

## Notes from the CEO

By John Krist

For growers on the Oxnard Plain, one tiny piece of good water-related news emerged in the past month. Perhaps it's stretching things to call it "good." It may be more appropriate to refer to it as "not as horrible as expected" news.

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With groundwater levels beneath the Oxnard Plain continuing to drop amid the most severe drought to grip California in more than a generation, United Water Conservation District warned customers on its Pumping Trough Pipeline system earlier this year that deliveries likely would be suspended by the end of September – just in time for the October strawberry-planting season.

The reason was two-fold. Historically, the system has delivered a blend of groundwater pumped from deep PTP wells, and diverted surface flows from the Santa Clara River. In autumn, those surface flows have been augmented by "conservation releases" from Lake Piru. But there have been virtually no natural surface flows the past two years. And with lake levels far too low to permit it, there was no autumn conservation release last year, and the absence of meaningful rain in winter and spring meant none was planned for this year. That left only the wells to supply water through the PTP, which serves about 4,600 acres of berries and vegetable crops.

The system limped through October last year at about 50 percent of capacity, supplying barely enough water to keep planting on schedule. Thankfully, the weather was generally cooperative, with little of the severe heat or east winds that would have boosted demand far beyond the supply.

This year, however, the falling groundwater level was projected to force the PTP wells offline by late August or September. That would put the system out of action, leaving thousands of acres at risk of fallowing.

But at a recent update to the UWCD board, groundwater department manager Tony Morgan said the

pace of depletion slowed after a modest rain event in late spring, which contributed to a minor amount of aquifer recharge. The pace at which the water levels are dropping has since accelerated again, but the brief hiatus means the PTP wells probably will be able to continue operating for a few more months before water levels drop below the pump intakes.

Of course, that may be subject to change. At press time, the forecast was for October to arrive in Southern California accompanied by a severe heat wave and high winds.

### Landmark groundwater legislation enacted

Drought also served as grim context for a far-reaching package of legislation signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown on Sept. 16. For the first time in history, California will require that many of its groundwater basins be managed to avoid overdraft and other impairments.

For Ventura County, which has had a form of groundwater management for more than three decades, the changes required to comply with the new requirements will be significant. But in other parts of the state – such as the vast Central Valley, where groundwater use is barely even measured, let alone managed – the impact will be nothing short of revolutionary.

It may also be delayed. Lawmakers and agricultural interests in the valley argued fiercely against the proposal, and litigation challenging elements of the legislation is probably inevitable. Some of the flaws and ambiguities also may be addressed through follow-up legislation next year.

Collectively known as the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, the trio of bills comprises SB 1168 by Sen. Fran Pavely (D-Agoura Hills), which establishes the legal and policy foundations for the act; AB 1739 by Assemblyman Roger Dickenson (D-Sacramento), which supplies the enforcement mechanisms; and SB 1319, also by Pavley, which provides some cleanup language sought by the governor's office.

It's a complicated piece of legislation, but the general outlines are not difficult to understand. There are 515 groundwater basins in California, and by Jan. 31, 2015, the Department of Water Resources must rank them all as high, medium, low or very low priority using the California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring system (CASGEM).

This is not as tall an order as it seems. Many of the basins (including all of those in Ventura County) already have a risk ranking through CASGEM, which bases its assessment

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# UCCE positions itself for the future

By Christopher M. Smith

My first year in Ventura County has not been without its “moments”, but these have been overshadowed by all the successes of this past year and the opportunities for the future. Amongst the successes is the completion of the reorganization of the Cooperative Extension (CE) and Hansen Agricultural Research and Extension Center (HAREC) so we are operating in a more synergistic fashion, reducing administrative and bureaucratic hurdles and costs, and thereby expanding research and education programs. This process included simplifying the process by which Ventura County CE Advisors can initiate research projects at the HAREC.

