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KCFB supports passage of SB 559 during water rally at state capitol

By Dusty Ference, Executive Director

Kings County Farm Bureau was invited to provide comments in support of Senate Bill 559 during a rally hosted by Senator Melissa Hurtado in Sacramento on June 28. Along with industry leaders, elected officials and residents from the Valley, KCFB spoke to the need to repair California's aging surface water delivery infrastructure.

"Unfortunately, this drought is the new normal in many of our communities, and it's unacceptable," said Senator Hurtado during the rally. "SB 559 will make the investment in our infrastructure to fix the water conveyance system in our state and help our families. California's human right to water is in jeopardy without SB 559 and with it, their right to food."

SB 559, the State Water Resiliency Act of 2021, would allocate \$785 million to repairing vital water delivery systems that provide drinking water to communities throughout California and water to sustain the state's leading agricultural economy. The funds would help fix the Friant-Kern Canal, the Delta-Mendota Canal and major portions of the California Aqueduct, all of which have degraded and are losing water as a result of subsidence.

The unfortunate part of this situation that the Valley once again finds itself in is that drought impacts should be less severe with the state's ability to store and deliver service water. Still, it cannot, partially because surface water flows are

"SB 559" continued on page 10



KCFB Executive Director Dusty Ference lends support to the State Water Resiliency Act of 2021 during a water rally at the state capitol. Photo by Breanna Larman

Ag burning phase-out plans released by SJVAPCD

Central Valley farmers will need to look for an alternative to agricultural burning, as a near-complete ban is set to take effect in 2025. The four-year burning phase-out will impact vineyards, citrus, nut crops, fruit trees and rice.

Kings County Ag Commissioner Jimmy Hook said that with the exception of quarantine situations or diseased crops, no open burning will be allowed by January 2025.

It's a plan that's been in the works since the 2003 passage of SB 705 in response to the Valley's notorious air pollution, but its planned enforcement by the California Air Resources Control Board may prove costly for farmers.

Vines, trees and other farm waste that has traditionally been burned will have to be chipped, composted or sent to biomass plants. Chipping is expensive, and the number of biomass facilities available to farmers has shrunk considerably over the years. There were more than 20 plants for farmers to utilize in the 1980s; now there are five.

"Ag Burning" continued on page 5





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Executive Director

Dusty Ference
dusty.ference@kcfb.org

Farm Life Editorial

Amy Fienen
afienen@kcfb.org

Farm Life Advertising

Paula Vinzant
pvinzant@kcfb.org
(559) 901-4278

Farm Life Designer

Beth Greene

CFBF District Representative

Jenny Holterman

Contact

870 Greenfield Ave., Hanford, CA 93230
Phone: (559) 584-3557
www.kcfb.org



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AG NEWS IN BRIEF

USDA's debt forgiveness program for socially disadvantaged farmers on hold

The USDA's debt forgiveness assistance program for socially disadvantaged farmers is on hold after a recent ruling by a federal judge. The \$4 billion program aimed to help approximately 14,000 minority farmers and ranchers across the country. The temporary restraining order comes after a lawsuit filed by 12 farmers from various states claimed that the relief program for minority farmers and ranchers is discriminatory in excluding white producers. Payments, which were expected to be issued between June and December, are now on hold.

World Ag Expo planning for live event in 2022

COVID-19 forced the World Ag Expo to go digital in 2021, but organizers are planning for a live, in-person event at Tulare's International Agri-Center in 2022. Booth spaces are already 68 percent reserved, and major manufacturers including John Deere, AGCO, Case IH, New Holland, Kubota and Kioti have committed to the Feb. 8-10 event.

Greg Gatzka named new Corcoran City Manager

Congratulations to Greg Gatzka for being named the new Corcoran City Manager. Gatzka worked for Kings County for 25 years, most recently as their Community Development Agency Director and LAFCO Executive Officer. While at the County, Gatzka worked closely with Kings County Farm Bureau in fighting high-speed rail.

