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Rural Kings County residents may qualify for free safe drinking water

By Amy D. Fienen

More than two in five, or approximately 44 percent of domestic wells that fall within the Kings Water Alliance boundaries contain nitrate levels that leave the water unsafe for drinking. In rural areas of the Central Valley, many residents drink groundwater, but consuming nitrate-contaminated water poses health risks. The recently formed non-profit Kings Water Alliance offers free nitrate testing to those who live in affected areas and will provide free drinking water to residents whose water tests for nitrates above safe drinking levels.

The Kings Water Alliance, which is managed by the Kings River Conservation District (KRCD), encompasses the Kings and Tulare Lake groundwater subbasins. It covers an area from north of Fresno to the southern border of Kings County. It was formed to implement new water quality requirements under the Salt and Nitrate Control Program that was adopted by the State Water Resources Control Board with new mandates for dischargers in the Valley.

Rebecca Quist, external affairs program specialist for KRCD, is spearheading the community outreach and education efforts for the Kings Water Alliance. She said the long-term goals of reducing nitrate and salt impacts and restoring

"Drinking Water" continued on page 5



What to look for when hiring a farm labor contractor

As harvest gets underway for some and is in full swing for others, many growers are struggling to find a reliable work force. Many find working with a farm labor contractor (FLC) ensures adequate workers to get the job done, but it's not a relationship that should be entered into lightly.

Since there is no firewall of protection for growers from the reliability of hiring workers upon contracting with a FLC, AgSafe has created a checklist and made it available to KCFB members on our website at kcfb.org/resources. With COVID-19 adding additional layers to an already complicated relationship, it's more important than ever that growers vet a FLC to protect themselves and ensure a good working relationship.

Theresa Kiehn, CEO of AgSafe, likened hiring a FLC to getting married without the possibility of divorce.

"Once you begin working with a FLC, you become so entangled that their actions are now your actions," she said.

"Labor Contractor" continued on page 10



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COVID continues to make planning ahead challenging

By Dusty Ference, Executive Director



Dusty Ference

Each summer, KCFB staff dedicates time to planning how the upcoming year is going to take shape. The first step is creating a calendar of events containing meetings, programs and events hosted by KCFB. Then comes the hard part: creating a budget to ensure all of our plans have the funds needed to come to life. In years past, this was a pretty straightforward process. Planning for 2022 is proving to be more complicated than other years.

We all got a taste of post-COVID-19 life for a few weeks as our planning process began. Despite efforts to manage expectations of an unmasked future, we got excited—the thought of being out in the world with our members equated to a robust plan for 2022. Cut to the last week of July and the Center for Disease Control announced guidance advising masks be worn again. Personal beliefs on masks aside, this recommendation has implications on the not-so-distant future.

We now have to consider the participants at our events and the facilities we employ to host them. Are people willing to buy tickets and attend events given the situation? Who owns and runs the locations where we hold events? Will their worker's compensation insurance coverage be impacted? Does local, state or federal ordinance govern them? Do they have a staff willing to work with the general public? Most of these questions are unanswerable at this point. So how does an organization make a plan for the months to come?

I am not claiming to have an answer to these questions. We talk about what next year holds or doesn't, and are working to create options and opportunities in a masked or unmasked California. By staying flexible and diligent, I am confident we will survive another year no matter what the world throws at us. In the meantime, we will make a plan and a contingency for our contingency. We will work hard every day to create value for our members and come out stronger together. 🙌

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Member to Member *People, Products, Prosperity*

Meras Water Solutions By Amy D. Fienen

During an extremely dry year when every drop of water is precious, silver-level Friend of Farm Bureau Meras Water Solutions helps ensure every ounce you have available makes it to your crops.

Since its founding in 2004, Meras Water Solutions has used customizable water remediations to keep irrigation systems clean and performing efficiently. They use distribution uniformity to determine if water is being evenly distributed, implement effective reservoir and well water chemical treatments, tailor



individualized winterization techniques to restore irrigation system efficacy, and protect crops from diseases with mitigation plans. Their maintenance and service programs keep irrigation systems working at optimal levels to produce abundant crops.

