

Notes from the CEO

By John Krist

As 2016 draws to a close, it's an opportune time to look back on the most significant issues and events of the past 12 months for Ventura County agriculture, and to look ahead at what 2017 might bring.

I will do my best not to make this a depressing catalogue of doom and disaster. It won't be easy, though.

HLB arrives in Ventura County — maybe

Although we have always known that Huanglongbing disease would eventually arrive in local citrus orchards, 2016

was the year we saw the first evidence that it probably has.

To recap, the Asian citrus psyllid, which vectors the deadly bacterial disease, was first detected in Ventura County citrus groves in late 2010. There were sporadic detections in 2011 and early 2012, the population began spreading widely in late 2012, and in 2013 it exploded across the county.

ACP is now found everywhere in large numbers, triggering a compre-

hensive countywide suppression program coordinated by citrus growers, pesticide applicators, pest-control advisors, packinghouse representatives, our Ventura County ACP-HLB Task Force, and the grower liaisons under contract with the Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Program (CPDPP), which is managed by the California Department of Food and Agriculture. It's an unprecedented example of private-public collaboration, created in response to an unprecedented threat to the citrus industry.

In the early weeks and months of the Task Force's existence, its members fanned out across the county to conduct an intensive public outreach campaign. Our goal was to build widespread awareness among urban residents and community leaders about the nature and severity of the threat posed by ACP and HLB. A staple message in all our presentations was that whenever ACP has invaded a citrus-producing area, HLB has inevitably followed within about two years.

The good news is that the aggressive preparation for ACP led by our Task Force likely stretched that timeline out by four years. The bad news is that our battle now shifts from managing a bug to managing a disease epidemic.

At a scientific conference at UC Riverside in October, U.S. Department of Agriculture researcher David Bartels revealed that clusters of Asian citrus psyllid samples collected in three areas of the county between July 2015 and April 2016 returned "inconclusive" results when tested for presence of DNA from the bacteria that causes HLB. These test results may indicate that there are HLB-infected trees in those areas.

Dave's work has focused on mapping the locations of ACP collected and tested for HLB as part of the CPDPP's statewide HLB surveillance project. Although most of those ACP test negative for presence of the HLB bacteria's DNA, a significant fraction produce "inconclusive" results — the test indicates bacterial DNA is present, but the signal is faint and does not reach the threshold state and federal regulatory agencies accept as reliably positive.

If these results were random — the result of lab errors, sample contamination or other flaws in the process — the locations where the inconclusive samples were collected should be distributed randomly across the landscape. Dave's analysis, however, shows that these "inconclusive" ACP tend to be collected in geographic clusters.

When this pattern was observed in Texas in 2010 and 2011, it predicted fairly accurately the locations where, in 2012 and later, trees would be confirmed positive for HLB through DNA testing of their stems and leaves — the regulatory gold standard for conclusively determining that the disease is present.

If the Texas pattern holds here, it means HLB is in Somis, Westlake Village and Simi Valley. It also means HLB has already spread widely throughout Southern California, as dozens of "inconclusive" clusters are scattered across the entire region. And it suggests we might see regulatory confirmation of HLB in Ventura County trees as early as 2017.

Regional Board approves new 5-year irrigated lands program

In April, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board adopted a new five-year irrigated lands regulatory program affecting all farming operations in Ventura County.

The updated version of the "Conditional Waiver of Waste

Pitted against [a] litany of challenges... is an agricultural community with a rich history of innovation, creativity and adaptability. ... And as it has for more than a century, Farm Bureau will be with them every step of the way.

What's Inside?

- Recycled coffee grounds show promise as soil amendment
- Member Benefits

Recycled coffee grounds show promise as soil amendment

By Oleg Daugovish

The benefits of coffee grounds as soil amendments have been known for generations. Ground particles of *Coffea* spp. have been used as soil amendments to lower soil pH; add nitrogen, iron and potassium; and improve soil porosity and water infiltration. Your grandma fertilized her garden with them.

In Ventura County, several tons of coffee grounds are commercially roasted every week, and we wanted to know if they will work as carbon source for anaerobic soil disinfestation (ASD). ASD in California has been based on rice bran as carbon source that reliably generated anaerobic conditions when mixed with soil and covered by plastic.

Three weeks of anaerobiosis reduced populations of some soil-borne pathogens, and provided nitrogen and other benefits to soil. Rice bran-based ASD has increased strawberry plant vigor and yields, sometimes more than 50 percent compared to non-treat-

ed soil. Organic fields benefited from ASD the most: fumigation was never an option and nitrogen in bran served as organic pre-plant fertilizer. The problem is the cost of bran and its transportation from the Central Valley to our coastal fields. It can cost more than \$2,500 an acre.

As a candidate for ASD, coffee grounds have favorable C:N ratio, are easy to incorporate, are locally available and – most importantly – are free. They are classified as green waste by organic certifiers and have no artificial additives, while any possible biological contaminants have been eliminated during steaming.