David Valadao introduces drought legislation

Last month, Congressman David Valadao (CA-21) introduced the Necessary to Ensure Expedient Delivery of Water Act, or NEED Water Act, to provide emergency drought relief for the Central Valley. The legislation would protect water currently in the Central Valley Project system for human needs and reduce regulatory burdens in order to lessen the negative impacts of the drought on Central Valley residents. The bill would also extend the California provisions of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) Act (P.L. 114-322) and is cosponsored by the majority of the California Republican delegation. 🐾

Supreme Court ruling: California farmers can keep union organizers off private land

In what's being hailed a huge victory by property owners, the U.S. Supreme Court sided with ag businesses last month in ruling that unions may no longer access farm property and food processing businesses under a long-held law that allowed them to do so.

Inspired by Cesar Chavez in 1975, the state law allowed unions access to farms and other ag businesses for up to three hours a day, 120 days a year, to organize workers.

Two agricultural businesses - Fowler Packing Company in Fresno and Cedar Point Nursery in Dorris - challenged the regulation on the premise that it violated the Constitution by effectually taking their property without compensation. Additionally, they claimed the practice is outdated, as union organizers now have the means to reach workers via smartphone, radio and other ways that weren't available when the rule was implemented. Both businesses were visited by union organizers in 2015.

In a 6-3 vote, the justices agreed with the claimants that, per the Constitution, private property shall not be "taken for public use without just compensation" and the "right of access" rule violates property rights. 🐾

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Member to Member *People, Products, Prosperity*

Innovative Ag Services, LLC

By Amy D. Fienen

In the constantly changing landscape of compliance regulations ag producers and processing facilities have to keep up with, Innovative Ag Services LLC (IAS) is a one-stop shop for regulatory and government funding needs.

Founded in 2007 by Nathen Heeringa, Innovative Ag Services' diverse team of ag professionals includes agronomists, farm management consultants, environmental permitting and government funding specialists. They help clients from Kern to San Joaquin County maintain annual monitoring and reporting compliance under waste discharge requirements to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board and county offices. They are experts in regulations that include the Dairy General Order, Irrigated Lands and Digester and Composting General Order. Currently, they're in the process of advancing client services specializing in SGMA, food processing and other emerging markets.

Additionally, IAS helps secure funding opportunities for clients looking to expand or improve their operation, and to help them implement regulatory practices. Since 2017, they have obtained more than \$11 million for their clients in CDFG grants, and

average an annual \$2 million in NRCS-EQIP funds.

Other agricultural services IAS provides include county permitting, the CV Salt Control Program, hazardous material business plans, hydrological groundwater monitoring, and compliance for public utility districts and wastewater treatment facilities.

Marketing Manager Kelly Verdegaal said that IAS is unique in that they help clients with all aspects of regulatory compliance, and they do so with a focus on building relationships that last. Their reputation in the industry and the loyalty of their clientele speak to the success of their business, she said.

"We understand their dairy and farming operations are more than their livelihood, they are often a family tradition," Verdegaal said. "In California, an unyielding amount of bureaucratic regulations, coupled with a shortage of natural resources, makes for a complex industry, to say the least. We are here to cut through the red tape so our clients may focus on growing and continuing their legacy through the next generation."



IAS is a bronze-level Friend of Farm Bureau, and Verdegaal said they're proud to partner with KCFB because it's in the best interest of the local farmers for the industry to work together to advocate for each other.

"Farm Bureau makes our job possible by bringing all community advocates together to strengthen efforts and make a difference, whether it be through political advocacy, community programs or economic services," she said.

Innovative Ag Services is located in the Delta View Ag Complex off Highway 198 and Road 1½, at 1201 Delta View Rd., Suite 5 in Hanford. For more information, please visit innovativeag.net or call (559) 587-2800. 📞

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Ag Commissioner's Compliance Report



Jimmy Hook,
Agricultural
Commissioner/
Sealer

Certified Farmer's Markets: Providing an opportunity to buy high quality produce directly from the producer

Contributed by Steve Schweizer, Deputy Ag Commissioner-Sealer

Summertime is upon us, as is the peak season for farmer's markets. Hanford's Thursday Night Market Place is home to Kings County's only certified farmers market (CFM), offering fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as other commodities, to the local community. It is an opportunity to get to know who is growing your food and learn more about the farming process through direct communication with the producer. Many relationships are formed in these weekly events that continue year after year.