Brandon Obar is Meras Water Solutions' South Valley account manager and sales rep, covering Kings, Tulare and Kern counties. He works primarily with permanent crop growers, and does a lot of business

with pistachio, almond, tomato and blueberry farmers.

Founded on the belief that they can do more for their customers, Meras Water Solutions' employees prioritize consistent, exemplary customer service.

Obar said that when he meets with a new customer, his focus is on building a long-term relationship. And being the cheapest in the industry is not their goal; in fact, they pride themselves on not being the cheapest, Obar said. Rather, they strive to be the best.

"We provide excellent customer service and rely on our service model to separate us from our competitors," he said. "Personal service and being honest and direct with growers is what makes our relationships last."

Obar said that Meras Water Solutions is making a concerted effort to get more involved with localized industry programs like Farm Bureau this year, as Farm Bureau is a huge supporter of the ag industry as a whole.

To speak with Brandon Obar about how Meras Water Solutions can make your farming operation more efficient, you can reach him at (559) 474-7977 or bobar@meras.com.

The "Member to Member" feature is our way of promoting the members that help make our work possible through their financial support. Please consider doing business with companies who show their commitment to the local ag industry through their support of Farm Bureau. If your company would like to become a Friend of Farm Bureau, please call the KCFB office at (559) 584-3557.



AG NEWS IN BRIEF

Get involved in the Kings County redistricting process

Kings County residents are invited to participate in the redistricting process to help ensure district lines respect neighborhoods, history, and geographical elements. Redistricting is a process that takes place every 10 years, as local governments use new data from the Census to redraw their district lines to reflect how local populations have changed.

The first of two public hearings providing an overview of the redistricting process and criteria that guides the formation of district boundaries were held in July. Additional hearings will be held Aug. 31, and in November and December.

For more on upcoming public hearings, as well as information and materials about the redistricting process, please visit redistrictkings.com.

Chuck Kinney named new Community Development Director

Following Greg Gatzka's appointment as Corcoran's city manager, the Kings County Board of Supervisors has selected Chuck Kinney to replace him as community development director. Additionally, the board approved hiring Larry Spikes, former county CAO, to fill in as interim administrative officer until a permanent CAO is hired.

Kings County portion of high-speed rail significantly over budget

During an update to the Kings County Council of Governments in late June, California High Speed Rail Authority CEO Brian Kelly said the stretch of the high-speed rail project that runs through Kings County is now expected to cost \$2.1 billion. The original estimate was \$1.3 billion. There are 48 miles and 29 structures currently under construction in Kings County. Right-of-way negotiations are ongoing, as the Authority has possession of 754 parcels out of the 1,000 needed.

Ag Commissioner's Compliance Report



Jimmy Hook,
Agricultural
Commissioner/
Sealer

Compliance assistance available for pesticide use enforcement activities

Contributed by Mario Gutierrez, Deputy Ag Commissioner

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) enacts laws covering minimum pesticide requirements which are enforced in California at the state and local (county) levels through cooperative agreements. The Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR), California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association (CACASA), and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9 are parties to a three-way cooperative agreement that ensures a unified and coordinated program of pesticide episode reporting, investigation and enforcement in California. The responsibility for safety in the pesticide workplace is placed with DPR; County Agricultural Commissioner (CAC) departments enforce the provisions of laws covering pesticide requirements under the direction and supervision of DPR. CAC staff regulate compliance with pesticide use requirements by conducting numerous inspections. Some of these inspections may identify non-compliances ultimately resulting in an enforcement action. One tool available to help understand this process is the ability for those whom we regulate to contact our office to request a compliance audit. During an audit, staff will assess the requestor's operation to help identify any potential non-compliances.

Field inspections conducted by the CAC are

generally random and un-announced. One of the most common inspections is the Pesticide Use Monitoring Inspection (PUMI), where inspectors conduct inspections on growers and commercial applicators in agricultural and non-agricultural settings while mixing, loading or applying pesticides. Inspectors verify things like whether a grower has a valid permit and business registration in the county, if handlers follow label use requirements, if employees are provided and use the correct personal protective equipment (PPE), availability of a decontamination facility, and if environmental conditions are adequate for the application.

