

Notes from the CEO

By John Krist

Farm Bureau of Ventura County will conduct its annual membership meeting and election of directors this year on Thursday, May 22. I am pleased to announce that the guest speaker at this year's event will be Karen Ross, secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

Save the Date:

Farm Bureau's Annual Membership Meeting Thursday, May 22, 2014

Guest Speaker:

Karen Ross, Secretary of the California Dept. of Food & Agriculture

Karen was appointed to that post in January 2011 by Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr. Before joining CDFG, she was chief of staff for U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, a position she accepted in 2009. Before her time at the United States Department of Agriculture, Secretary Ross served more than 13 years as president of the California Association of Winegrape Growers, based in Sacramento. During that same period she served as the executive director of Winegrape Growers of America, a coalition of state

winegrower organizations, and as Executive Director of the California Wine Grape Growers Foundation, which sponsors scholarships for the children of vineyard employees.

Agricultural members of FBVC will be receiving their formal meeting notices and ballots for the director election in the mail soon. The event will be at the Museum of Ventura County in Downtown Ventura, and will again include a tasty breakfast beginning at 8:30 a.m. Business will wrap up by 11.

Drought restrictions loom

For the past month, Farm Bureau has been convening agricultural stakeholders to formulate strategy and develop comments in response to a proposal by the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency (GMA) to impose drought-related pumping restrictions on all well operators within the GMA boundaries. Those boundaries encompass about 118,000 acres, including more than half the irrigated agricultural acreage in Ventura County – just over 50,000 acres.

It has been a complex and at times confusing process. In part, this is because of the speed with which the GMA is attempting to act. But it is also because of the inherent difficulty

involved in arriving at a common set of principles and actions to protect the interests of growers with very different needs and challenges.

Groundwater conditions vary greatly among the various basins that form the Fox Canyon system, and growers in the GMA are doing everything from conventional orchard cultivation to intensive vegetable-crop rotation, strawberry production and hydroponics, on varying soils and in multiple microclimates. This means that unless a pumping reduction strategy is carefully crafted to acknowledge both the controllable variables and the uncontrollable ones, it runs the risk of penalizing water-efficient operators, rewarding the wasteful and potentially inflicting tremendous economic harm on growers and their workers without actually addressing the problem it is intended to solve.

There is little disagreement that the groundwater situation on the Oxnard Plain is reaching a critical point. As the official keeper of hydrological data for the Santa Clara River and its associated groundwater resources – including most of those in the GMA – the United Water Conservation District has been sounding the alarm for months about declining groundwater levels and deteriorating groundwater quality. By summer, the groundwater level in a key part of the system will reach depths not seen since the last major multi-year drought in California, in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

If the drought continues, conditions will worsen, and because of regulatory restrictions on Santa Clara River diversions, it will take much longer for United's recharge activities to restore the basins even if abundant rainfall returns.

As I wrote in last month's newsletter, the falling water level will soon claim its first casualty: By the end of this summer, the deep wells feeding the Pumping Trough Pipeline system will run dry, shutting off deliveries to about 46,000 acres of prime farmland. Those growers without access to private wells will have no choice but to fallow their ground until the rains return or groundwater levels recover.

In recognition of the worsening conditions, the GMA board on Jan. 22 directed staff to develop an emergency ordinance for consideration at the Feb. 26 GMA board meeting. The stated intent was to reduce pumping and slow the rate of depletion, while providing time for stakeholders to develop projects that will augment the supply through wastewater recycling and other strategies. In the long term, those projects will be critical to restoring balance between supply and demand.

(continued on page 3)

What's Inside?

- Primocane blackberries provide flexibility in fruit production
- Leadership Farm Bureau welcomes Ventura Candidates
- Member Benefits

Primocane blackberries can provide flexibility in fruit production

By Oleg Daugovish

There is an increasing interest in healthy vitamin- and antioxidant-rich foods. It helps when they come in the form of sweet, juicy, big berries, strategically placed near the entrance of grocery stores. Blackberry consumption has become common in the United States due to longer availability of imports from Mexico and the recent development of new, higher-quality varieties.

A public variety from Arkansas, PrimeArk 45, feels right at home in Ventura County and in University of California Cooperative Extension trials has produced large attractive fruit, some as big as 2 inches. It is a primocane variety (flowers and fruit rapidly develop on the same cane that comes out of the ground in spring) with high yield potential.

To avoid competition with Mexico, which floods the market with blackberries from November to July, we wanted to learn about managing PrimeArk 45 to maximize production from August through October when supplies are down and prices are typically up.