Hopefully, the challenges the farmers market industry went through during the Covid-19 pandemic are behind us. Many markets did not operate last year, and the ones that did struggled with attendance and sales. Our local market was able to operate, but without the normally large crowds due to the ancillary events and booths not able to participate. This year, things are getting back to normal as evidenced by the larger

crowds we've seen in attendance.

The origin of today's CFM program began over 40 years ago as a result of a cannery strike. In the summer of 1976, during the height of the harvest season, one of the costliest agricultural strikes in state history occurred at canneries throughout California. Although the strike lasted only 11 days, certain crops were hit especially hard, including apricots, peaches, pears and tomatoes. During the strike, growers petitioned the state for an exemption to the standardization regulations so they could sell their products directly to the public. An executive order was issued to allow this, and the beginning of direct marketing, and eventually the CFM program, took root.

Today's rules regarding CFMs come from "direct marketing" legislation that helps support California farmers by allowing their products to be sold directly to the public and be exempt from regulations for size, packaging and transportation standards for fresh fruits, nuts and vegetables. The products sold must still meet minimum quality standards and the selling practices must be honest and fair.

The Agricultural Commissioner plays a vital role in helping to ensure that CFMs follow the intent and spirit of the law. Each producer selling at a CFM is certified by the County Agricultural Commissioner where they grow or raise their products. Their growing site is inspected to verify they are actually producing the products they sell. An embossed certificate is issued to the producer upon completion of the inspection, which is honored in all California counties. This Certified Producer Certificate lists the commodities and amount grown, estimated production and harvest season, as well as the producer's storage facilities. If you shop at a CFM, look for the certificate. It must be posted for the consumer to read.

If products are sold by weight, the scale must be



legal for trade and be inspected annually by weights and measures officials. Look for the county seal on the scale, like the one found on all supermarket checkout scales.

Organic products are very popular at CFMs. Organic producers should have their organic certification and registration available for customers to verify, if needed. Our department also inspects these producers for proper certification and sample their products to have them analyzed for pesticide residue.

A few years ago, due to pressure from both the CFM industry and the public, legislation was passed that substantially raised the penalties for those found violating the laws and regulations regarding the sale of products at CFMs. If a producer is found selling products they did not produce, the penalties include a maximum \$5,000 fine and/or the revocation of their Certified Producer Certificate.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding the certified farmers' market requirements, or are interested in selling at a CFM, please feel free to contact the Kings County Department of Agriculture at (559) 852-2830 or email us at agstaff@co.kings.ca.us.

