

Notes from the CEO

By John Krist

Having completed just one season, hemp production in Ventura County is still an infant of the agricultural industry. Last month, the Board of Supervisors tried to smother it in its crib.

Industrial hemp is a promising crop here, with qualities that ought to make it easy for policy makers to embrace – especially those who, like our county supervisors, champion environmental sustainability and responsible resource conservation.

Constituent complaints about hemp cultivation may have presented a political threat to supervisors Long and Huber, but actual hemp posed no immediate physical threat to anyone.

Growers demonstrated in 2019 that hemp can be grown with less than half the water required by the vegetable crops it replaces, and with virtually no pesticides or herbicides. Workers in hemp production are paid a premium wage, compared to those tending most fruit and vegetable crops, owing to the

role of investors with socially conscious brands to protect. It produces a variety of high-value products sold into the burgeoning health and wellness consumer market.

So why did the Board of Supervisors vote 5-0 to impose a death sentence on it? Because some homeowners complained about the odor of neighboring hemp fields during the 2019 season. And rather than see if the conflict could be resolved voluntarily through facilitated discussions involving regulators, growers and residents, the board took the lazy way out and directed staff to develop an ordinance that would impose such restrictive setback requirements that virtually all farmable acreage in Ventura County would be off limits to hemp.

On paper, it could have been worse: The board rejected an even clumsier proposal by Supervisor Bob Huber, whose district includes the Moorpark neighborhood that generated most of the odor complaints (Camarillo, represented by Supervisor Kelly Long, was responsible for much of the rest). Citing “a current and imminent threat to the public health and safety,” Huber asked the board to adopt an immediate 45-day moratorium on hemp cultivation everywhere in the unincorporated area – even across thousands of acres where hemp cultivation generated no neighbor complaints.

Unpleasant odors may be an aesthetic nuisance, but they are not a public safety threat. In his board letter, Huber cited no medical evidence for his assertion. The plants involved in hemp production generate no toxins or allergens (only female plants are cultivated, and they produce no pollen), and in any event the planting season was still months away when the moratorium was proposed. Constituent complaints about hemp cultivation may have presented a political threat to supervisors Long and Huber, but actual hemp posed no immediate physical threat to anyone.

The concept of a buffer-zone ordinance in lieu of a moratorium – a distinction, in this case, without much of a difference – was put forth by Board Chairman Steve Bennett, who made a point of noting that he had reached out to Farm Bureau and our board chairman (and hemp grower) Will Terry before the hearing. That’s true. Will and I both spoke with him about the issue, and we appreciate his effort to gain a better understanding before voting on it – something none of the other four supervisors apparently did.

But it’s also true that Supervisor Bennett does not seem to have fully grasped what Will and I told him: Any regulatory move that injects additional uncertainty into the fledgling hemp market – which will take several seasons to find its feet even if the regulatory environment remains stable – will spook investors. In response, they will take their money elsewhere. That means they’ll contract with growers in counties with more sensible (or at least more predictable) regulations, and will build critical processing and handling infrastructure elsewhere. Once that supply chain is established in a friendlier locale, it will never find its way back to Ventura County.

There’s already evidence that this is happening. Merely the presence of the proposed moratorium on the Dec. 10 board agenda prompted some companies to suspend negotiation of growing contracts for the 2020 season.

Discussions with hemp supporters and county staff are still going on behind the scenes, so it is possible that the draft ordinance language – scheduled to return to the board on Jan. 14 – will present a more nuanced, surgical approach to mitigating potential ag-urban conflicts over hemp than either the moratorium proposal or the board-recommended buffer requirement.

But even if that is the case, Ventura County growers should be alarmed by the disturbing precedent the *(continued on page 2)*

What’s Inside?

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- Food Share seeks stronger connection
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My Sabbatical: What I did for the past year

By *Jim Downer*

The word “sabbatical” comes from the word “Sabbath,” which most of us take to be a day of rest. So naturally, most people not affiliated with universities would assume that sabbaticals are a kind of paid vacation. After a certain number of years, professors can leave for a yearlong vacation somewhere.