After two years of trials at UC Hansen Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Santa Paula, in open field without tunnels, we found that:

- PrimeArk 45 regrows rapidly after tipping (pruning at about 20 inches from the ground) and produces additional branches with fruit in response. Early tipping in May allows fruit production to start in July and peak in September. Tipping in June or July delays fruiting to later months in fall.

- Delaying end-of-the-season mow-down of canes from December to February or March tends to increase the productivity of canes in the following year. This is likely due to extended ability of the plants to send photosynthetic materials for storage to the roots to be used for next year's growth. Even though the production stops in winter the plants remain green.

- A single plant produces 3 to 5 pounds of marketable fruit per season in non-fumigated soil with only pre-plant fertilizer and minimal pest management. (Yes, we wanted to know how these blackberries perform under stress.)

- The biggest fruit losses (at some harvests close to 50 percent) were from spotted winged drosophila infestations, scarring of fruit and bird feeding. Occasionally, we saw sunburn and red berry mite damage. And in unlikely event of rain, the sweet, juicy fruit



Late winter mowing and early spring tipping of new blackberry PrimeArk 45 resulted in greatest fruit yields and large berries.

can get infested with *Botrytis* gray mold.

- There are still fruit to be picked for winter holidays, provided they have not been destroyed by Santa Ana wind, which thrash the canes and damage the fragile berries, or have been eaten by birds. Protection may be worthwhile in the case of late fall-winter production.

Our trials continue but it looks like flexibility of production of PrimeArk blackber-

ries in response to management may provide an opportunity to Ventura County growers for a high-value alternative. This can help maintain profitability of farming operations facing high land costs and increased production expenses.

— Oleg Daugovish is a UCCE farm advisor in Ventura, specializing in strawberries and vegetable crops. Contact him at odaugovish@ucanr.edu.

Leadership Farm Bureau welcomes Ventura candidates

Two candidates from Ventura County have been selected to participate in a prestigious training program conducted by California Farm Bureau Federation.

The 2014 Leadership Farm Bureau class will receive more than 250 hours of instruction in subjects including political advocacy, public speaking, media relations, personal development and the Farm Bureau organization. The year-long training program lays the foundation for future contributions to the farming and ranching community. This year's class will participate in an advocacy trip to Washington, D.C., as well as a trip to Arkansas that will allow the group to compare and contrast what they have seen in California with the forces affecting farmers and ranchers in another region of the country.

Representing Ventura County will be Aimee Meidinger, operations manager at Brokaw Nursery and secretary of the Farm Bureau of Ventura County's Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee, and Tod Bartholomay, a Southern California Edison agricultural representative whose family raises cattle and farms in North Dakota.

Other Farm Bureau members selected

for the 2014 Leadership Farm Bureau class include:

- Sarbdeep Atwal, a criminal defense and immigration attorney who is a managing partner in his family's farm of tree fruit and nut crops and is a board member of the Yuba-Sutter County Farm Bureau;

- Mary Diebert, Madera County, agricultural account manager at Pacific Gas and Electric Co. and a member of the utility's Ag Task Force;

- Paul Gilbert, president of his family's walnut farm and second vice president of the Yuba-Sutter County Farm Bureau;

- Melissa Green, who is responsible for new product research and development at Superior Farms in Dixon and is the current chair of the Solano County Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee;

- Hans Herkert, Yuba-Sutter County, pest control advisor and certified crop advisor in Northern California who also farms rice on the family ranch in Colusa;

- Devon Jones, executive director of the Mendocino County Farm Bureau and an active member of the American Quarter Horse Association;

(continued on page 3)

Notes from the CEO

(cont'd from page 1)

The draft ordinance release only a few days before the Feb. 26 meeting was alarming in many ways. It would have instituted a pumping reduction of 20 percent (compared to 2013 use) for municipal and industrial pumpers, as well as for agricultural users with access to imported state water, and 10 percent for all other agricultural pumpers. It also would have imposed a moratorium on new wells if they would increase extraction capacity, and would have suspended the use of credits to avoid paying surcharges on water use above the reduced allocation.

As Farm Bureau pointed out in its comments to the GMA board before and during the Feb. 26 hearing, there were significant problems with this approach.

As proposed, the ordinance would have required the same pumping reduction throughout the GMA boundaries, regardless of where a well is located. This ignored the wide range of conditions among the sub-basins within the GMA boundaries. There is no reason, for example, to require a pumping reduction in the Las Posas Basins, where no overdraft exists and where rising groundwater recharged by municipal wastewater of poor quality is the more immediate concern.