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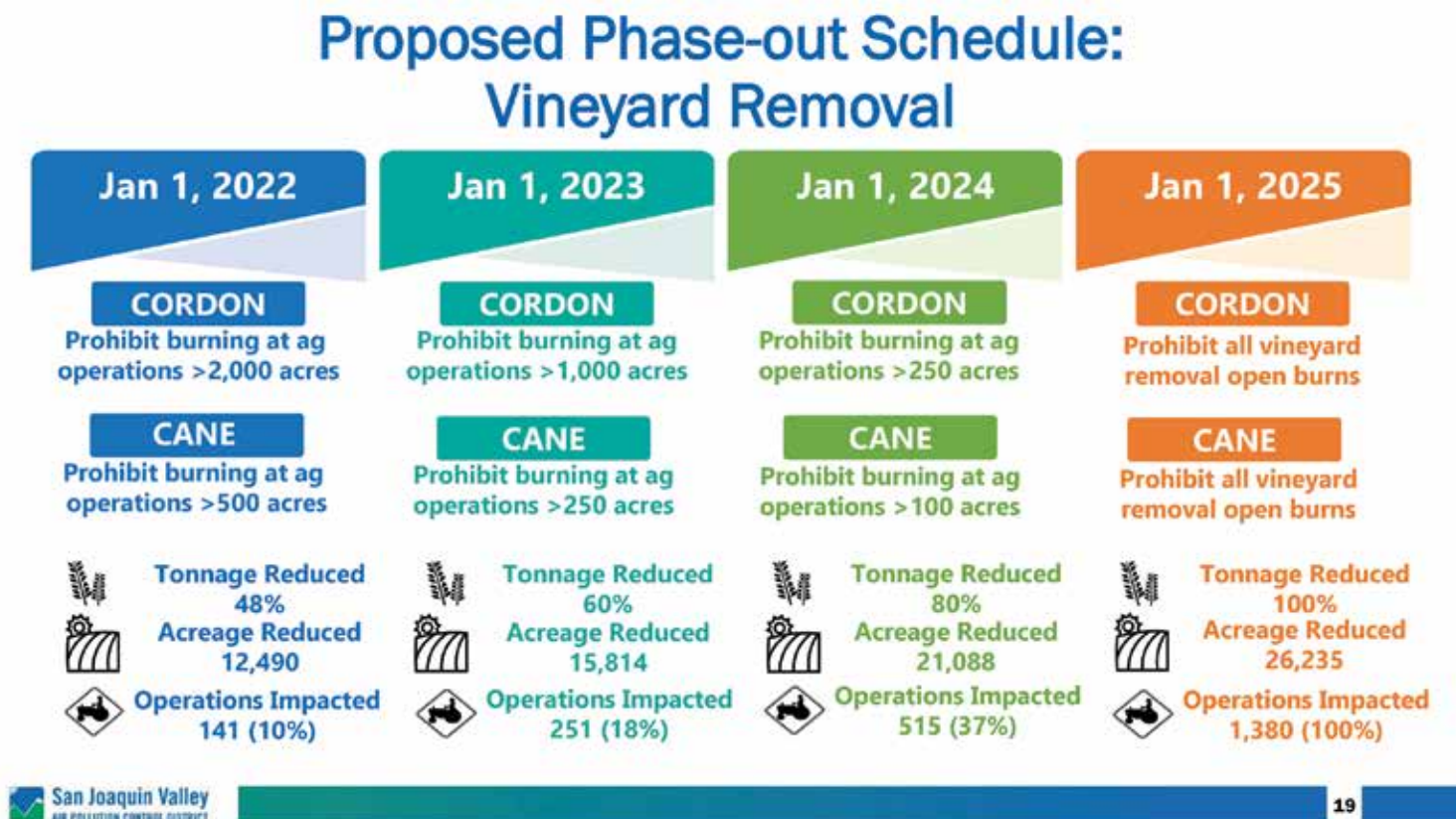
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#FINANCIALFUTURE

“Ag Burning” continued from page 1

The air board anticipates the need for an additional \$15- to \$30 million a year in state, federal and local funds to help growers cover the cost of the transition. Costs could reach \$50- to \$60 million over the next four years. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has a grant program available that provides a maximum incentive of \$60,000 per year. More on this program can be found at valleyair.org/grants/alt-ag-burning.htm.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District recently released phase-out schedules for vineyard (see graphic to the right), citrus orchard and small orchard removals and surface harvested prunings. See all the phase-out schedules and additional information on the regulations at valleyair.org, or call the Kings County Farm Bureau office. 📞



What employers need to know about revised COVID-19 safety standards

California’s journey to relaxing COVID-19 workplace standards was a long and oftentimes confusing one, but new regulations that loosened the mask guidelines were approved last month.

Under Cal/OSHA’s latest revisions to the COVID-19 safety rules, fully vaccinated workers are no longer required to wear masks in many circumstances, but employers may have questions as to how they are to verify vaccination status and what restrictions remain in place. The complete Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) can be found online at dir.ca.gov/dosh/coronavirus, but for quick reference, here are some bullet points that highlight what employers need to know to protect themselves and their employees under the revised ETS.

Important changes in the revised order

Face coverings:

- Indoors, fully vaccinated workers without COVID-19 symptoms do not need to wear face coverings in a room where everyone else is fully vaccinated and not showing symptoms. However, where there is a mixture of vaccinated and unvaccinated persons in a room, all workers will continue to be required to wear a face covering.
- Outdoors, fully vaccinated workers without symptoms do not need to wear face coverings. However, outdoor workers who are not fully vaccinated must continue to wear a face covering when they are less than six feet away from another person.

Physical distancing:

Employers can eliminate physical distancing and partitions/barriers for employees working indoors and at outdoor mega events if they provide respirators, such as N95s, to unvaccinated employees for voluntary use. After July 31, physical distancing and barriers are no longer required (except during outbreaks. An outbreak is three or more cases in an exposed group of employees), but employers must provide all unvaccinated employees with N95s for voluntary use.