In 2015, we conducted a small-plot ASD trial at UC Hansen Research and Extension Center in Santa Paula, and at 9 tons per acre the coffee grounds worked well. They created moderate anaerobic conditions, released nitrate nitrogen similarly to synthetic pre-plant fertilizer, and decreased soil bulk density – “loosening up” the heavy clay soil.

San Andreas strawberry responded with early growth, and production during the fresh-market period of strawberry season was more than 60 percent greater than in untreated yet fertilized soil. At the end of the production season, the plots with coffee grounds had a particular, persistent cluster of fungi in soil, suggesting that there was a microbiological population shift. We did not identify them but hope they are well-natured. Well, at least like most of us they like coffee.

This fall we’re expanding coffee ground ASD research to grower fields and hope that strawberries in the Oxnard Plain will benefit. It would be great to use this waste product as a resource for our agriculture.

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

Notes from the CEO

Continued from front page

Discharge Requirements” will be in effect from 2016 to 2021. Although there have been two previous versions of the Conditional Waiver – 2005-2010, and 2010-2015 (later extended until 2016), the new version includes significantly more rigorous requirements for farm owners and operators than the previous versions. In general, the new waiver requires more reporting, analysis, data collection, outreach, tracking and special studies with an aggressive time frame.

Rigorous as the new requirements are, the outcome could have been much worse.

The earliest draft of the waiver sought to require a countywide groundwater monitoring program conducted by our discharger group at member expense, one that would largely duplicate numerous existing monitoring efforts. It also would have triggered individual monitoring, reporting and numeric effluent limits for hundreds or even thousands of parcels on a much shorter time frame – perhaps as soon as two years from now. Through our negotiations, we were able to push those requirement back, and to allow us greater discretion in deciding how and where to address water-quality problems, whether on the surface or under ground.

A coalition of environmental and social-

justice groups also pushed the board to adopt a drastically harsher set of regulations. We pushed back strongly, however, and our strategy was largely successful. The board unanimously adopted the waiver as presented, granting none of the changes sought by those groups.

As the year ends, we have concluded the first round of re-enrollment and invoicing. In 2017, we will be unveiling a new survey of farm management practices, and launching a series of workshops so VCAILG members can obtain the 2 hours of water-quality education required each year. We’ll also be analyzing groundwater data from a wide array of sources and developing a plan for linking farm activities to observed trends. And we will continue managing a grant program helping growers install new equipment to make their irrigation systems more efficient and thereby reduce runoff.

Labor crunch continues

A persistent labor shortage continued to bedevil Ventura County growers in 2016, prompting some to use the cumbersome and costly H2-A visa program to bring in temporary workers from Mexico. It’s difficult to estimate with any precision, but informal observations suggest the county has only about 75 percent of the agricultural work

force it needs, causing significant difficulties in crew scheduling and timely harvesting.

Piling on, California’s Legislature and governor made the agricultural labor picture even more problematic for growers by enacting new overtime and wage requirements.

On April 4, Governor Brown signed SB 3, which phases in an increase in the California minimum wage. It will increase from \$10 to \$10.50 an hour on Jan. 1, 2017, and \$11 an hour on Jan. 1, 2018. The minimum wage will then increase by \$1 on Jan. 1 of each year until it reaches \$15 an hour in 2022. Businesses employing 25 or fewer employees will have an additional year to implement each step in the minimum wage increase.

Once the minimum wage reaches \$15 an hour in 2020, the minimum wage will be indexed annually for inflation, limited to an increase of 3.5 percent a year (rounded to the nearest 10 cents).

On Sept. 12, the governor signed AB 1066, which dramatically changed the overtime pay rules for agricultural workers. The current 10-hour workday for agriculture, which has been in place since at least 1976, will be phased down to an 8-hour day in four annual increments. Beginning Jan. 1, 2019, agricultural employers will be required to pay overtime *(continued on page 3)*

Notes from the CEO *Cont'd from p2*

after 9.5 hours in a workday. At the same time, a maximum work-week length will be imposed, also in 4 half-hour increments. This also will begin on Jan. 1, 2019, with a requirement to pay overtime after 55 hours in a workweek.

Employers with 25 or fewer employees will have an additional three years at each of these overtime phase-in deadlines to implement the new overtime thresholds.

Additionally, AB 1066 eliminates as of Jan. 1, 2017 the exemption for agriculture from the days-of-rest requirements in the Labor Code that the Legislature applied to other industries in 1999.

Drought — natural and regulatory — persists

With blasts of rain and snow turning fall and early winter into a markedly wet period in Central and Northern California, much of the state has been removed from the most severe categories of drought as defined by the U.S. Drought Monitoring Center. The Central Coast, southern San Joaquin Valley and southern Sierra, however, remain in the most dire condition — “exceptional drought” — according to the center.

