



Fresno County Farm Bureau

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U.S. Agriculture Secretary visits Valley for first time

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan were in the Fresno and Modesto areas this week – their first official visit as head of the nation's agricultural policy agency. This is the first time both the secretary and deputy secretary have visited a single state simultaneously.

As part of the USDA heads' visit, they participated in an editorial board meeting at the Fresno Bee on Tuesday, participated in a brief tour of local agriculture Wednesday morning, and conducted a town hall meeting in Modesto on Wednesday afternoon.

Vilsack and Merrigan met privately with local dairy representatives to discuss USDA's personal involvement in the current dairy crisis. According to the Fresno Bee, Vilsack said the USDA has boosted the dairy industry by increasing the price-support program, buying products to be used in the school lunch program and making exporting easier. He also announced this week the creation of the Dairy Industry Advisory Committee, which will be made up of 15 dairy representatives, to assist the USDA with long-term and short-term solutions to solving the dairy crisis and volatility of prices.

Other topics discussed with Vilsack and Merrigan during the visit included: comprehensive immigration reform; health care reform and its effect on rural America; Department of Transportation's Cross-Boarder Trucking Demonstration Program with Mexico; forest management; water availability; Asian citrus psyllid pest detection; and the importance of the region's production of fruits and vegetables as it relates to USDA's nutritional programs.

Also this week, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md) toured Mendota with Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno. Hoyer participated in a tour and briefing of local impacts from the drought and recession. He was in Mendota during a food distribution organized by the Community Food Bank.

Sen. Feinstein calls for scientific review of biological opinions and additional storage in state water bond

More than 90 agricultural and water leaders and local elected officials attended a meeting with U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein on Wednesday to focus on solutions to the west side water crisis. The luncheon meeting at Harris Ranch brought in water industry representatives from as far away as southern California and Sacramento Valley, as well as local farmers, food processors, agricultural organizations and high-level state and federal water agency officials.

The discussion focused on short-, mid- and long-term solutions to fixing the Delta. Lester Snow, director of the California Department of Water Resources, provided an overview of statewide water conditions, recapping the need for additional storage to capture wet years' runoff and the need for increased flexibility in operations of the water projects. Snow said in 2006, statewide runoff was 173 percent of average, with carryover at 123 percent. Conversely in 2009, statewide runoff is 67 percent of average and carryover is estimated to be around 66 percent, he said. "It would have been nice to have put this water [2006 runoff] somewhere," Snow said, calling for additional storage facilities.

Snow, Deputy Interior Secretary David Hayes and other local water industry representatives discussed the need to implement two physical improvements including the proposed 2-Gates Project and Intertie conveyance facility between the California Aqueduct and Delta-Mendota Canal. Snow said the state has already committed \$17 million for construction of the 2-Gates Project, which will provide barriers to help steer the ESA-listed Delta Smelt away from the state and federal water pumping stations.

The water industry officials also called for a review of the biological opinions (BO) on the Delta Smelt and salmon, both of which call for reduced export pumping and greatly constrain operations of the state and federal projects. Several water districts and agencies, as well as the State DWR and local governments have legally challenged the BOs, calling for a "reconsultation" of the science used to form the opinions.

Wanting to avoid long drawn-out legal action, Sen. Feinstein suggested "to get out of the courts and at the table" to find a workable solution to the BO debate. After much discussion, Sen. Feinstein charged Hayes with the task to develop a plan to resolve the inadequacies and conflicts in the two BOs within the next 30 days. If a plan is not developed by the deadline, Sen. Feinstein said she will call for a review of the BOs by the National Academy of Sciences. "We need to move ahead," she said.

For a long-term fix, Sen. Feinstein expressed support for a water bond that must include additional water storage. "I want to see a large, comprehensive, balanced bill," the Senator said at a news conference following the meeting.

Governor appeals to President Obama for federal disaster declaration

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger sent a letter to President Barack Obama appealing the denial of California's request for a major federal disaster declaration for the state as a result of severe drought conditions.

On June 19, the Governor requested a federal disaster declaration from President Obama for Fresno County and issued an executive order, activating the California Disaster Assistance Act. By taking this action, the state has been able to provide temporary supplemental assistance to the local governments and non-profit organizations that supply food and other aid to those who are impacted by the drought statewide. The order also waived the one-week waiting period for unemployment insurance.

In July, Gov. Schwarzenegger received a letter from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) denying the request for a major federal disaster declaration in the State of California as a result of severe drought conditions.

The Governor's response to the denial states that the monetary cost to the state and the economic impact on local governments, combined with the economic impact of recent drought-related fires, make this incident of such severity and magnitude that effective response and recovery is beyond the capabilities of the state and affected local governments, and that supplementary federal assistance is necessary.

Food Bank still needs volunteers

The Community Food Bank still needs volunteer helpers for the community food distributions in drought-impacted communities.