The Kings CAC's office conducted 103 PUMI in 2019 and 144 in 2020; inspectors also completed 51 Field Worker Safety Inspections in the same two years.

Common violations found during these inspections include worker safety violations such as no label or medical care posting at the use site, handlers not using appropriate/required PPE, PPE not available to employees, lack of required decontamination facilities or emergency eyewash, and employees not trained to handle pesticides. When field inspections contain cases of noncompliance, we are required to conduct a follow-up inspection. Many times, staff will follow up with a Pest Control Records Inspection at the headquarters of the inspected business. This will include checks to confirm training programs are adequate, pesticide handler and respiratory training is completed, posting and availability of pesticide records, storage and availability of PPE, and proper storage of pesticides.

Non-compliances may result in violations and potentially an Administrative Civil Penalty (ACP). An ACP for a non-compliance encountered during an inspection ranges from \$50 to \$5,000 per code section violated, and in some cases, penalties may be required for multiple counts, increasing fines above the \$5,000 per code section maximum. Some ACP examples include paperwork type violations, which can carry a potential fine of \$50 to \$400, worker safety violations which range from \$250 to \$1,000, and violations that result in injury or threaten worker safety could



result in a penalty of \$700 to \$5,000.

The Kings CAC department is active in providing outreach to the industry and hosts numerous pesticide handler trainings and continuing education courses on complying with pesticide laws and regulations. The annual training courses for pesticide handlers meet the EPA's requirements for employees who handle pesticides. The continuing education courses provide information and methods on how to comply with pesticide laws if you are a grower, pest control business, farm labor contactor or pest control advisor. Please contact PUE staff for assistance.

If requested, our office will conduct compliance audits that may include a mock field or records inspection that will help ensure operations compliance with pesticide laws and regulations. During a compliance audit, staff will check for non-compliance in the various inspection types. This will aid in meeting record-keeping requirements, along with requirements for employees who mix, load or apply pesticides. Areas covered during a compliance audit are identical to an inspection and can include mixing and loading procedures, maintaining labels, appropriate PPE, PPE storage, medical care posting, decontamination facility accessibility and mitigation measures to prevent pesticide hazards during applications, maintaining pesticide documents, handler and fieldworker training paperwork, chemical specific training, respiratory protection or medical supervision programs, pesticide storage and pesticide use reporting requirements.

A compliance audit is just another tool that can help ensure your operation is functioning within the regulatory requirements. This can help to mitigate infractions and potential hazards to the handler and environment. We encourage you to contact our office to request this assistance. The Kings County Agricultural Commissioner's office can be reached at 559-852-2830. 🌱

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"Drinking Water" continued from page 1

groundwater levels will be a decades long process. For now, they are in the early action plan phase.

"Our current outreach is focused on safe drinking water solutions over the short-term," Quist said.

