

YUBA-SUTTER FARM BUREAU

croptalk

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PRODUCER FOCUS:
URBINA FARM MANAGEMENT

FIRE PREVENTION AND SAFETY FOR
AGRICULTURE OPERATIONS: HOW
TO GET AND STAY IN COMPLIANCE

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MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION
PARTNERSHIP IN BIRD RETURNS
PROGRAM FOR WATERBIRDS



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YUBA-SUTTER FARM BUREAU CROP TALK

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and public policy advocacy in order to promote the economic viability of agriculture balanced with appropriate management of natural resources. This magazine and the activities sponsored by the Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau are paid for by the annual dues of its membership.

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Article suggestions are encouraged, and we also encourage our members to submit their own articles for review. These should be mailed to our office. Use of articles is at the sole discretion of the Crop Talk Editor.

New Cover Crop Selector and Database Available for California

By Sarah Light, Agronomy Advisor, University of California Cooperative Extension



Figure 1 Common Vetch - Courtesy of Sarah Light, UCCE

There is a new cover crop tool available for growers, technical assistance providers, and crop advisors. Cover crops provide many benefits because they keep soil covered, maintain living roots that support microbial life, and integrate a new plant species into crop rotation. **The Cover Crop Species Selector** is a cover crop database and a species selector tool. California was added to this national resource in September.

Start by selecting your state, which filters down to a list of species commonly grown in California. Then select either “Get a Recommendation” or “Browse Cover Crops.” Browsing allows you to explore the traits of different cover crops. Once you select a species you’re interested in, you’ll see a description and photos, as well as information about basic agronomics, environmental tolerances, tolerable soil conditions, and growth habits. Planting considerations include seeding rate and depth, and typical seeds per pound, and termination methods and timing guidelines are also included. The tool includes relevant notes such as grazing limitations, some planting and establishment nuances, and pest and disease information related to crops in nearby fields or the following crop. Each cover crop is also rated for seed persistence, residue management challenges, and volunteer establishment in following crops.

To “Get a Recommendation” select your field location. This automatically pulls soil and environmental data. Then choose from a list of 14 goals. Up to three goals can be selected and adjusted in order of priority. To optimize recommendations, select your cover crop planting season, identify your cash crop growing window, as well as cropping system (annual or perennial).

The following page leads to a ranked list of all cover crops based on your goals, climate and soil type. The first goal (Goal 1) is an important sort and filter component of the data set. You can re-order goals by clicking on the column headers for your goals, but this doesn’t generate a new list of recommended cover crops. To get a new recommendation based on new or re-ordered goals, return to the goals tab. The output page also depicts the reliable cover crop establishment window for each species with the user-inputted cash crop growing window overlaying it. This visual shows if there is an overlap with an annual crop or a conflict in management window for a perennial system. Cover crop species are greyed out if the species rank low for Goal 1 or if the reliable establishment window conflicts with the cash crop season. You can click on individual cover crop species names to see the information sheet for that species. Finally, the tool has a variety of filters that allow the user to filter down their results even further. We recommended not over filtering the results and instead exploring different cover crop species in the database that are highly ranked for the users’ goals, location, and growing window.

The dataset was created by experts in the West including researchers, Extension professionals, farmers, natural resource partners, seed industry and non-profit representatives. The tool can be accessed through the Western Cover Crops Council website or at <https://covercrop-selector.org>. We welcome feedback. If you have experience with cover crop species and it doesn’t match the information in the tool, please write us a note in the Feedback tab. ☺



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Rice Growers Partner with the Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership in BirdReturns Program for Waterbirds

By Leslie Williams, YSFB Program Coordinator

Residents and visitors of Yuba and Sutter Counties surely recognize the sights and sounds of migratory waterbirds throughout the valley. There is nothing quite like seeing the white blanket of Snow Geese covering the flooded rice fields on a crisp foggy autumn morning, or the echo of the Canada Geese flying overhead in V formation against the backdrop of the Sutter Buttes. They are as much of a staple to our community as the rice itself, so it is fitting that the very programs that support the migratory waterbirds are managed in partnership with local rice growers.

Our growers understand that their fields are an ecologically important habitat for both local and migrating wildlife. Because production cycles do not always align with bird breeding and migration seasons, farmers who wish to maximize the benefits of their land in support of wildlife will leave portions of their land fallow and dedicate it to conservation. Thankfully, there are programs in place to provide compensation to growers to help offset the costs involved with adjusting operations to provide waterbird habitat. As stewards of the land, growers have an opportunity to work with organizations such as the Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership (The Nature Conservancy, Audubon California, and Point Blue Conservation Science) through a program known as BirdReturns and the California Ricelands Waterbird Foundation (CWRWF) Bid4Birds program.

For over a decade, the BirdReturns and Bid4Birds programs have been compensating growers to create habitats for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds by flooding their fields at specific shallow depths in spring or fall when migratory birds need it most. In 2021, BirdReturns expanded its crop types with the help of additional funding. The incentive payments to growers help mitigate the additional expenses growers incur to support the Pacific Flyway ecosystem, such as energy or water costs or extra post-harvest preparation not normally done.

Rice growing practices of seasonally flooding to accelerate decomposition of rice straw mimics how the Sacramento Valley landscape functioned naturally prior to levee systems for flood control, agriculture, and urban growth. Both BirdReturns and

Bid4Birds programs extend the time water stays in the field making it available for waterbirds when shallow wetland habitat is needed most. "Conservationists and scientists who monitored the migratory and nesting patterns of shorebirds were able to calculate the timing and duration of shorebird breeding and nesting activities. They used that information to determine the gap between the date when growers normally would drain their fields, and the date until birds needed use of the fields to flourish" wrote CRWF.

