

Riverside County AGRICULTURE

The official publication of Riverside County Farm Bureau, Inc.
A private, nonprofit organization serving farmers throughout Riverside County since 1917

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2024



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Welcome New Members

We would like to "Thank You" for becoming part of the Farm Bureau Family.

Queensland fruit fly threatens California citrus, other crops

The Queensland fruit fly (*Bactrocera tryoni*) quarantine is the first of its kind in the U.S. Although QFF was first seen in California in 1985, the recent detection of two adult males triggered the unprecedented quarantine action by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and CDFA.

"This pest has earned a bad reputation for wreaking havoc on fruit production in Australia, where it is native," said Hamutahl Cohen, University of California Cooperative Extension entomology advisor for Ventura County. "Adult flies lay their eggs in fruit, and the eggs hatch into larvae that then feed on the fruit, causing damage."

And while females of other fruit fly species live for only two or three months, QFF females are unique in that they can live up to a year, according to Cohen.

"Once QFF populations take root, they're challenging to manage because females can each lay up to 100 eggs per day," Cohen said.

In addition to being highly adaptable to a variety of environmental conditions, QFF has more than 170 host plants – including a wide range of California commodities such as citrus, grape, strawberry, fig, avocado, apricot, peach, cherry, nectarine, plum, pear, apple, tomato and sweet pepper.

The threat to citrus is especially concerning, as Southern California growers continue to grapple with the specter of spreading huanglongbing (HLB) disease, which kills citrus trees. Cohen said residents of citrus-growing regions can do their part to help their neighbors and local economy by respecting quarantine restrictions.

"Growers are already dealing with other invasive species like Asian citrus psyllid [vector of HLB pathogen], so we as homeowners need to prevent the spread of fruit flies to reduce the burden on them," she explained.

While a spike this year in the detections of multiple fruit fly species was likely caused by a host of factors, Cohen speculates that increased post-pandemic travel is helping to move the flies. And with holiday travel in full swing, she said it's important to practice "Don't Pack a Pest" principles.

"Invasive species often hitchhike on fruits and vegetables brought into California by travelers – that's why we often first find invasive species in urban and suburban backyards, and not on farms," Cohen said. "Travelers entering the U.S. can visit dontpackapest.com to learn about which products they can and cannot bring back with them."

To report a suspected infestation of fruit fly larvae in homegrown produce, call the CDFA pest hotline at 1-800-491-1899. Growers with questions and concerns are urged to contact their local agricultural commissioner's office.

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\$5 Million Grant Awarded to Help Farmers Enhance Pollinator Habitat in Citrus Groves

The California Farm Bureau and its partners have received \$5 million from the California Department of Food and Agriculture to implement climate-smart farming practices in citrus groves in 11 counties. The project, which is part of CDFA's Pollinator Habitat Program, will focus on hedgerow planting, carbon sequestration and soil management practices, all of which create safe pollinator habitat in citrus groves.

It will fund 20 to 45 citrus groves over three years in Fresno, Imperial, Kern, Kings, Riverside, San Bernardino, Santa Barbara, Tulare, San Diego, Placer and Ventura counties. The citrus sector in these counties generates around \$2 billion per year, playing a crucial role in job creation and contributing to agricultural and environmental sustainability efforts.

"This grant will help citrus growers offset costs associated with their efforts to increase pollinator habitat and learn more about how growers can protect pollinators while still controlling harmful insects and plant diseases," said James Cranney, president of the California Citrus Quality Council, the lead organization on the grant. "The data collected from these projects will help the industry to tell its story about their contribution to pollinator protection and climate change."

The grant was awarded to a partnership between CCQC, California Farm Bureau and the Xerces Society.

CCQC will recruit citrus growers to join the program and create pilot projects that will then help other growers determine the feasibility of developing climate-smart production practices.

California Farm Bureau will provide all administrative support and technical assistance on healthy soil management practices through its science and research nonprofit, the California Bountiful Foundation.

The Xerces Society will provide technical assistance on pollinator-related aspects of the project, including native plants, hedgerow planting and identifying optimal locations for these features that balance pollinator health with crop productivity.

"It was important to bring the right organizations into this grant application," California Farm Bureau Administrator Jim Houston said. "As the largest farmer organization in the state, we have the resources and know-how to implement such projects since we are designed to serve the farming community."

Xerces Society Pollinator and Agricultural Biodiversity Co-Director Eric Lee-Mäder said, "We are excited to be part of this project and provide pollinator habitat technical assistance for citrus growers wanting to further their environmental sustainability efforts, including carbon sequestration, which contributes to reducing the effects of climate change. These partnerships are critical to building trust and making progress on so many different fronts."

More than 80% of the awards will fund the cost of on-farm healthy soil management practices in citrus groves. As required by the funding agency, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers—as defined by the 2017 Farmer Equity Act—will receive at least 25% of the funds.

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The Taxpayer Protection and Government Accountability Act (TPA) creates new protections in the California constitution for all taxpayers in one of the nation's highest-taxed and highest-cost-of-living states.

