

Notes from the CEO

By John Krist

More than 100 Farm Bureau members gathered at the Museum of Ventura County on May 22 for the organization's annual business meeting, enjoying a fine breakfast and an engaging presentation by guest speaker Karen Ross, secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

Board Election Results: Incumbents Jan Berk, Scott Klittich and David Schwabauer were re-elected to new three-year terms. Joining them will be William Terry, who replaces retiring director Gus Gunderson.

At the close of the meeting, President Fred Van Wingerden announced the results of the Board of Directors election. Incumbents Jan Berk, Scott Klittich and David Schwabauer were re-elected to new three-year terms. Joining them will be William Terry, who replaces retiring director Gus Gunderson.

Will is a fifth-generation Ventura County farmer who works as chief operating officer of Terry Farms, Inc. He is on the boards of the California Pepper Commission and the University of California Hansen Fund. He is a past chairman of the Ventura County Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee, serving in that capacity as an advisory member of the Farm Bureau Board of Directors from 2010 to 2013.

Gus, director of southern operations for Limoneira, has served on the Farm Bureau of Ventura County (FBVC) board since 2002. Farm Bureau very much appreciates his years of dedicated service to the organization, and wishes him all the best. We are also pleased to welcome Will back to the board, this time as a full voting member.

Excerpts from the annual report

One of the agenda items at the annual meeting is the CEO's report, during which I summarize events and activities that FBVC focused on during the preceding 12 months. For the benefit of those members who were unable to attend, an abbreviated version of that report follows.

identified a number of hot spots around the county where agricultural practices are contributing to exceedences of state and federal water-quality standards. When this happens, growers are required to modify their cultural practices or management strategies to reduce the level of contamination.

This year we also unveiled a new tool to track BMP implementation and provide a foundation for analysis of its effect on water quality. Working through our primary consultant, Larry Walker Associates, and a web-based software design company, we developed an online survey, put it through several rounds of internal testing, and then invited growers and farm managers in our targeted watersheds to log in and complete it. The effort was a great success, with 672 respondents (representing 66 percent of the acreage enrolled in VCAILG) completing the survey.

In order to better understand the effect of specific management practices on water quality, Farm Bureau has established a partnership with the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at the University of California, Santa Barbara. A team of graduate students from Bren has chosen as its master's degree project a statistical analysis of BMP implementation, based on both this survey and an earlier one conducted several years ago by UC Cooperative Extension farm advisors, and observed changes in water quality as recorded by our monitoring program and reported each year to the Regional Water Quality Control Board. This work has already begun, and to keep the students engaged over the summer, Farm Bureau is funding a paid internship.

This investment is important to the future of the VCAILG program. The current Conditional Waiver will expire in 2015, and we anticipate a renewal battle with skeptical environmental groups that strongly oppose the waiver and have been successful in other regions in forcing costly and onerous changes in irrigated-lands regulations. By documenting as rigorously as possible the efforts Ventura County growers are making to improve water quality – and linking that with measured reductions in pollutant levels – we hope to bolster our argument to keep the program intact and unchanged for another five-year term.

Membership

For 2012-2013, we set a goal of increasing our agricultural membership by at least 2 percent, and we accomplished that. We also met our agricultural membership goal of 100 percent retention in all four quarters last year, and we exceeded our overall membership goal (which includes both the agricultural

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Programs

Ventura County Agricultural Irrigated Lands Group

The focus of our VCAILG program over the past year has been on providing guidance and assistance to growers in targeted watersheds to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs). Our monitoring program has

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and associate member categories) for the entire year. Only 20 of the state's 53 county Farm Bureaus managed to achieve both those milestones last year. In recognition of these and other accomplishments, FBVC was honored at California Farm Bureau Federation's 2013 annual meeting with Activities of Excellence Awards in public relations, leadership and membership.

Education and outreach

Because public education is such a key element of our mission, we have budgeted this year to add a part-time communications coordinator to our team. This will be a contract position, commencing in July, with responsibility for monitoring, managing and updating our website, Facebook page and Twitter feed; preparing educational displays for special events; compiling email blasts for members; planning agricultural tours for community members; and working with the California Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation (a CFBF affiliate) and local educators to enhance agricultural content in local schools.

We are fortunate to have a candidate already on hand. Devon Cichoski, who has taken on the role of advertising manager for our quarterly magazine, *Central Coast Farm & Ranch*, will also take on the role of communications coordinator. Experienced in marketing, public relations and communications, she joins us from Solar World, the largest solar manufacturer in the United States and Europe, where she has been the public relations manager since 2011. Before that, she was communications manager for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. She's also the daughter of Betsy Chess, who is retiring as the magazine's advertising manager, bringing a strong element of continuity and deep local ties to the position.

Issues

Water

The past year has brought unprecedented water-supply challenges to Ventura County agriculture. With the severe drought entering its third year, local resources have been strained to the breaking point, prompting system outages and emergency drought legislation that is already having a dramatic impact on produc-

ers. Farm Bureau has taken a leadership role in helping the farming and ranching community respond, by organizing workshops, hosting stakeholder meetings, convening commodity groups to develop formal responses to proposed regulatory measures, and engaging in a comprehensive planning process intended to restore long-term balance between supply and demand to the county's primary groundwater system.

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the county would be receiving no significant rainfall in 2013, the United Water Conservation District sounded the alarm last April that it would be unable to release water from Lake Piru in late summer and early fall. This meant it would have no surface flows available to divert into the Pumping Trough Pipeline (PTP) and Pleasant Valley Pipeline (PVP) for direct delivery to agricultural users, which rely on it to irrigate their crops.

