

## Notes from the CEO

By John Krist

Things grew a bit testy when representatives of Southern California Edison fielded questions from a roomful of avocado growers at the Agriculture Museum in Santa Paula in early November.

The purpose of that morning's briefing was to explain SCE's new Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) program, in which the utility may selectively turn off electrical circuits at times of extremely high fire danger to prevent SCE equipment from sparking a wildfire when struck by falling tree branches or flying debris.

Considering how often sparking utility lines have been implicated or identified as the ignition source for damaging wildfires in California, the precaution seems sensible at some level. Edison has,

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in fact, acknowledged that its equipment was involved in triggering at least one of the two fires that swiftly merged last Dec. 4 to become the raging monster that was Thomas.

The Nov. 8 meeting was organized by the California Avocado Commission, and most of those in attendance suffered damage to their avocado operations during the Thomas Fire. Many have also joined in litigation filed against SCE in connection with that fire. Despite that, the questioning was civil, if at times heated, and focused not so much on the issues of loss and liability raised by last year's fire, but on the practical implications of a policy that in the future might cut power to farms and ranches precisely when it is needed most.

According to SCE, implementation of the PSPS policy relies on a sequence of ever more refined threat assessments based largely on weather forecasting – principally predictions of high winds, low relative humidity and high temperatures – along with evaluation of fuel loads and their proximity to vulnerable SCE equipment.

Using its own weather data collection and forecasting, in conjunction with the National Weather Service forecasts, public safety agency assessments, and

field observations by Edison crews, SCE maintains a rolling seven-day prediction of future fire conditions. When those forecasts predict extreme fire risk four to seven days ahead, it triggers a more intensive level of threat assessment and inter-agency consultation.

If SCE's team concludes that conditions may be sufficiently dire to trigger a PSPS in 48 hours, it plans to notify all customers on the affected circuit(s) that a shutdown is possible. If the prediction still holds 24 hours later, a one-day notice will be distributed alerting customers that a shutdown is likely. If the situation does not improve, a final notice of imminent shutdown is distributed a few hours before Edison workers throw the switch. Once the danger has passed, and SCE crews have visually inspected the lines to make sure they have not been compromised, power will be restored and customers will be notified.

That's how it is supposed to work in theory, anyway.

But hot, dry and windy conditions also mean heightened need for crop irrigation. And without electricity, pumps don't run. Few growers have on-farm water storage, and fewer still have large generators or gravity-feed systems enabling them to irrigate when the grid goes down. Being deprived of power means being deprived not just of the ability to hydrate heat-stressed trees, but also to moisten mulch so orchards can serve as a protective fire break. And depending on where the shutdown occurs, it could also involve fragile vegetable and berry crops, which cannot survive a scorching Santa Ana event that lasts several days with no irrigation.

The SCE team came in for some criticism as well over the utility's fuel management program. Growers who've been pressured to remove or drastically prune lush avocado and lemon trees under power lines – an extremely unlikely place for a fire to start and spread out of control – had plenty of stories to tell of dense brush being allowed to crowd wooden power poles in the backcountry, a far more potent threat.

There are several takeaways from the session. First, it's important to update your customer information. Most of SCE's agricultural customers established their accounts many years ago. Because the PSPS notification protocol requires accurate and up-to-date customer contact information, you'll be left out if your account information includes only a land-line number when in fact all your

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### What's Inside?

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# UC Cooperative Extension gets new county leader

By *Annemiek Schilder*

What do The Netherlands and Ventura County have in common? To all appearances not very much, the Netherlands being dominated by water-rich lowlands with a cool maritime climate versus the dry hillsides and plains of Ventura County featuring a Mediterranean climate. Flat, green meadows dotted with cows, sheep, and swans versus irrigated citrus and avocado orchards and strawberry fields.

Yet, I sense a commonality in the people – there is a “can-do” attitude and enthusiasm, a sense of community as well as an emphasis on agriculture and horticulture while protecting the natural environment. In both locations, farms and natural areas contribute open space and aesthetic value to the landscape. In addition, both The Netherlands and Ventura County have extended coastlines and a close relationship with the sea.

As the new director of the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) Office in Ventura and the Hansen Agricultural Research and Extension Center (HAREC) in Santa Paula, I am in accelerated learning mode while adjusting to living in a new community and climatic zone! I grew up in the Netherlands in an extended family of dairy farmers. After high school, I ventured to the United States to study Agronomy at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette, Louisiana, followed by a year of plant science studies at Wageningen Agricultural University in Wageningen, The Netherlands.

I completed my MS and PhD studies in plant pathology with an emphasis on wheat disease epidemiology and seed health at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. A three-year assignment as a postdoctoral researcher at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Ibadan, Nigeria, West Africa offered me a truly fascinating and rewarding scientific and cultural experience! The next 20 years were spent as a grape and berry pathologist with research, teaching and extension responsibilities at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. Fungi were the common thread throughout my career (no pun intended), although I also worked with viruses and bacteria as the need arose.