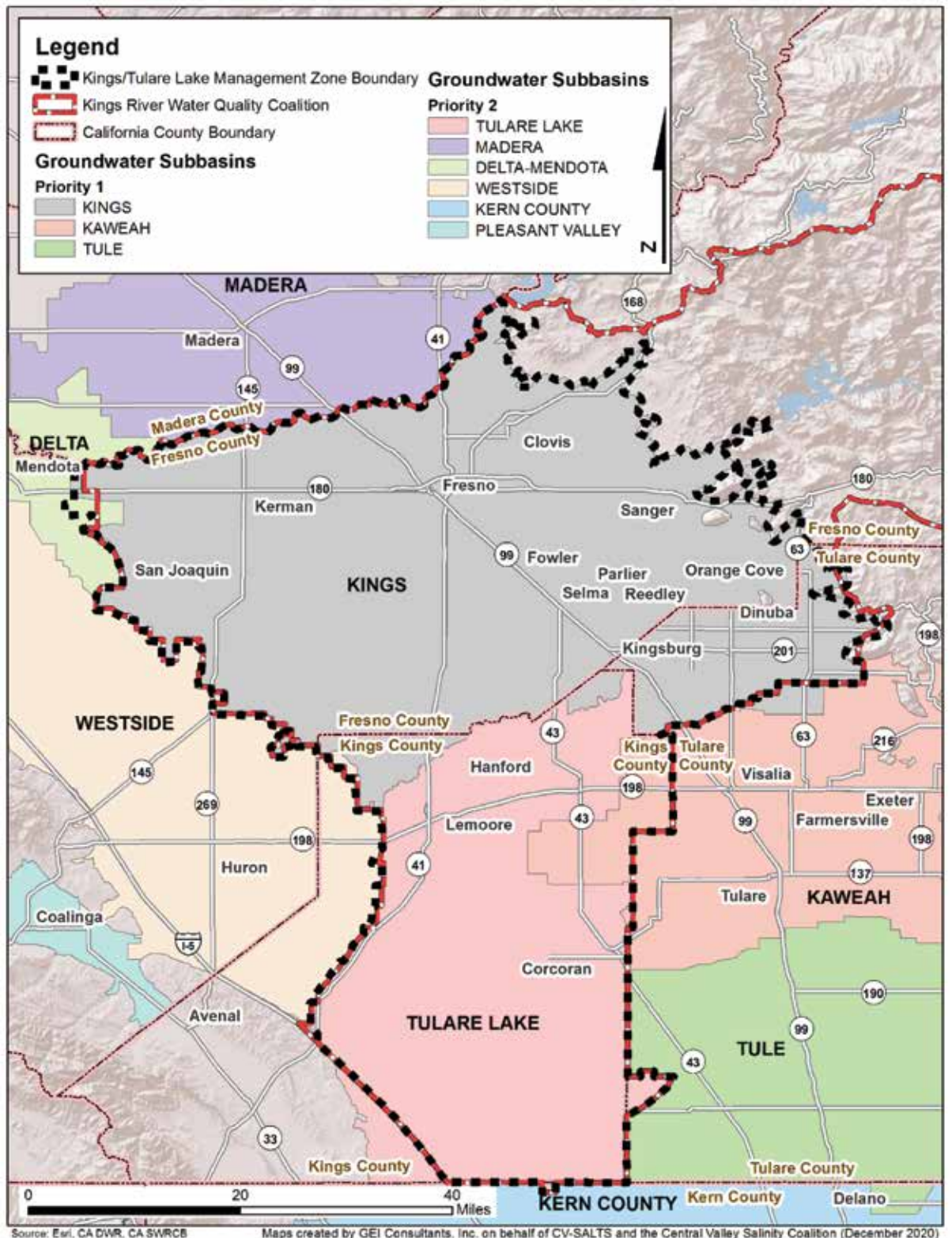
Quist explained that the safe drinking water campaign is being rolled out in two groups: priority 1 and priority 2, which are shown on the map to the right. Additionally, an interactive map at kingswateralliance.org/map can help residents determine whether they fall within the Kings Water Alliance boundaries and which priority group they're in.

Priority group 1 is currently eligible for free domestic well nitrate testing. Wells with nitrates above 10 milligrams per liter of nitrogen are considered unsafe for drinking. Residents with wells that test unsafe can have free bottled water delivered to their homes. Priority group number 2 will be eligible for the same beginning sometime next year.

While the free well testing and drinking water distribution program gets underway, the Kings Water Alliance has installed fill stations in Hanford, Kerman and Dinuba. Residents can fill up to a five-gallon container with safe drinking water for free at any time. The Hanford station is located at 504 W. 7th Street.

The majority of Kings County Farm Bureau members live within the Kings Water Alliance district. If you live in a rural area with a domestic well, please visit kingswateralliance.org to confirm your eligibility and schedule a free well test. 🐾

This map shows the boundaries of the Kings Water Alliance and whether they qualify for priority 1 or 2 status. Courtesy of Kings Water Alliance



Source: Esri, CA DWR, CA SWRCB Maps created by GEI Consultants, Inc. on behalf of CV-SALTS and the Central Valley Salinity Coalition (December 2020)