The reality of sabbaticals is quite different. As University of California academics, farm advisors have a sabbatical privilege, although many of my colleagues never take the opportunity. A well-known pomologist in Northern California has never taken one in her entire career. Her choice is not uncommon, because it takes a lot of change to make Change happen. You have to uproot yourself and create a life elsewhere and that takes much planning. A sabbatical is a kind of rest, because we are not doing our normal job functions, but also a time of renewal, study, or exploration that should have outputs of interest to those with whom we work (our clientele).

It is an academic privilege to take sabbaticals, but UC has requirements before we can do so. Before we can leave we have to accrue credit toward the sabbatical. It takes about nine years of full-time work before we are able to go away for a year. Shorter versions are also possible. While gone, we can't use any of our office or county-based resources. In order to go, we need to write a plan that details what will be done, how we fund our activities, what will be learned, and how it will help our clientele. When we return, a detailed report must be filed that describes what was accomplished. Sabbaticals often involve foreign travel, but that is dependent on the nature of the sabbatical. They may be focused on research or on professional development (going back to school). In my last sabbatical, more than 25 years ago, I did the coursework for my Ph.D. in plant pathology.

On this sabbatical, my emphasis was writing. I have so many projects that were not written up either for journal articles or popular clientele-based publications. I had never written a UC publication before, so that was also a goal (<https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/>). I was also interested in looking at the origin of some of the “climate ready” trees that grow in the desert Southwest, and finally I did some travel to Thailand and Texas to look at shade trees in very different places.

I took up residence in the small town of

Portal, Arizona, last October (2018). Located there is the South Western Research Station (SWRS). SWRS is a nexus for biologists studying biodiversity in the Chiricahua Mountains of Arizona. I held two meetings – one at the beginning of my sabbatical and one just at the end – on the ecology of trees in the Chiricahua Mountains. Clientele from California and all over the country and world attended. The meetings were in collaboration with the University of Arizona.

My trip to Thailand focused on horticulture in Chiang Mai, and it was fascinating to see trees struggling with urban life in a tropical country. In Texas, I spoke at Texas A&M about palms and drought, and learned about local drought-tolerant species.

My travels and findings about “climate ready” trees were summarized briefly in a sab-

batical report on our website at http://ceventura.ucanr.edu/Environmental_Horticulture/Landscape/. There are links there to other publications that I was able to produce while on leave. Several of the publications are open-access journals and can be easily viewed on the web. I am in the process of developing my final sabbatical report and another “Landscape Notes” article on trees that I recommend for Southern California landscapes.

While sabbaticals are a time of renewal and rest from current duties, they also result in new knowledge and ways we can better help our clientele. I am back now and look forward to working with everyone in Ventura County on tree and plant pathology issues.

— *Jim Downer is the plant pathology and horticulture advisor with UC Cooperative Extension in Ventura. Contact him at ajdowner@ucdavis.edu*

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Board of Supervisors has already set: On the basis of something as subjective as an odor complaint, it's willing to declare an emergency and effectively outlaw a crop recognized as legal under both state and federal law – even if that means disrupting millions of dollars in existing or pending private business contracts.

But it isn't just growers who have a stake in this debate. An agricultural county in which elected officials believe they have the right to tell farmers what they can grow, and when and where they can plant, will not remain an agricultural county for long. That should alarm anybody who enjoys living in a landscape characterized more by fruit orchards and berry fields than by strip malls and office parks.

Return of the canines

Dogs trained to detect the bacterium that causes huanglongbing disease in citrus trees paid a return visit to Ventura County in November. As was the case during their inaugural visit in July, they found evidence of infection wherever they looked.

On behalf of the Ventura County ACP-HLB Task Force, Farm Bureau signed a contract with Florida-based F1K9 for five days of scouting. The Task Force has been awarded a \$20,000 grant by the UC Hansen Fund to cover travel and lodging expenses, with additional funding available for that purpose from

a packinghouse assessment. The remainder of the contract amount, representing the cost of scouting the groves, was borne by growers, who were invoiced \$3.25 per scouted tree.