We also saw a serious flaw in using calendar year 2013 pumping as a baseline for reductions. For one thing, it would have penalized growers who have already taken steps to maximize their water efficiency and rewarded those who have not. It also ignored the possibility that some growers may have had artificially low water use in 2013 for reasons that had nothing to do with

drought or system efficiency: They may have temporarily fallowed ground or planted low-water-demand cover crops to address pest or disease pressures, to proceed toward organic certification, or because of unusual market conditions.

In response to these and other comments, the GMA board directed staff to revise the ordinance and return with a new version at a special meeting on March 14.

The second version was an improvement over the first: reductions were to be phased in, and a three-year-average replaced reliance on a single year (2013) as the baseline. It also built in an appeal process, exempted wells in the permitting process from the drilling ban, and provided a number of water-level benchmarks that would have to be reached in order for the ordinance to be suspended.

We continue to have misgivings about certain elements of the ordinance, however, and we are frustrated by the rapid pace of the process, which allows little time for thoughtful analysis of each new proposal before time runs out and the board takes it up again. Nevertheless, we continue to convene meetings of the agricultural stakeholders group to discuss options, evaluate the pros and cons of each, and present constructive suggestions to the GMA board and staff.

As this issue of the newsletter went to press, our group was awaiting release of the third draft of the emergency ordinance, which we intend to review before the next special GMA board meeting on the topic, set for April 11. Stay tuned.

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

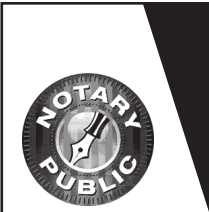
Leadership candidates

(cont'd from page 2)

- Riana Mello, a commodity salesperson for J.D. Heiskell & Co., a grain and commodity sales and trading business, and an active member of the Tulare County Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee;
- Pierre Sleiman, CEO of Go Green Agriculture Inc., an organically certified hydroponic greenhouse operation, and a member of the San Diego County Farm Bureau board of directors;
- Brie Witt, a grower relations representative at Constellation Brands Inc. and chair

of the San Joaquin County Young Farmers & Ranchers.

The participants' training will culminate at a graduation ceremony during the California Farm Bureau Federation Annual Meeting this December in Orange County.



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Member Benefits

TICKETS & DISCOUNTS

Farm Bureau members qualify for discounts on admission to many of Southern California's most popular theme parks and other attractions. To take advantage of any of these special offers, drop by the Farm Bureau office at 5156 McGrath St. in Ventura. You can also place an order and pay by phone, and have the tickets mailed to you. For more information, contact Cissy Perez-Haas at (805) 289-0155. Have your membership number handy. We accept Visa and MasterCard.

Aquarium of the Pacific — Adult (12+ yrs): \$19.95 (save \$9); Child (3-11 yrs): \$11.95 (save \$3). Valid thru 12/31/14 except 4/11-13 & 12/25 2014.

California Adventure and Disneyland 1-day Park Hopper — Adult (10+ yrs): \$131 (save \$6); Child (3-9 yrs): \$126 (save \$4). Valid through 12/31/14.

Cinemark Theatres — Platinum ticket, valid any show time at all Cinemark & Century locations: \$8.25 (savings \$2.75). Additional premiums may be applied for specially priced films and/or events priced higher than normal box office. No expiration.

Knott's Berry Farm — Buena Park/Palm Springs. Adult (12+ yrs) \$34.95 (save \$27.05); Junior (3-11 yrs) Senior (62+ yrs) \$29.95 (save \$3.05). Valid thru 12/31/2014.

Six Flags Magic Mountain — General use ticket (3+ yrs): \$40.95 (save \$27.04). Valid thru 9/28/14.

Regal Cinemas — Unrestricted tickets \$8.25 (regularly \$9.50 Sun.-Thurs, \$10 Fri.-Sat). Good at Edwards, Regal, Signature and United Artists Theaters. No expiration.

San Diego Sea World — Adult (10+ yrs) \$68.95 (save \$15.05); Child (3-9 yrs) \$68.95 (save \$9.05). Valid thru 12/31/14.

San Diego Safari Park — (Formerly Wild Animal Park) Adult-African Tram Safari: \$39 (save \$7) (12+ yrs); Child-African Tram Safari: \$31 (save \$5) (3-11 yrs). Africa Tram Safari includes admission, unlimited rides on the Africa Tram, and all shows & exhibits. Valid through 01/31/15.

San Diego Zoo — Adult (12+ yrs): \$39 (save \$7). Child (3-11 yrs): \$31 (save \$5). Includes admission, unlimited use of Guided Bus Tour, Express Bus, Skyfari Aerial Tram and all shows & exhibits. Valid through 01/31/15.

See's Candy gift certificate — One-pound box \$14.95 (Save \$2.05). No expiration.

"E Tickets" are available for certain amusement parks.

FARM BUREAU OF VENTURA COUNTY

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