revise the proposal - the supervisors pulled the item from the agenda so it could be retooled.

The proposal on the June 6 agenda emerged from intense negotiations among members of the Miracle Group and discussion with the supervisors. The specific language about staffing and structure was dropped, replaced by the much more

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UC Statewide IPM Project
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Root system of
yellow nutsedge.

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conceptual reference to the FRP, and the makeup and role of the advisory committee was modified.

The program's objectives now, according to the board letter outlining the proposal, are "building trust and relationships with local farm workers, employers, advocates and related agencies; promoting Ventura County as a first-choice destination to work in agriculture and assist in attracting farmworkers to Ventura County; informing farmworkers about their existing labor protections; (providing) assistance in navigating public agencies; and seeking resolutions to workplace issues."

Developing a plan for achieving those goals will be up to an eight-member advisory committee, which will be charged with "the design, creation, monitoring and evaluation of the program." Farm Bureau was asked to choose four grower representatives for the committee, and MICOP was asked to choose four farm worker representatives.

After the FRP was approved, I consulted with Rob Roy of the Ventura County Agricultural Association, and we developed recommendations for presentation to the FBVC board. On June 15, FBVC directors agreed that three of the four grower seats on the advisory committee should be filled by Ellen Brokaw, Dave Murray and Yissel Barajas. As members of the Miracle Group they have already done much hard work building trust, addressing misconceptions and forging a collaborative spirit, and it makes sense to keep that team together as the effort enters this new phase. Joining them will be Danny Pereira, general manager of Rio Farms and first vice president of FBVC.

Although FBVC was unsuccessful in blocking the board's action – which we opposed on the grounds that the proposal was being pushed forward too quickly, had not been properly vetted by the agricultural community or by the supervisors' own Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee, and would invite abuse – we view it as a better alternative than the Farm Workers Bill of Rights the supervisors were being pressured to adopt at this time last year. And we are confident that the growers on the advisory committee will keep the interests of the agricultural community paramount while working to design a program that addresses legitimate needs of

the farm worker community.

We also support the general approach to problem-solving the Miracle Group has taken. As I said in my testimony to the Board of Supervisors during the June 6 public hearing, "we applaud the efforts of Ellen Brokaw, Dave Murray, Yissel Barajas and their counterparts from CAUSE and MICOP, who have been meeting for months to build bridges between the ag industry and labor advocacy groups. Although there will always be points of disagreement, we believe the community is best served when potential adversaries take the time to understand each other, identify common objectives, and base their positions on a shared understanding of the facts."

AWM research project bearing fruit

Since the Ventura County ACP-HLB Task Force began coordinating area-wide pesticide applications to suppress Asian citrus psyllid in early 2015, growers, pest-control advisors and applicators have questioned whether the strategy is working. Thanks to a research project undertaken by University of California entomologist Beth Grafton-Cardwell, we finally have an answer: a qualified Yes.

Effectiveness varies with the type of material and application method, as well as timing and other factors. But in most cases, she found, the AWM treatments are doing a good job of knocking ACP populations down to very low levels – particularly when broad-spectrum materials are used.

Beth presented the results of her project at a Task Force workshop on May 25. In case you missed it, her presentation – which explains how the project was designed and is being carried out – is available online at bit.ly/VC-AWM-docs. Open the folder named "Other AWM documents" to locate it and other materials related to the AWM program.

— *John Krist is chief executive officer of the Farm Bureau of Ventura County. Contact him at john@farmbureauvc.com.*

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Aquarium of the Pacific, Long Beach; Adult (12+ yrs) \$20.95 (save \$9); Child (3-11 yrs) \$15.95 (save \$2). *Valid thru 12/31/17. Closed 4/7-4/9 & 12/25/2017.*

Cinemark & Rave Theatres — All Cinemark, Century & Rave locations; Platinum Super Save Ticket. Valid any regular movie anytime. Regular price up to \$9.25 (save \$2.75). *Additional premiums may apply for specially priced films and/or events priced higher than normal box office. No expiration.*

Knott's Berry Farm — Buena Park. Adult (12+ yrs) \$42.50 (save \$32.50); Junior (3 to 11 yrs) or Seniors (62+ yrs) \$39.95 (save \$5.05). *Valid thru 12/31/2017.*

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San Diego Safari Park — Escondido. Adult (12+ yrs) \$45.00 (save \$7.00); Child (3 to 11 yrs) \$37.00 (save \$5.00). Includes Africa Tram, all shows and exhibits. *Valid thru 12/31/17.*

San Diego Sea World — Adult (10+ yrs) Single Day Ticket \$69.75 + get 2nd day free (save \$23.25). Child (3 to 9 yrs.) Single Day Ticket \$69.75 (savings \$17.25) + get 2nd Day Free. *Both visits valid thru 12/31/17.*

San Diego Zoo — Adult (12+ yrs) \$45.00 (save \$7.00); Child (3 to 11 yrs) \$37.00 (save \$5.00). *Valid thru 12/31/17.*

Six Flags Magic Mountain — Valencia. General admission (3yrs+) \$49.95 (save \$30.04). *Valid thru 09/17/2017*

See's Candy gift certificate — Valid at any See's Candy Shop in the U.S. One-pound candy gift certificate for \$16.45 (Save \$2.05). *No expiration.*

FARM BUREAU OF VENTURA COUNTY

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