The team arrived in Ventura on Nov. 14, and consisted of six dogs (Szaboles, Cisar, Bello, Maci, Ica and Iza) and three handlers (Jerry Bishop, Tyler Meck and Bryan Brice). They were accompanied by F1K9's chief scientific officer, Bill Schneider, and were joined midweek by Billy Moraitis, the company's vice president of operations and business development, and Gavin Poole, a plant pathology researcher at the USDA field station in Fort Pierce, Fla. The scouting commenced on Monday, Nov. 18, and concluded on Friday, Nov. 22.

The team scouted 20 citrus ranches. The visit included returns to several ranches in the Las Posas Valley that were scouted during the July deployment, as well as ranches in new areas, such as Bardsdale, Camarillo, Saticoy, East Ventura and the Santa Rosa Valley. A total of 4,650 trees were inspected, and dogs alerted on 353 (8%). Alerts occurred at every location. The percentage of scouted trees that triggered alerts at each ranch or block ranged from 3% to 22%.

The visit taught us much more about the likely countywide distribution of *C. liberibacter asiaticus* (Clas), HLB's causative agent. Unfortunately, the information was not comforting.

Some of it was expected. In Bardsdale, where ACP populations are generally not well controlled (owing mainly to *(continued on page 3)*

Food Share seeks to strengthen connection with local producers

By Tessa Salzman

Hello Farm Bureau members and community!

As Ventura County's food bank, Food Share is the hub for feeding hungry people in our community. Last year we distributed 13.2 million pounds of food locally, and each month we feed 75,000 people. The folks we feed include working families, school children, farm workers, homeless individuals and anyone else finding it difficult to make ends meet - because we believe that no one should go hungry.

As the new food sourcing director, my goal is to increase the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables we distribute. To do this, I want to make donating as easy and efficient as possible for you. And I'm happy to report, we just added a new truck to our fleet specifically dedicated to recovering more produce, more quickly. If you ever have excess produce to donate or orchards to glean, please reach out to me directly.

Another way we can work together is by setting up a food distribution at your farm for your workers. We've seen success with these efforts and would love to expand the program.

You can contact me anytime with questions, ideas, or donation offers. Let's connect the fruits of your labor with hungry people. I look forward to hearing from you.

— Tessa Salzman can be reached at (805) 207-6567 or tsalzman@foodshare.com.

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the presence of abandoned or poorly managed groves, and numerous small organic operations), the percentage of scouted trees upon which the dogs alerted was the highest we've seen in the county - 21 percent on one ranch and 22 percent on the other. Both are conventionally farmed, but have high-risk neighbors.

Also expected was the result of the first dog inspection of trees adjacent to a residential subdivision. The dogs scouted 342 trees on a conventionally farmed lemon ranch in East Ventura, and alerted on 53 (16 percent). More than half the total (27 trees) were along the residential border row or very close to it. According to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, more than a quarter of the homeowners in that tract have refused to allow their trees to be sprayed during recent buffer treatment operations - twice the average refusal rate in Ventura. This underscores the threat poorly managed urban plantings pose to commercial neighbors.

Other findings were unexpected and alarming. For example, the percentage of dog-alert trees was similar on ranches adjacent to highways and on ranches miles away from them. This suggests that although major transportation corridors may have been the pathway of initial introduction of ACP and *Clas* into Ventura County, they are no longer

a dominant risk factor. The bug and the bacteria have been spreading locally on their own.

It was also disturbing to see the dogs alert on very young trees in replant blocks (one block was less than 18 months old). These suggest that *Clas* presence there is the result of recent movement by infected ACP from nearby citrus groves, not by direct introductions via shipments of bulk fruit before the statewide tarping regulation took effect. The pattern also raises the question of how replants can be protected from infection when they replace mature trees removed because of dog alerts.

The team from F1K9 will return to Ventura County the week of Jan. 27-31. If you are interested in having your orchard scouted, contact me by email. Negotiations are still under way to move part of the F1K9 operation to Ventura County permanently, which will make it easier and cheaper to arrange future grove inspections.