For four years, the UCCE and HAREC have functioned with interim leadership, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Jim Downer as in-

terim director of UCCE Ventura County, Jose Fernandez de Soto as director of HAREC, and Patti Verdugo Johnson as administrative manager. Jim is currently on sabbatical leave in Arizona, Jose has retired, and Patti is as busy as ever training her new pupil (me) in the ways of the UC system.

Previous directors, including Larry Yee and Chris Smith, have left their legacies. As the new director coming in, my first goal is to thoroughly familiarize myself with all aspects of agriculture and horticulture; youth, family and community development programs; and natural resource management in Ventura County. We are planning a review of the 2015-2035 strategic plan for UCCE/HAREC in light of changing cropping and climatic trends, invasive pests, and economic challenges within the UC system.

One my goals is to enhance the research and diagnostic capacity of HAREC, in consultation with the staff, commodity groups



and other stakeholders. I also hope to gain synergy through strengthening linkages with relevant organizations in Ventura County and establishing new collaborations. I look forward to a fruitful and productive future for UCCE/HAREC and Ventura County.

— *Annemiek Schilder is county director of UC Cooperative Extension and director of the Hansen Agricultural Research and Extension Center. Contact her at [amschilder@ucanr.edu](mailto:amschilder@ucanr.edu).*

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## Notes from the CEO *(Continued from front page)*

communication these days is via cell phone.

Second, the events of last December – coupled with SCE’s new PSPS policy – reinforce the value of having on-farm power-generating capability, to maintain critical water system operations. Unfortunately, generators with sufficient capacity are extremely expensive. Several speakers at the workshop suggested that Edison should launch a rebate program to help growers reduce those costs, and that will be the subject of follow-up communication by the California Avocado Commission, Farm Bureau and hopefully other industry advocates.

In conjunction with that, however, the industry will be pressuring SCE to revisit its standby demand charge, which it forces customers with their own generating capacity to pay to ensure SCE will supply backup power whenever needed. The new shutdown policy means SCE cannot assure anyone of uninterrupted service – in fact, it is pledging to deliberately turn off power to potentially thousands of customers when it believes the situation warrants it – raising serious questions about the validity of that charge.

As if anyone needed a reminder of the risk we face, attendees leaving the workshop walked out into the teeth of a gusting east

wind. Two hours later, the Hill Fire broke out in the Santa Rosa Valley, exploding to 7,000 acres within two hours, followed shortly by the even more dangerous and destructive Woolsey Fire, which ignited near Simi Valley and began a devastating march through suburban neighborhoods toward the sea.

## Officers elected

At its September meeting, the Farm Bureau board elected officer for 2018-2019. They are Danny Pereira, president; Will Terry, first vice president; Ted Grether, second vice president; Chris Sayer, secretary; and Jason Cole, treasurer. All are serving their second one-year terms in those offices.

## FBVC wins recognition

Farm Bureau of Ventura County will be honored at this year’s California Farm Bureau Federation meeting with Activities of Excellence awards for its Membership, Policy Implementation, Ag Education and Public Relations programs. The awards program is intended to recognize county Farm Bureaus for their efforts at the local level to provide industry leadership and advocacy, public education and outreach, and to strengthen the organization through membership and board development. *(continued on page 3)*

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### Farmworker Resource Program wins OK

The Ventura County Board of Supervisors has approved the recommendations of the Farmworker Resource Program Advisory Committee. The board action, taken on Oct. 9, sets in motion the process of hiring two county employees to mediate workplace conflicts and help agricultural workers access various public services. It's the culmination of nearly a year of hard work by the committee members, and marks an important milestone in a process that began in July 2016.

That month, under 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 groups' claims, and that state and federal regulatory agencies 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.

In response, the Board of Supervisors voted in June 2016 to establish a Farmworker Resource Program (FRP), and to allocate up to \$200,000 in the 2017-2018 budget to fund it. The BOS also directed that the responsibility for designing the program and overseeing its implementation be given to an eight-member advisory committee, with four members selected by Farm Bureau and the other four by the Mixteco Indigena Community Organization.

Farm Bureau nominated Yissel Barajas of Reiter Affiliated Companies; Ellen Brokaw, Brokaw Ranch Co.; Dave Murray, Andrew and Williamson; and Danny Pereira, Rio Farms and now president of FBVC. The other members of the Committee, nominated by MICOP, are Jessica Arciniega, with the Agricultural Labor Relations Board; Natalie Ospina, with California Rural Legal Assistance; Juvenal Solano, MICOP; and Lucas Zucker, CAUSE. Ellen and Lucas are co-chairs.

The committee began meeting in September 2017, and worked steadily – except for the month of December, when meetings were suspended because of the Thomas Fire – to develop a set of recommendations for the BOS.