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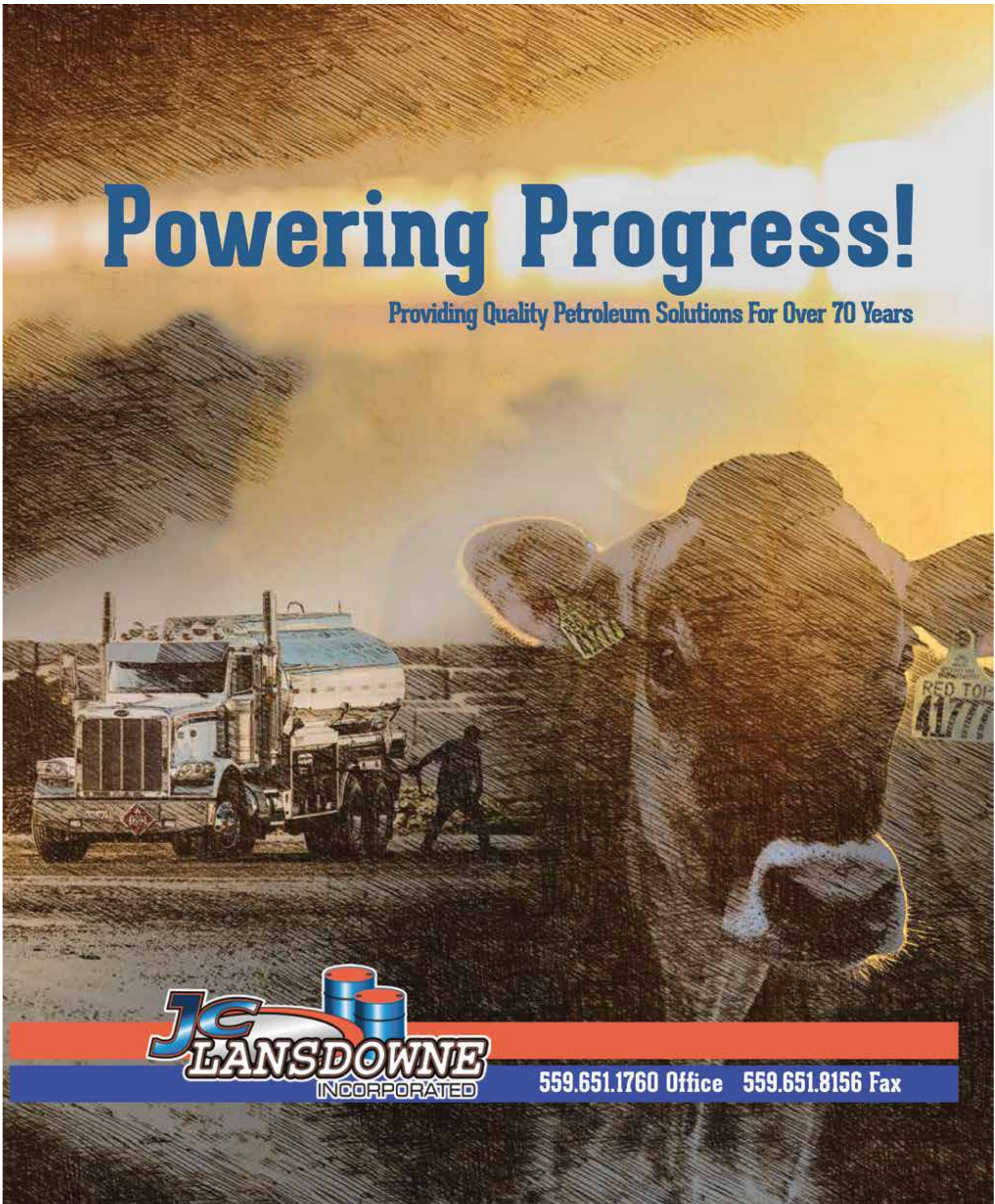
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Kings County Rural Crime Report

Copper wire thefts from irrigation pumps on the rise again

Contributed by Task Force Supervisor Rod Shulman



The Kings County Rural Crime Unit had a slow month, which is unusual for us. In July, our unit conducted or took over several investigations. We continue to see a rise in copper wire thefts from irrigation pumps occurring all over the county. In the past, the suspect in most of the wire thefts was the same person. We located the same tire and shoe impressions at several of the crime scenes. In our current wire theft investigations, we have several different tire and shoe impressions, making it difficult to identify a suspect.