Prevention program:

Employers are still required to maintain a written COVID-19 Prevention Program but there are some key changes to requirements:

- Employers must review the California Department of Public Health’s Interim guidance for Ventilation, Filtration, and Air Quality in Indoor Environments.

- COVID-19 prevention training must now include information on how the vaccine is effective at preventing COVID-19 and protecting against both transmission and serious illness or death.

“COVID-19 Safety” continued on page 10

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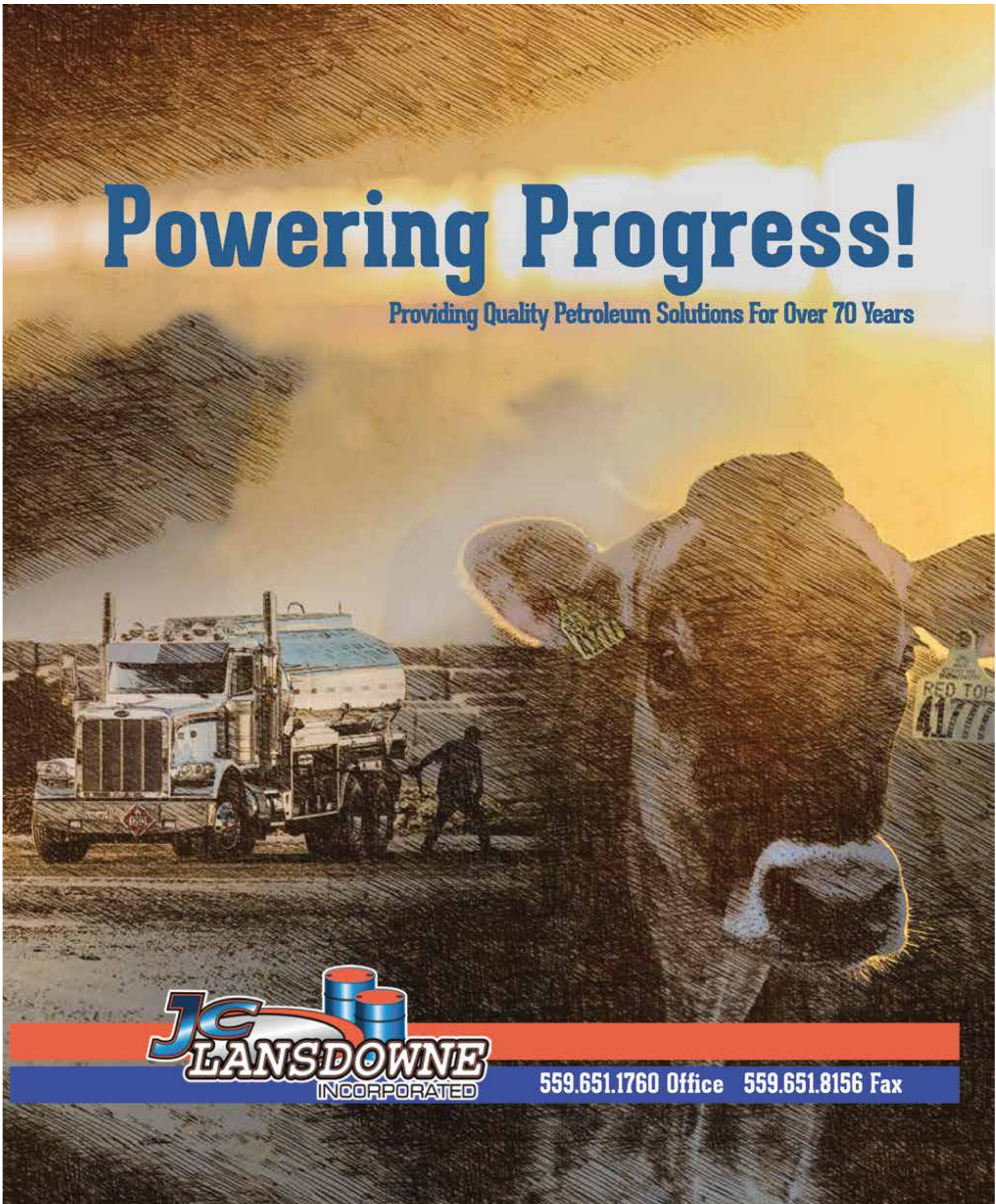
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Kings County Rural Crime Report