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



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Farm Bureau members qualify for savings on admission to many of Southern California's most popular theme parks and other attractions. To place an order or request a complete list of discounts, you may call our office at 805-289-0155 or send an email to Cheri@farmbureauvc.com. Please have your membership number available.

Aquarium of the Pacific — Long Beach; One Day Ticket. Adult (12 yrs+) \$25.95 (save \$9); Child (3-11 yrs) \$22.95 (save \$2). Valid thru 12/31/20.

Cinemark Century & Rave Theatres — All Cinemark, Century & Rave locations. Platinum Super Saver Ticket, valid any regular movie anytime. Regular price up to \$12, you pay \$10. Additional premiums may apply for specially priced films and/or events priced higher than normal box office. No expiration. Physical tickets only.

Dinner Detective Murder Mystery — Ventura County/ Thousand Oaks; Adult (13 years+) Dinner & Show \$58.95. Save up to \$12.50 with tax/gratuity. No expiration dates. E-Tickets only.

Knott's Berry Farm — Buena Park; General One Day Admission (3 yrs+) \$49.50 (save \$34.50). Valid thru 1/5/20. One Day Admission (3 yrs+) \$46.95 (save \$37.05) Mon-Thurs Only. Valid thru 1/5/20.

Legoland California Resort — Carlsbad; Valid thru 3/31/20. E Tickets Only. Resort Hopper - Includes 1 Day at Legoland, Including Seasonal Waterpark* and Sea Life Aquarium, and Free 2nd Day. \$68.95 (3 Yrs+) Save \$52.04. Both visits must occur by 4/30/20. Water Park requires same-day admission to Legoland & is open seasonally between March & October.

Medieval Times Dinner and Tournament — Buena Park; Reservations Required. Dinner and Show. Adult \$45.75 (save \$22 w/tax). Child (12 yrs & under) \$34.50 (save \$7.20 w/tax). "BOGO Birthday Special" during your Birthday month. Valid thru 12/30/20.

Pacific Park — Santa Monica Pier; 1-Day Unlimited Ride Wristband Voucher \$23.95 (save \$9 per person over 7 years). Valid thru 12/31/20.

Regal Entertainment Group — All Edwards and Regal locations. Premiere Unrestricted Ticket, valid ANY showtime, \$9.75. (Surcharge for IMAX, RPX, 3-D films & 4DX films, premium or Luxury Seating locations or select theaters.). Ultimate Movie Pack-2 Premiere Unrestricted Ticket & \$10 Gift Card \$29.50. No expiration dates on physical tickets. Physical tickets only.

San Diego Safari Park — Escondido; Adult (12 yrs+) \$49.00 (save \$9); Child (3-11 yrs) \$41.00 (save \$7). Valid thru 5/25/20. E-Tickets Only.

San Diego Sea World — San Diego; E-Tickets Only. Single Day Tickets: (3 yrs+) \$67.95 (save \$24.04); Valid thru 12/31/20.

San Diego Zoo — San Diego; E-ticket 1. Day Pass Adult (12 yrs+) \$49 (save \$9); 1 Day Pass Child (3-11 yrs) \$41 (save \$7). Valid thru 05/25/20. E-Tickets Only.

See's Candies — One Pound Candy Gift Certificate & gift envelope \$18.50 (save \$2.50). No Expiration Date. Physical Tickets Only.

Six Flags Magic Mountain — Valencia; General Admission (3yrs+) \$63.95 (save \$29.04). Valid 1 operating day thru 9/13/20.

Universal Studios Hollywood — Universal City; E-tickets only. Season Pass (3yrs+) \$129 (save \$30). Unlimited visits thru 5/31/20. Valid 9 months after your first visit. View blackout dates apply after 1st visit.

FARM BUREAU OF VENTURA COUNTY

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We represent the broad and dynamic interests of the agricultural industry through our diverse membership. We serve members by delivering services, promoting policies, developing coalitions, and fostering community action that will ensure the long-term success of agriculture in Ventura County.

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