For example, Advisors Oleg Daugovich (strawberries/caneberries) and Andre Bis caro (irrigation and nutrient management), in collaboration with UC Santa Cruz faculty, have just begun a project investigating the feasibility and technical aspects of delayed irrigation and use of glycerol (a simple alcohol sugar) as a carbon source in anaerobic soil disinfection, an organically acceptable alternative to chemical fumigation of fields.

Another advisor, Surendra Dara (strawberries and integrated pest management), will be initiating a study to determine the impact of entomopathogenic fungi (injected into the soil) on strawberry plant health. Preliminary studies indicate that this group of fungal pathogens works synergistically with plants enhancing root growth and water retention around the root zone. Incidentally, the test fungus is the pathogen enemy of the notorious bagrada bug – bringing to life the saying, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” We have also engaged a research team at UCSB, led by Adam Lambert, to begin an exhaustive study on the life and ecology of the bagrada bug in its natural riparian habitats and crop fields. This basic understanding will help us develop environmental, biological and/or chemical methods to control, if not eliminate this pest.

And on a grand scale, I am in the process of developing a concept proposal for a comprehensive Ventura County research and education center that will provide your CE advisors with the resources to better serve you today and far into the next millennium. This will be a community project involving stakeholders in practically every aspect of agriculture and resource conservation, and funded by a number of federal, state, re-

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gional, and community entities.

It is our desire that this robust center encompass a significant acreage footprint; house extensive research, diagnostics, training, and plant breeding laboratories, and greenhouses; include classrooms and conference facilities for education programs and national agriculture, research and commodity conferences; and contain data analysis and visualization resources to thoroughly analyze the copious amounts of agriculture-related data collected daily, including new high-resolution aerial imaging data that is just around the corner.

The new facilities will also be accompanied by the addition of new researchers in

pomology (plant breeding), integrated pest management, vegetable crops, nutrition and food systems, and environmental horticulture, while attracting other world-renowned agriculture researchers from the U.S. and abroad to study here on long-term collaborative projects.

And our education team, which just piloted a weeklong agriculture and food systems summer camp, has plans to expand this program into a 10-week summer camp (over the next few years) to engage and nurture a new crop of agriculture researchers, growers, farmers and ranchers. A robust, comprehensive center will make this education endeavor much more enjoyable, productive and successful.

I am looking forward to working closely with the agriculture and natural resources communities in the coming year as we address immediate needs and work towards creating an agriculture center with the resources and capabilities to enhance crop productivity and our natural habitat well into the future.

— Christopher M. Smith is director of UC Cooperative Extension Ventura County and the Hansen Agricultural Research and Extension Center. Contact him at [cmwsmith@ucanr.edu](mailto:cmwsmith@ucanr.edu).

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## Ag Passes are important tool during fire season

As vegetation along the hillsides and open space throughout Ventura County grows drier with the continuing drought, this is a reminder to all farmers and ranchers, especially those in the fire prone areas, to take advantage of the Ventura County Agricultural Worker ID (“Ag Pass”) Program.

Through this program, which is offered free of charge, agricultural workers are issued a unique ID card containing a photo. This card identifies them as employees of a farm or ranch to firefighting personnel, public safety officers and other emergency workers assigned to restrict public access to areas threatened by fires and other disasters. The cards do not necessarily mean workers will be able to enter your property if there is imminent danger. Front-line emergency personnel are empowered to use discretion when it comes to protecting emergency crews from unnecessary exposure to risk which can happen during wildfires. However, in those cases when the boundaries of the closure area include agricultural land not deemed at imminent risk, the cards should allow employees access to agricultural property.

Ag Passes are issued by the Central Ventura County Fire Safe Council and can be requested in the following ways:

- Download and complete a blank Ag Pass Request Form from [www.cvcfiresafe.org](http://www.cvcfiresafe.org) and follow the instructions to email along with a digital picture to [info@cvcfiresafe.org](mailto:info@cvcfiresafe.org).
- Schedule an appointment to have a Fire Safe Council representative come to your location to take pictures of your employees and print the cards onsite for immediate distribution.
- Schedule an appointment with a Fire Safe Council representative to meet with you and your employees at the Resource Conservation District offices in Somis or the Farm Bureau office in Ventura.