The program approved last month will involve two employees, housed in the Ventura County Human Services Agency: an Agriculture Community Labor Relations Coordinator to lead the program, and an Agriculture Community Labor Relations Assistant to provide support. They will be responsible for referring farm workers with workplace questions or issues to the appropriate local, state or federal agency. They'll also mediate workplace conflicts between employees and employers or supervisors. Participation in this program will be entirely voluntary, and the county employees will have no regulatory or investigative authority. The hiring process is under way, and the goal is to have the program ready to formally launch in March 2019.

Farm Bureau was skeptical about the need for such a program, but we are comfortable with the final product of the committee's difficult work. We will be watching closely as implementation proceeds, but we believe the voluntary mediation service could help employers avoid litigation, or lengthy and costly investigation by state or federal regulators, by resolving problems before they escalate. It's also in the industry's best interest to ensure its workers feel valued, respected, and that they understand their rights and responsibilities. If the program accomplishes that, it will be a win for everyone.

To download the committee's final report, go to <http://bit.ly/FRPreport>.

— John Krist is chief executive officer of the Farm Bureau of Ventura County. Contact him at [john@farmbureauvc.com](mailto:john@farmbureauvc.com).

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## Member Benefits

### TICKETS & DISCOUNTS

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](mailto:Cheri@farmbureauvc.com). Please have your membership number available.

**Aquarium of the Pacific** — Long Beach; One Day Ticket. Adult (12 yrs+) \$20.95 (save \$9); Child (3-11 yrs) \$15.95 (save \$2). Valid thru 12/31/18. Closed 12/25/2018.

**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 \$9.25 (save \$2.75). Additional premiums may apply for specially priced films and/or events priced higher than normal box office. No expiration. Physical tickets only.

**Knott's Berry Farm** — Buena Park; General One Day Admission (3 yrs+) \$43.00 (save \$39). Valid thru 1/6/19.

**Legoland California Resort** — Carlsbad; E-tickets Only. 1-Day Admission (3yrs+) \$65.95 (save \$29.05). **2-Day Hopper** (3+) \$69.95 (save \$68.05). All visits must occur by 12/31/18.

**Legoland 2-Day Resort Hopper** — Includes 1 Day at Legoland, Including Seasonal Waterpark\* and Sea Life Aquarium, and Free 2nd Day (3yrs+) \$75.95 (save \$68.05). All visits must be by 12/31/18. Fun Express members receive 15% off on Legoland Hotel! Visit [Legoland.com/FunExpress.com](http://Legoland.com/FunExpress.com) to book. No discount code required.

**Medieval Times Dinner and Tournament** — Buena Park; Reservations Required. Dinner and Show. Adult \$44.65 (save \$22 w/tax). Child (12 yrs & under) \$34.40 (save \$7.25 w/tax). "BOGO Birthday Special" during your Birthday month. Valid thru 12/30/18.

**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+) \$45.50 (save \$8.50); Child (3-11 yrs) \$37.50 (save \$6.50). Valid thru 6/12/19. E-Tickets Only. Includes Africa Tram, Cheetah Run & all regularly scheduled shows & exhibits.

**San Diego Sea World** — San Diego; E-Tickets Only. **Single Day Tickets:** Adult (10 yrs+) \$66.40 (save \$25.59); Child (3-9 yrs) \$66.40 (save \$20.59). General (3+) **Single Day with All-Day Dining:** General \$86.95 (save \$5.04). **2018-19 Fun Card:** Adult \$84.50 (save \$7.49) or Child \$79.85 (save \$7.14) Unlimited visits thru 12/31/19. E-Tickets Only.

**San Diego Zoo** — San Diego; E-ticket Adult (12 yrs+) 1 Day Pass \$45.50 (save \$8.50); Child (3-11 yrs) 1 Day Pass \$37.50 (save \$6.50). Both Adult & Child 1 Day Pass includes Guided Bus Tour, Kangaroo Bus & Skyfari Aerial Tram & all shows and exhibits. Valid thru 6/12/19. E-Tickets Only.

**See's Candies** — One Pound Candy Gift Certificate & gift envelope \$17.45 (save \$2.45). No Expiration Date. Physical Tickets Only.

**Six Flags Magic Mountain** — Valencia; General Admission (3yrs+) \$56.95 (save \$33.04). Valid 1 operating day thru 9/15/19.

**Universal Studios Hollywood** — Universal City; E-tickets only. Season Pass (3yrs+) \$119 (save \$30). Unlimited visits valid 9 months from first visit. 1st visit valid thru 1/31/19. Blackout dates apply after 1st visit. To view blackout dates, visit [www.universalpassmember.com/2018P](http://www.universalpassmember.com/2018P) For additional ticket discounts visit [ushtix.com/FunEx.com](http://ushtix.com/FunEx.com)

# 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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