As most storms have veered either north or south of us, Ventura County's rainfall totals as of mid-December remain below average for this point in the rain year, which began Oct. 1. Meanwhile, early season precipitation is at or above average in the northern and central regions. The snowpack remains alarmingly anemic, however, with rain rather than snow falling at much higher elevations than usual.

The results here have become depressingly familiar: higher irrigation costs, continued soil salinity problems, dwindling surface reservoir storage, falling groundwater levels, and worsening groundwater quality.

And the key piece of Ventura County water infrastructure, at least from the agricultural perspective, faces potentially crippling legal and regulatory challenges that might vastly reduce its capacity to divert Santa Clara River flows to replenish the crucial groundwater basins beneath the Oxnard Plain. The Freeman Diversion, which has shunted more than 1.7 million acre-feet from the river for groundwater recharge and direct delivery since it went into service 25

years ago, is the object of intense scrutiny by federal regulators and litigation (filed in 2016) by environmental groups. Both seek to greatly reduce the diversion's capacity by imposing new flow requirements, as well as extremely costly physical improvements, to restore runs of endangered southern steelhead.

And if that were not enough, growers will soon be contending with the compounding effects of Sustainable Groundwater Management Act implementation. In 2017, as local groundwater sustainability agencies shift into high gear on development of groundwater sustainability plans for their basins, growers are likely to begin seeing the outlines of their future.

Early hints suggest that, for growers on the Oxnard Plain, that future may look very different from the present. It has become clear in recent years that extractions from several basins within the jurisdiction of the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency greatly exceed recharge, over both short and long time periods. Regulatory reductions in Freeman Diversion capacity have worsened that, and preliminary modeling indicates pumping in some basins may need to be reduced by as much as half to meet SGMA's sustainability objectives. That's likely to set off a cascade of other effects, from reduced production and agricultural employment to upheavals in the farmland rent and sales markets.

Pitted against this litany of challenges, however, is an agricultural community with a rich history of innovation, creativity and adaptability. Ventura County growers and all those who work to support farming have faced and overcome crises before. I have no doubt they will continue to do so. And as it has for more than a century, Farm Bureau will be with them every step of the way.

— *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 — Adult (12+ yrs): \$19.95 (save \$9); Child (3-11 yrs): \$12.95 (save \$4). Valid thru 12/31/16.

Cinemark & Century Theatres — Platinum ticket, valid all show times at all Cinemark & Century locations: \$9.25 (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. Adult (12+ yrs) \$37.95 (save \$34.05); Junior (3-11 yrs) Senior (62+ yrs) \$34.95 (save \$7.05). Valid thru 12/31/2016.

Legoland — “E” tickets only. Adult (13+ yrs) \$78.95 (save \$14.05); Child (3-12 yrs) \$72.95 (save \$14.05). Includes 2nd day free ticket within 90 days of 1st visit. Resort Hopper Ticket — “E” Ticket only. Adult (13+ yrs) \$87.95 (save \$29.05); Child (3-12 yrs) \$80.95 (save \$30.05). *Includes 2 visits to Legoland, including new Waterpark (seasonal) and 2 visits to Sea Life Aquarium. Valid thru 12/31/2016.*

Regal Cinemas — Unrestricted tickets \$8.75 (regularly \$12.50 Sun-Thu, \$10 Fri.-Sat). Good at Edwards, Regal, Signature & United Artists. *No expiration.*

San Diego Safari Park — (Formerly Wild Animal Park) Adult-African Tram Safari: \$42.95 (save \$7.05) (12+ yrs); Child-African Tram Safari: \$33.95 (save \$6.05) (3-11 yrs). Valid thru 12/31/16. *Africa Tram Safari includes admission, unlimited use of the Journey into Africa Tour, Conservation Carousel and other shows/exhibits.*

San Diego Sea World —Single Day Ticket Adult (10+ yrs.) \$65 (savings \$24) Child (3-9 yrs.) \$65 (savings \$18) Valid thru 12/31/2016; **2nd Day Free Ticket** Adult (10 yrs+) \$65 (save \$24); Child (3-9 yrs) \$65 (save \$18). *Both visits valid thru 12/31/16.*

San Diego Zoo — Adult (12+ yrs): \$42.95 (save \$7.05). Child (3-11 yrs): \$33.95 (save \$6.05). Valid thru 12/31/16.

See's Candy gift certificate — One-pound box \$16.45 (Save \$2.05). *No expiration.*

“E Tickets” — San Diego Sea World: Unlimited visits: Adult (10+ yrs) 2016 Fun Card \$75 (save \$14) Child (3-9 yrs) \$75 (save \$8). Valid thru 12/30/16. *Blackout dates apply.* **Universal Studios:** 12 Month Annual Pass (3+ yrs) \$109 (save \$40) Exp. 12/31/16. Valid 12 months from first visit. First visit must be by January 31, 2017. Blackout dates apply after 1st visit. To view blackout dates see www.universalspassmember.com2016N.

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