



## Fresno County Farm Bureau

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### Williamson Act Subvention Funding still in question; Supervisors vote to hold back on non-renewal process

By Teresa Plascencia

FCFB Governmental Affairs Coordinator

On Tuesday, the Fresno County Board of Supervisors discussed the future of Fresno County's participation in the Williamson Act program, and took action to send a letter to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger asking him to restore the State's share through subvention funding. The Board also directed county staff to delay the non-renewal process for existing Williamson Act contracts this year and to not accept any new contracts.

State subvention funding reimbursements to the counties were vetoed from the State Budget this year, forcing Fresno County to absorb the \$5.6 million shortfall and to make decisions about its future involvement in the program.

Countywide non-renewal is one option available to the Supervisors. Non-renewal would phase every Fresno County Williamson Act contract out of tax protections over nine years. Enrolled parcels currently see property tax reductions of 20-70 percent for the 10-year contractual commitment to keep the land in agricultural production. Nearly one-third of all private land in the state is under a Williamson Act contract. Fresno County has 1.47 million acres of farm and range land under Williamson Act contracts.

Supervisor Phil Larson said, "We [farmers] can't take a 30-40 percent [tax] hit. For our county, those involved in Williamson Act, it would not be productive [to non-renew], [instead] to hold fast and see what happens next year."

Supervisor Judy Case said, "Our real effort should focus on the Governor; he blue lined this act. We need to keep our contracts in place".

FCFB Executive Director Ryan Jacobsen and FCFB Board Members Mark Thompson and Bryan Beekman urged the Supervisors to continue this important tool. Jacobsen offered suggestions of what should be included in the letter to the Governor, including the important financial contributions the counties already invest in the program and what county services are at risk from the funding shortfall. In addition, the

counties should be made aware of how long they may be responsible for funding the program, given the 10-year duration of the Williamson Act contracts. Representing beef producers, Thompson emphasized the importance of the Williamson Act to producers who run cattle on both the east and west sides of the county.

With the current pressures on farmers and ranchers, such as low commodity prices, inadequate water supplies and costly environmental regulations, any increased production costs--such as increased land-based taxes--could be enough to drive farmers out of production.

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### **USDA finally declares drought disaster areas**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture this week declared that 50 of California's 58 counties are natural disaster areas because of crop losses due to the ongoing drought. The long-awaited declaration means that emergency loans will be made available to farmers who have suffered financial losses from the drought this year.

C DFA Secretary A.G. Kawamura said the drought disaster declaration is an important first step in helping farmers, ranchers and entire communities that have been decimated by the drought. "The losses from this drought reach into the hundreds of millions of dollars and affect the entire state, from Shasta County in the north to San Diego County in the south; from the coast, to the desert, to the eastern Sierra. This is a genuine crisis for California's food supply, and for all Californians," said Kawamura.

For information about the loan program, contact the Fresno FSA office at (559) 276-7494.

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### **Almond harvest underway; crop appears to be short**

With just about half of the area's almond crop harvested, it looks like this year's crop may fall short of the statewide estimate, according to growers and processors. With much of the crop still on the ground, it's too early to tell overall, but it's safe to say it likely will be less than last year's huge production.

Jason Baldwin, plant manager of Panoche Creek Packing in Kerman, said the yields so far have varied, depending on the area. The Madera, Chowchilla and LeGrand areas are showing crop reductions due to frost that occurred during bloom and early fruit set in March. Panoche Creek's General Manager Frank Roque said there appears to be significant damage in some orchards in those areas. "On average, some growers are trying to get half of what they had last year," he said.

In addition to frost, Roque said other factors may be contributing to a lighter crop. Last year's crop was so large, Roque said many varieties may show alternate bearing influences and could be taking a year off. Also water issues stemming from last year and increased use of well water could be contributing factors. Post-harvest irrigations for almonds are critical for setting the next season's crop and water shortages along the west side's almond growing region make it difficult to have enough water for those critical irrigations. Likewise, groundwater in this area can contain higher levels of Boron, which almonds trees don't favor. One grower reports one west side orchard may be as much as 60 percent off of last year's production.

Roque and Baldwin both said there are areas in the region that are better than others though. "By Nov. 1, we will have a better handle of where we're at," said Roque. "Most people think it may be under the estimate, but by how much is in question," he added.

The USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service forecasts California's 2009 almond production at 1.35 billion meat pounds, down 17 percent below last year's crop. The forecast is based on 710,000 bearing acres statewide. Fresno County has more than 120,400 bearing acres.

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### **FCFB's FAACT Class VII is announced**

The Fresno County Farm Bureau has announced its selection for the Future Advocates for Agriculture Concerned about Tomorrow (FAACT) Leadership Development Class VII for 2009-10.

Class VII is a diverse cross-section from local business, governmental and agricultural industries from both public and private sectors. Members of the class are:

- Kristen Avery, Bank of the West, Clovis
- Councilmember Andreas Borgeas, City of Fresno, Fresno
- Jeffrey Carr, Deerpoint Group, Inc., Fresno
- Kerri Ginis, Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce, Fresno
- Emilio Miranda, Allied Grape Growers, Fresno
- Lorna Schultz-Roush, Schultz Ranch Inc., Riverdale
- Anthony Serpa, AgriLand Farming Company, Fresno
- Stephen Sotomayor, Councilmember Andreas Borgeas' Office, Fresno
- Elizabeth Steinhauer-Clark, Bolen Fransen LLP, Fresno
- Debra Tom McCray, Assemblymember Juan Arambula's Office, Fresno

The award-winning FAACT Program is an eight-month intensive, educational program for community leaders to acquire knowledge on a broad spectrum of issues affecting our region, particularly the agricultural sector. The seminars discuss agricultural labor and immigration, air quality, land use planning and trade. Because of water's importance to the region, two of the sessions provide a comprehensive focus on watersheds, water resource management, groundwater, and water quantity and quality issues of Fresno County's major water sources, including the San Joaquin and Kings rivers and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The first class session will be on Oct. 12.

Direct questions to Teresa Plascencia at (559) 237-0263 or email: [teresap@fcfb.org](mailto:teresap@fcfb.org).

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### **Fresno County to receive grant under USDA farmers' market program**

The USDA announced the recipients of its 2009 Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), which includes a grant of \$94,445 for the County of Fresno. The grants are awarded to encourage and support the viability of farmers' markets and direct marketing projects nationwide.

As part of the USDA's "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" program, the farmers' market program helps promote local and regional food systems to help boost local economics and increase access to fresh produce in low-income neighborhoods. Grant funds will be used to establish, expand and promote farmers' markets and other direct producer-to-consumer marketing opportunities.

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### **Reminder: Cotton Harvest Safety Training Workshop is next Tuesday**

Sign-ups are still being accepted for next Tuesday's annual Cotton Harvest Safety Training Workshop at the U.C. West Side Field Station on the southwest corner of Oakland and Lassen Ave. near Five Points.

The free safety training program will begin with registration and refreshments at 7:30 a.m., with presentations beginning at 8:15 a.m. The program concludes at noon with lunch. To RSVP for the event, contact the FCFB office at (559) 237-0263 or via email at [info@fcfb.org](mailto:info@fcfb.org).

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### **California Farm Bureau launches annual photo contest**

Wednesday, Sept. 30 is the deadline to submit entries for the California Farm Bureau's 2009 Photo Contest. More than \$2,000 in cash prizes will be awarded in the annual contest.

Amateur photographers who are Farm Bureau members can submit their photos that best highlight California agriculture in the five categories: Kids & Critters; From Farm to Fork; All in a Day's Work on the Farm; Natural Beauty; and Budding Artists (for aspiring shutterbugs 13 years and younger who are children of Farm Bureau members).

Detailed contest information, including entry forms, is available at: [www.cfbf.com](http://www.cfbf.com).

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### **Words to live by**

Get outside every day. Miracles are waiting everywhere.

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### **Calendar of Upcoming Events & Meetings**

- Sept. 25** Fresno Ag Roundtable, 7 a.m., Marie Calendar's Restaurant, Cedar and Shaw avenues
  - Sept. 29** FCFB/State Fund Cotton Harvest Safety Training, 7:30 a.m., U.C. Westside Research Center, Five Points; Details: (559) 237-0263
  - Sept. 30** Manchester GATE School Fabulous Food Machine presentation, 2:15 p.m.
  - Oct. 1** FCFB Meeting of Members/Board of Directors meeting, 6 p.m., FCFB office; RSVP: (559) 237-0263
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