As reported in Friday Follow-Up the last few weeks, more than three million pounds of food each month is being distributed to five rural communities in west Fresno County, including Huron, San Joaquin, Firebaugh, Mendota and Selma.

The joint effort is administered by the Community Food Bank, County of Fresno, HandsOn Central California, along with federal and state agencies. The Food Bank needs 450 volunteers each week to distribute food on the first and third Thursdays of the month in Huron; first and third Tuesdays in San Joaquin; second and fourth Fridays in Firebaugh; second and fourth Tuesdays in Mendota; and second and fourth Thursdays in Selma.

Volunteers can sign-up on-line at: vols4disaster@handsoncentralcal.org. For details, contact HandsOn Central California at: (559) 237-3101; or the Food Bank at (559) 237-3663.

CCC needs staging locations

Fresno County is working to get the California Conservation Corps (CCC) in the area to help distribute food. However, CCC volunteers need a location to stay and a way to access food when they come. CCC is flexible with a location or facility, but needs the minimum of a bathroom and shower facilities. For food, they need breakfast, a sack lunch and dinner.

If anyone knows of a possible facility for 15 to 45 members to come and work the distributions for several weeks or longer, contact Ken Austin, Fresno County Office of Emergency Services, at (559) 445-3391.

Legislation Update

By Teresa Plascencia
FCFB Governmental Affairs Coordinator

Congress is on recess and Congressional members are visiting their districts. When they return, one bill that will require close monitoring addresses the Estate Tax:

H.R. 3524 (Mike Thompson, D-CA), the Family Farm Preservation and Conservation Estate Tax Act "Estate Tax," seeks to exempt agriculture land from the estate tax, as long as the land remains in agriculture. More detail will be provided in the September edition of Agriculture Today.

For details on proposed legislation, contact FCFB at (559) 237-0263 or teresap@fcfb.org.

Ag Booster Barbecue is set for Sept. 13

It's time to get ready for the 32nd Annual Ag Boosters Barbecue. The Ag One Foundation and the California Women for Agriculture (CWA) will be hosting the annual fundraising event at Rancho Vista del Rio (Borba Ranch) on the San Joaquin River near Highway 99 in Madera on Sunday, Sept. 13, from 4 to 8 p.m.

Through this annual event, the organizations have been able to raise over \$656,000 to benefit students and programs in the Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology at Fresno State and CWA's educational efforts.

In addition, Ag One will hold its Fantasy Vacation drawing, featuring different destinations. A live and silent auction also are included as part of the activities.

Tickets cost \$50 per person, \$450 for table of 10 if purchased by Sept. 3; or \$60 per person, \$550 table of 10 after Sept. 4. Tickets can be purchased on-line at: www.agonefoundation.org, or by calling the Ag One office at [\(559\) 278- 4266](tel:5592784266).

CDQAP offering Environmental Stewardship Certification classes for dairy producers in September
California Dairy Quality Assurance Program will be offering free classes for dairy producers to receive Environmental Stewardship Certification in Tulare and Modesto. The classes will focus on air quality and water quality, covering environmental issues, regulatory requirements and best management practices. Certification entitles producers to significant discounts on regulatory fees, including a 50 percent reduction on annual water quality permit fees.

Classes in Modesto will run Tuesday, Sept. 1, 10 a.m. – noon; Tuesday, Sept. 15, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.; and Tuesday, Sept. 22, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.; at the Stanislaus County Agricultural Center, HI Room, 3800 Cornucopia Way, Modesto. Classes in Tulare will run Thursday, Sept. 3, 10 a.m. – noon; Thursday, Sept. 17, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.; and Tuesday, Sept. 24, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.; at the Tulare County Ag Center, 4437 Laspina Street, Tulare.

For more information, call CDQAP at (866) 662-3727.

Words to live by

- Your job won't take care of you when you are sick. Your friends and parents will. Stay in touch.
 - You don't have to win every argument. Agree to disagree.
 - Get rid of anything that isn't useful, beautiful or joyful.
 - Don't audit life. Show up and make the most of it now.
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Next Week's Calendar

Sept. 2 Agricultural Land Conservation Committee, 8 a.m., FCFB Office

Sept. 3 CMAC Board meeting, 3:30 p.m., Dickey Youth Conference Center;
FCFB Board of Directors' meeting, 6 p.m., FCFB Office

This Week's Calendar

Aug. 24 CA Farm Water Coalition Board Meeting; SJVAPCD Meeting – CMP/Rule 4702

Aug. 26 Water meeting with Sen. Feinstein; Tour with USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack

Aug. 28 CA Water Quality Control Board Groundwater Workshop;
Small Farm Regulatory Compliance Workshop;
Fresno Ag Roundtable, 7 a.m., Marie Calendar's, Cedar and Shaw avenues