For additional information please contact the Central Ventura County Fire Safe Council at [info@cvcfiresafe.org](mailto:info@cvcfiresafe.org) or call the Ag Pass program manager at (805) 402-6092.

## Notes from the CEO (cont'd from page 1)

on a variety of factors such as number of wells, population size and trends, quantity of irrigated acreage, amount being extracted, and documented negative impacts such as seawater intrusion or other impairments.

For any basin deemed to be high or medium risk, local authorities have until Jan. 1, 2017, to establish a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) with responsibility for managing it. By Jan. 1, 2020, each GSA responsible for a basin subject to "critical conditions of overdraft" must produce a Groundwater Sustainability Plan that meets with state approval (DWR has until 2016 to figure out what that will entail). Other high- and medium-risk basins must have a plan in place by Jan. 1, 2022.

Ventura County has 11 basins ranked as high or medium priority in the CASGEM system. Ten are ranked low or very low.

Each plan must detail how the GSA will bring supply and demand into balance and prevent undesirable results such as chronic depletion, seawater intrusion, water quality degradation or subsidence. Failure to meet any of the deadlines, or to submit an acceptable plan, may result in the State Water Resources Control Board assuming control of a basin and developing its own management plan for it.

The GSAs are given wide authority to regulate groundwater use to achieve their management plan objectives: mandatory metering and extraction reporting, pumping limitations, acquisition of water and water rights, construction and operation of water-supply and distribution facilities, spacing and operational restrictions on wells.

The legislation specifically designates the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency (FCGMA) as the GSA for the basins within its jurisdiction, which includes most of the county's high or medium priority basins. The FCGMA's current management plan, however, does not come close to meeting the requirements of a groundwater sustainability plan as detailed in the legislation. The Ojai Basin Groundwater Management Agency is likewise identified as the GSA for that basin, but its existing plan similarly does not meet the requirements of the new law.

The Santa Paula Basin is also identified

by the legislation as exempt from the GSA requirements, because it has been adjudicated – presumably achieving the "sustainability" required by the new act. However, some legal analysts have raised questions whether existing adjudication agreements in California – which typically do not consider ecological water needs when apportioning the supply – fulfill the requirements of the Groundwater sustainability Act, which does require such consideration. How that will be resolved, or if in fact it needs to be, remains to be seen.

There are several basins in Ventura County that require a GSA and a plan but over which no entity currently has management responsibility. These include the Piru, Fillmore and Upper Ventura River basins. There will no doubt be some institutional jockeying as local authorities try to figure out the useful and appropriate roles for their agencies in this new world of resource management. Let's hope the longtime Ventura County tradition of cooperation continues to prevail.

### Farm Bureau fills posts

At its September 18 meeting, the FBVC Board of Directors elected officers for 2014-2015. They are as follows:

President: Fred Van Wingerden  
First Vice President: Scott Klittich  
Second Vice President: Jan Berk  
Secretary: Danny Pereira  
Treasurer: Katie Brokaw

The board also appointed Ted Grether to serve out the remainder of the term held by past president Josh Pinkerton, who resigned from the board in July. Ted was a candidate for the board in our May election, and is a welcome addition to the leadership ranks. His term will expire in September 2015.

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

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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 12/25 2014.

**California Adventure and Disneyland 1-day Park Hopper** — Adult (10+ yrs): \$144 (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 — Magic Mountain Fright Fest** \$43.50 (savings \$26.49) General (3 yrs. +). Includes Fright Fest every Friday-Sunday, Sept. 27-Nov. 1, 2014. Fright Fest mazes require the purchase of a Fright Fest Maze wristband.

**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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