California's agriculture industry is at constant risk from ever-increasing taxes and fees that raise the cost of doing business and hurt farmers' and ranchers' ability to compete with other states and countries.

The agriculture community is a critical voice in this effort. In 2020, farmers and ranchers across the state came together to oppose Prop. 15, the split-roll property tax increase that would have taxed everything from fruit trees to barns and other agricultural property. TPA is the critical next step in defending Prop. 13 to further protect California's farmers and ranchers.

TPA CREATES NEW PROTECTIONS FOR FARMERS AND RANCHERS

Stops State and Local Governments From Using Fees to Impose "Hidden Taxes" on Agriculture

- Every government charge is defined as a tax unless it explicitly meets TPA's definition of an "exempt charge." This prevents state and local governments from creating new taxes on agriculture by disguising them as fees on everything from water, energy use, environmental and air pollution permits, property improvements and new construction, farm equipment, and more.
- TPA also requires state and local elected officials to approve new or higher exempt charges. Current law allows unelected bureaucrats to hike them unilaterally.

Strengthens Prop. 13 Protections and Guards Against Future Split Roll Property Tax

- TPA strengthens Prop. 13 protections by prohibiting "split rate" taxes where surcharges are imposed based on a property's value above the limits set by Prop. 13. This eliminates the government's ability to charge higher taxes on agricultural and other types of properties that exceed Prop. 13's current rate limitations (1 percent of assessed value, plus voter-approved bonded indebtedness).
- It also guards against future split roll property tax increases like Prop. 15 (2020) by requiring local property taxes to remain in the county where they were collected.

Restores Voter Threshold for Local Special Taxes, Including for Property Transfer Taxes

- TPA restores the two-thirds voter approval requirement for local special taxes put on the ballot by citizen initiatives.
- This closes the court-created loophole that special interests have exploited to pass measures like ULA in Los Angeles, which created a 4 percent transfer tax on properties worth more than \$5 million and a 5.5 percent tax on properties above \$10 million.
- These types of property transfer taxes could be devastating if imposed on agricultural and other business properties.

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Strengthens Prop. 13 Protections

- Guarantees that local property tax revenues remain in the county where they were collected for schools and essential services. No more sending property taxes to Sacramento for state politicians to spend on their pet programs.
- Prohibits a "split rate" property tax by eliminating the ability to add surcharges to all properties above the limits set by Prop. 13.

Closes Court-Created Loopholes That Make It Easier to Raise Taxes

- Prop. 218 in 1996 required all local government special taxes to receive two-thirds voter approval. In 2018, the courts created the "Upland Loophole," which lowered the vote threshold for citizen-backed initiatives from two-thirds to a majority. This became the new strategy for public employee unions to raise taxes as they have the political capital to qualify citizen initiatives throughout California.
- The higher threshold would have resulted in several local government transfer taxes failing in 2022 alone, including Measure ULA and similar transfer taxes in Santa Monica and South San Francisco.

Requires a Vote on All New and Higher State Taxes

- Requires a majority vote of California voters for all state taxes passed by the Legislature.

- Since 2004, 16 state tax measures have been considered by voters, only four of which passed.

Eliminates All “Hidden Taxes”

- Clearly defines what is a tax and what is an exempt charge, addressing recent court decisions that overturned decades of established taxpayer protections.
- Limits the ability of the Legislature and local governments to disguise taxes, such as Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) taxes, as a “fee” or other type of “charge” to avoid voter approval.

VOTERS SUPPORT TAXPAYER PROTECTION

The California Business Roundtable recently led the fight to defeat Proposition 15, the \$14 billion split roll property tax in 2020, and is now leading the effort to pass the Taxpayer Protection and Government Accountability Act, which has qualified for the November 5, 2024, ballot.

Ongoing survey work over the last three years clearly demonstrates that Californians strongly desire more control and accountability over taxes and are supportive of the initiative. Our data shows a strong path to successfully pass this measure in 2024, provided we can raise the funds to go out early and educate voters on the true provisions of the TPA.

Farm Bureau Rallies Members for 2024 Tax Fight

Farm Bureau has joined a broad business coalition backing a ballot measure that seeks to protect Californians from unwarranted tax increases. The Taxpayer Protection and Government Accountability Act targets “hidden taxes” on agriculture in the form of fees, defends property tax limits and sets a higher bar for passing special taxes from local governments.

The initiative has qualified for the November 2024 ballot but faces headwinds from Democrats in the Legislature, who recently passed a measure to override it. Gov. Gavin Newsom has also stepped into the foray, partnering with California Attorney General Rob Bonta to file a lawsuit seeking to throw it out.

Farm Bureau is urging members to get involved, the coalition estimates it needs to raise up to \$80 million to pass the measure. To proponents, the measure does not block new tax increases but creates more accountability and transparency.

“[The act] gives you the right to vote on all future tax increases,” said Steven Fenaroli, who directs political affairs at California Farm Bureau. “This is about making sure that farmers and ranchers continue to have their voices heard and that we don't let unelected bureaucrats continue to raise taxes and fees on us.”