Unit eradicated four illegal marijuana grows last month

Contributed by Task Force Supervisor Rod Shulman

The Kings County Rural Crime Unit has been extremely busy with several investigations. In June, most of our investigations were marijuana related. We also took over several copper wire theft cases from our patrol division. In most of the copper wire thefts, there has been little to no evidence to work with in establishing suspects. During one investigation, we did get a suspect vehicle and descriptions of two suspects. We are currently looking for a smaller white truck, similar to a Chevy S-10. The suspects in this vehicle attempted to steal copper wire from the area of 6 1/2 and Kent avenues. The suspects were described as two white males with numerous tattoos. If anyone sees this vehicle, please call us immediately. It is believed these suspects are involved in several of our open investigations.

Our unit eradicated four large illegal marijuana grows last month. We were able to complete these operations with the assistance of SWAT. Three of the grows were located in the 11600 block of 9th Avenue. We removed over 1,200 marijuana plants from these locations and arrested five suspects on several drug-related charges. The largest grow we eradicated took place in Corcoran. It had eight hoop houses used to grow and harvest illegal marijuana. During the operation, 33 illegal immigrants who were working the grow were detained. Homeland Security was contacted and assisted us with this investigation. As a result, four suspects were arrested on drug charges and possession of stolen property. One stolen firearm was also located during this operation.

If you see any suspicious activity or vehicles, please call our dispatch or one of our detectives 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. Additionally, please call to alert us of any illegal marijuana grows. We can be contacted at the cell phone numbers below any time for assistance. Thank you for your support. 🙌



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Keenan Farms
Keller Motors
Kings Dairy Supply Inc.
Laguna Irrigation District
Pearson Realty Inc.

Schuil & Associates
Sullivan Farming LLC
Torrent Resources
Tulare Lake Compost
Valley Ag Spraying

“COVID-19 Safety” continued from page 5

Exclusion from the workplace:

Fully vaccinated workers who do not have COVID-19 symptoms no longer need to be excluded from the workplace after a close contact.

Special protections for housing and transportation:

Special COVID-19 prevention measures that apply to employer-provided housing and transportation no longer apply if all occupants are fully vaccinated.

Vaccine documentation requirements for employers

Employers must document employees’ vaccination status, although the revised ETS does not specify a particular method. The employer must record the vaccination status for any employee not wearing a face covering indoors and this record must be kept confidential. Acceptable options include:

- Employees provide proof of vaccination (vaccine card, image of vaccine card or health

care document showing vaccination status) and employer maintains a copy.

- Employees provide proof of vaccination. The employer maintains a record of the employees who presented proof, but not the vaccine record itself.
- Employees self-attest to vaccination status and employer maintains a record of who self-attests.
- Nothing in the revised ETS prevents an employer from requiring all employees to wear a face covering instead of having a documentation process.
- An employer is not obligated to require employees to submit proof of being fully vaccinated. Absent such a requirement, an employee has the right to decline to state if they are vaccinated or not. In that case, the employer must treat the employee as unvaccinated and must not take disciplinary or discriminatory action against the employee. 🙌

“SB 559” continued from page 1

diminished due to deferred channel maintenance for some of California’s most important canals.

Along California’s canal system, farms and ranches produce food that feeds the world, and those farms create jobs. Communities exist where jobs and water meet. Everything is connected: If we lose water, we lose farms; without farms, jobs disappear. Delivering water through California is paramount to the state’s success. Without water, there is nothing.

Drought is inevitable in California and we constantly talk about being prepared for the next one. It’s time to stop talking and get to work. Drought is no longer an issue of agriculture or urban water. It is about the people of California.

We encourage all of you to learn more about Senate Bill 559 and contact your elected officials and invite them to vote yes on the bill. It will not solve all of the water woes in California, but it is a big step in the right direction and now is the time to start. 🙌

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