Construction of the pipelines was intended to wean those users off their own wells, which historically were responsible for a dangerous lowering of groundwater levels beneath the central Oxnard Plain. As a consequence, most of those growers have no other water supply. The pipeline deliveries have become particularly critical for strawberry growers on the PTP system; October is when most of the county's strawberry plantings are established, and it represents the peak month for water use.

Deprived of surface flows, United would be forced to rely on several wells to supply water to PTP users, and it warned that those wells have a cumulative capacity that is inadequate to meet October demand. To spread the word about the looming shortage, Farm Bureau worked with the California Strawberry Commission to convene a workshop for PTP/PVP customers at which United's staff shared the sobering news. At the conclusion of that meeting, Farm Bureau agreed to convene a working group of growers and irrigation experts to brainstorm strategic options. Additional workshops followed, at which growers shared information about efficient irrigation techniques and strategies, as well as water-sharing opportunities. Thanks in large part to that effort, the system was able to keep up with demand – just barely – during the critical fall period.

The continuing lack of rain means the problem will be even worse this year. Not only will there again be no surface water to divert, falling groundwater levels – a consequence of long-term overdraft, exacerbated by the drought – makes it unavoidable that wells supplying the PTP will cease to function by late summer or early fall. That will take the PTP system offline and leave growers on about 4,600 prime acres with little or no water for the remainder of the growing season. Again, Farm Bureau took the lead (continued on page 3)

FARM BUREAU OF VENTURA COUNTY ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING



May 22, 2014
Museum of Ventura County
Ventura, California

FARM  BUREAU
OF VENTURA COUNTY
THE INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR AGRICULTURE

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in organizing grower meetings to spread the word, but there is not much more to be done.

The decline in aquifer storage also prompted the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency (GMA) earlier this year to ask county staff to develop an emergency ordinance to address the issue by curtailing pumping. As soon as this process got under way, Farm Bureau convened a group of agricultural stakeholders to discuss the staff proposals, develop a coordinated response and provide constructive suggestions as the process moved forward.

After countless hours of meetings, numerous discussions with GMA staff and directors, submission of written comments and testimony at public hearings, this Farm Bureau-led group was successful in getting many of its suggested amendments incorporated into the final ordinance, which was adopted in April and seeks to reduce groundwater extractions by 20 percent over the next 18 months.

Several small groups of growers continue to meet with GMA staff to develop modifications to its extraction reporting process, and to provide input as the GMA commences a seven-month strategic planning effort intended to couple stricter demand management with supply augmentation to bring pumping and recharge back into balance. At the GMA's request, Farm Bureau continues to serve as the hub of this effort on the agricultural side (a similar effort is under way among municipal groundwater users), disseminating information from the GMA to the agricultural community and synthesizing input from growers to inform the GMA efforts.

UCCE adds water and nutrient specialist

The University of California Cooperative Extension office in Ventura has added a farm advisor whose area of expertise is particularly critical to Ventura County.

Andre Biscaro joined the local UCCE office on April 1. Before his appointment in Ventura, Andre was a farm advisor in the High Desert area covering Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties, where he worked primarily with improving irrigation and fertilizer use efficiency in alfalfa and onions.

Before moving to California to work with UC Cooperative Extension in 2008, Andre earned his M.S. in Soil Science at Auburn University, Alabama. Andre obtained his B.S. in Agronomy from the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, where he worked as a crop and soils consultant for two years.

Andre has a keen interest in working with soil fertility, the soil-water relationship, and their implication for water and nutrient management. His current research and educational program in Ventura County is focused on improving water and fertilizer use efficiency across different commodities including berries, vegetables and nursery crops. Determining crop coefficient and nitrogen uptake in berries and vegetable crops are examples of his current research projects.

Pests

Farm Bureau continued to play a leadership role in coordinating the Ventura County citrus industry's response to the spread of Asian citrus psyllid throughout Southern California.

Although the prognosis a year ago was fairly gloomy, with the pace of Ventura County detections increasing at a rapid pace, the county has so far resisted the invasion fairly well. Grower cooperation with the treatment protocol has been extremely good, and the urban suppression program has likewise met with solid public support. As a result, the treatment program – pesticide applications to urban landscape host plants within 400 meters of a detection, and commercial grove treatments within 800 meters – appears to be suppressing the ACP population fairly successfully. There are on average two to three new detections a month in the county, and although that seems like a lot, it is a far cry from the situation in Riverside and Imperial counties, where the advancing wave of psyllids long ago overran the citrus production areas.

The state program has begun replicating many of the elements of our program, expanding its community outreach efforts into the Central Coast and picking up the campaign we launched in 2010, and establishing grower liaison programs in all citrus counties patterned after the one we pioneered in 2011. Although we continue to have disagreements with the state over some elements of its ACP strategy, it is gratifying to see Ventura County serving as a model for California.

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

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 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.

Knott's Soak City — Regular (12 yrs.+): \$24.95 (save \$10.04) Junior/Senior (3-11 yrs. or 62 yrs.+): \$22.95 (save \$2.04) Valid any 1 day of the 2014 season.

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

Six Flags Hurricane Harbor — General Use Ticket (3 yrs.+) \$26.95 (save \$13.04) Valid any 1 day of the 2014 season.

Raging Waters — General Use Ticket (3 yrs.+) \$28.95 (save \$10.04). All persons greater than 48". Valid any 1 day of the 2014 season.

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 — 2nd Day Free. Adult (10+ yrs.) \$63.95 (savings \$20.05); Child (3-9 yrs.) \$63.95 (savings \$14.05). Valid thru 12/25/14.

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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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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