Our unit is also investigating the theft of a water truck from Steve Diaz. The truck was taken from the office at the dairy on 5th Avenue. We have video surveillance of the suspect and have attempted to locate the stolen truck, but have not found it to date. We have also been conducting

more eradication operations for illegal marijuana grows. We conducted two eradication operations in July. These grows were removed as a result of community members calling or emailing our unit members. If you've notified us of a grow that hasn't been removed yet, please give us time. These operations require search warrants, fly-overs by our air unit, and surveillance of persons

coming and going from the property. We are working hard to investigate and remove all of the illegal grows we're aware of.

If you see any suspicious activity or vehicles around your property, please call dispatch or one of us for assistance. The OAN program is still a service we provide to all farmers and ranchers. If you need equipment stamped, please call me or one of our detectives for an appointment. The Kings County Farm Bureau also has SmartWater CSI available for purchase. Contact Dusty at the Farm Bureau for further information. Please also call us to report any illegal marijuana grows. We can be contacted on our cell phone numbers any time for assistance. Thank you for your support! 🙏

**Task Force Supervisor
Rod Shulman:**
559-469-4004

Detective Carlos Santos:
559-904-6893

Detective Kody Holt:
559-362-8928

**Detective
Colten Verhoeven:**
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Tulare Lake Compost
Valley Ag Spraying

“Labor Contractor” continued from page 1

Per the state labor code, the grower and FLC are equally responsible for ensuring workers are protected from possible injury and illness, and that all conditions of employment compensation are met. This includes, but is not limited to, stipulated wages, a workplace free from harassment and discrimination, and paid sick leave and health insurance. It is ultimately the grower’s responsibility to ensure the FLC they hire complies with applicable employment laws and to make a good faith effort to stay informed of the FLC’s business practices as they stand to affect the grower.

AgSafe’s checklist provides growers with an easy method for requesting evidence of the FLC’s compliance with current employment laws. Inability of the FLC to provide all requested documentation should serve as a red flag. The checklist outlines three pages of requirements to request from the FLC, which include:

- Copy of current State of California FLC License
- Copy of the Federal FLC Certificate of Registration
- Proof of workers’ compensation insurance
- Proof of general liability insurance
- Copy of the Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP)
- Copy of the COVID-19 IIPP Supplement
- Copy of the Heat Illness Prevention Program
- Copy of the Employee Handbook, including an Anti-Harassment and Discrimination Policy
- Evidence of the following annual training for supervisors and workers:
 - o Sexual Harassment Prevention
 - o General Workplace Safety
 - o Heat Illness Prevention
 - o Worker Protection Standard
 - o COVID-19 Risk Protection
 - o First Aid/CPR (1 trained individual for

every 20 workers)

- Evidence of worker wage and other compensation terms and conditions provided to the crew that will be contracted
 - Copy of a paystub, with confidential information removed
- AgSafe’s complete checklist can be found on our website, kcfb.org/resources. Please print out a copy to use when vetting a potential FLC. 📄



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- Agricultural Concrete Pads
- Custom Pump Facilities

MACHINE SHOP SERVICES

- Full Service Centrifugal Pump Machine Shop
- Custom Short Couple Lift Pump Fabrication
- Discharge Fabrication • Mid-Stretch Fabrication
- In-Field Welding, Pipe Repair & Fabrication

WELL DRILLING

- Air Rotary • Mud Rotary • Ag & Domestic

ELECTRICAL SERVICES

- Complete Pump Electrical Services
- Power Company Management
- Variable Frequency Drives
- Power Relocation to New Well • Electrical Panels
- Transformer Pads • New Services • Upgrades

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San Luis Obispo County*




PUMP SERVICES

- In-House Pump Designs
- Deep Well Vertical Turbines - All Makes & Models
- Deep Well Submersible Turbines - All Makes & Models
- Custom Built Lift Pumps
- Booster Pumps • Fertilizer Injection Pumps • Domestic Pumps

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