Fenaroli pointed out that California has the highest personal income and sales taxes and the trend is continuing, with the Legislature proposing more than \$200 billion in new fees and taxes this year, though Newsom vetoed many of those measures out of fiscal concerns. Fenaroli also channeled the frustration of farmers who have for years pleaded with the State Water Resources Control Board to not raise fees further.

Ben Granholm, a senior account executive at the political affairs firm Swing Strategies, lambasted a steady stream of gas tax increases approved every July, arguing the public is not involved until the referendum happens and that although the increases have raised \$5 billion in revenue, the state still has the worst roads in the nation.

The groups aim to restore a 1996 tax measure, Prop. 218 which required a two-thirds vote for all special taxes. They charged that a 2017 measure created a loophole by allowing for simple majority votes.

“This is nothing new, this is nothing wild or farfetched,” said Fenaroli. “This is literally just restoring the will of the voters.”

But some are setting up roadblocks for the initiative. California Secretary of State Shirley Weber, who previously represented portions of San Diego in the Assembly, crafted a summary on the initiative telling voters it would limit the ability of governments to raise revenues. Tino Rossi, vice president at Swing Strategies, called the description biased but said taking the secretary to court would likely be unsuccessful.

Along with the Assembly resolution seeking to block the initiative and Newsom's lawsuit, the initiative is competing with an opposite ballot measure that would lower the threshold for local governments to raise taxes to finance housing and infrastructure projects.

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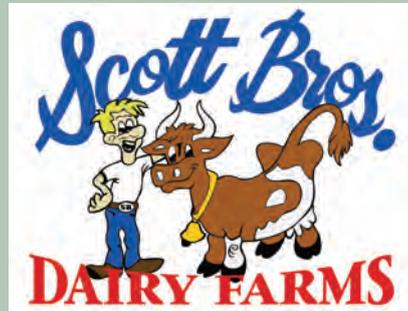


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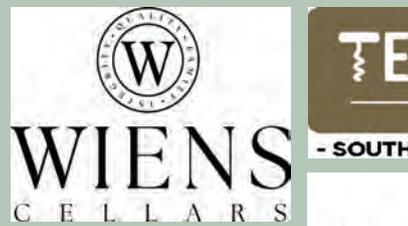


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Citrus Yellow Vein Clearing Virus Found in Los Angeles County

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has confirmed positive identifications of Citrus yellow vein clearing virus (CYVCV) in the Hacienda Heights area of Los Angeles County during the California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) routine multi-pest survey. This is the second area in California where CYVCV has been detected, following the first detections in Tulare County in March 2022.

In response to the additional detections of the virus, CDFA is surveying residential properties within a 1-mile core radius area around the initial find site in Los Angeles County to fully determine the extent of the disease's presence in the area.

CYVCV can be spread by vectors as they move from tree to tree feeding on foliage. The vectors include citrus whitefly, green citrus aphid, melon or cotton aphid, and cowpea aphid, which are all known to be present in California. CYVCV can also be spread through grafting and the movement of infected propagative materials and rootstocks, and contaminated tools and equipment. While there is no treatment for CYVCV, as of now, the best mitigation measures are to control the virus' vectors and sanitize tools and equipment. To the greatest extent possible, growers are encouraged to urge their field crews to clean and sanitize all their equipment thoroughly in between jobs or when moving between groves.

For any questions about CYVCV, please call the CDFA Pest Hotline at 1-800-491-1899 or visit CDFA's website to learn more.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS



The next Board meeting will be held in person at Farm Bureau office and via Zoom Conference on Tuesday, February 13, 2024. Please call our office at (951) 684-6732 for more information.

Food and Farm News

Courtesy of CFBB

Shannon Douglass becomes first woman to lead California Farm Bureau

Shannon Douglass, a diversified farmer from Glenn County, has been elected as the new president of the California Farm Bureau. Douglass, who served three terms as first vice president, becomes the first woman to head the organization, which was founded in 1919. The election took place at the organization's 105th Annual Meeting Dec. 1-6, in Reno, Nevada. Douglass is an owner of Douglass Ranch in Orland, which raises cattle and grows walnuts, corn and forage crops. She succeeds Jamie Johansson, a Butte County olive and citrus fruit grower who served three terms as president.

Farm Bureau joins coalition backing tax-reform initiative

The California Farm Bureau has endorsed a 2024 ballot initiative that would give voters the final decision on approving new local and state taxes. The Taxpayer Protection and Government Accountability Act is backed by a coalition that also includes the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, the California Business Roundtable, the California Business Properties Association and other supporters. The new measure would require all new taxes passed by the California Legislature be approved by voters and would reaffirm a two-thirds voter approval for all new local special tax increases.

Desert lettuce trials show promise for shallow drip irrigation

Desert lettuce growers may be able to save more than 10 inches of water by converting to shallow buried drip irrigation. Two years into a three-year study, UCCE Irrigation and Water Management Advisor Ali Montazar said shallow irrigation paired with high-tech moisture sensors have shown promise for significantly reducing water and nitrogen use. Preliminary results show that converting to drip does not significantly affect yield. And Montazar said drip produces higher quality lettuce by reducing disease pressure.