BirdReturns and Bid4Birds are strictly voluntary programs, for which participating growers apply to participate. Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau member Wynette Sills of Pleasant Grove

Farms is one example of a local grower that enthusiastically participates in both BirdReturns and Bid4Birds. When asked about their involvement in these programs, Wynette said "The opportunity to provide habitat to migratory waterbirds, including ducks, geese, sandhill cranes, and shorebirds, has blended very well with and provided complementary benefits to our Regenerative Organic Certified Rice farming rotation, but could be a positive



Figure 1 American Avocet - Photo Credit Briana Magner

addition to any farming operation. We believe we have seen a reduction in weed pressure in rice which is planted the following spring after the field has previously undergone a late summer/early fall BirdReturns shallow flooding. In fact, we have doubled our Bid4Birds field requests for this upcoming fall flood season".

Besides the ducks, geese, and swans most of us are familiar with, other species supported by the programs include the Long-Billed Dowitcher, Least Sandpiper, Dunlin, Greater Yellowlegs, Long-billed Curlew, Killdeer, Black-necked Stilts, White-Faced Ibis, American Avocet, Greater and Lesser Sandhill Cranes. "According to the recent Rice Footprint Report by UC Davis (<https://www.calrice.org/rice-footprint>), BirdReturns generated over \$2 million in farm payments and facilitated over 60,000 acres of bird habitat, with over 1.8 million birds counted, since 2014." This credible evidence speaks to the success of this important public and private donor-funded and grower supported partnership. For more information, visit birdreturns.org or contact your YS Farm Bureau for contact information at 530-673-6550. 🌾

Meet the 2026 Yuba-Sutter Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee Chair!

By Yuba-Sutter Young Farmers and Ranchers

Hannah Taylor is excited to serve as the 2026 Young Farmers and Ranchers (YF&R) Chair. Born and raised in the Yuba-Sutter area, Hannah became involved in the Sutter FFA program during her freshman year, where her knowledge of agriculture developed alongside her leadership skills. Her capstone of FFA was receiving her American Degree.

As a recipient of the Yuba-Sutter Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee Scholarship, she wanted to learn about this organization and enjoyed the thought of continuing to serve the community, learn more about agriculture and meet new people. In parallel with her FFA experience, she has a desire to offer the same opportunities to others around her while developing leadership skills herself.

Hannah looks forward to the growth opportunity for herself and the Committee. She believes this Committee offers young individuals in the Yuba-Sutter area the unique opportunity to get a behind the scenes look at many operations and processes most people know nothing about. The support of a flourishing Farm Bureau also allows aspiring members to grow their careers through events in different areas that interest



them including education, government, business, and of course farming and ranching.

At the end of the day the Committee's goal is to support young leaders in the community which not only includes committee members but future members as well. We support the youth in our community through events such as Farm Day, Toys for Tots, and offering scholarships just like the one Hannah received.

Hannah has not pursued an education or career in the agriculture industry, which serves as an example that it is not required to work in agriculture to join the Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee.

The YF&R committee wants to thank outgoing Chair Ryan Emory for his years of service and leadership.

Want to learn more about YF&R? Join us on July 7th at Anderson's Flying Service to learn about crop dusting and our networking barbecue with the Farm Bureau on July 10th.

Follow us on Instagram at [@yubssutteryfr](https://www.instagram.com/yubssutteryfr) to stay up to date with what we are up to. 🌾



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California Agriculture Commissioners Launch Emergency Response to Contain Dangerous Plant Pest

By California Agriculture Commissioners and Sealers Association and California Department of Food and Agriculture

Agricultural Commissioners in several California counties have launched emergency efforts to identify nursery plants purchased at Northern California Costco Wholesale locations that may be infested with the glassy-winged sharpshooter — a destructive invasive pest that poses an immediate threat to the state's grape and tree fruit industries. "Controlling the spread of this pest is the top priority for Agricultural Commissioners across the state," said Lindsey Carter, Executive Director of the California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association (CACASA), which represents Agricultural Commissioners in all 58 California counties. "Agricultural Commissioners in all affected counties are increasing inspections within their counties to address the spread and working closely with the public to locate, remove, and safely destroy infested plants before the pest can become established." Counties with Costco locations suspected to have received shipments of potentially infested nursery plants include: Alameda, Butte, Contra Costa, Humboldt, Marin, Merced, Napa, Placer, Sacramento, San Mateo, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus and Yolo. "We are asking for the cooperation of anyone who purchased grapevines or citrus trees between April 21 and May 20 from Costco Wholesale warehouses located in any of these counties," Carter said. "We understand that people may be

reluctant to part with these plants, but it is critically important that the spread of this devastating pest is contained quickly." Carter noted that preventing the pest from becoming established will significantly reduce the need for future pesticide



Figure 1 GWSS Inspection Station - Courtesy of Sutter County Ag Commissioner's Office

applications and costly eradication programs — another important reason for public cooperation. The glassy-winged sharpshooter damages plants primarily by spreading *Xylella fastidiosa*, a deadly bacterium that causes Pierce's disease in

grapevines. In addition to grapevines, the pest attacks hundreds of plant species including almonds, citrus, stone fruit, alfalfa, and ornamental plants.

Public Guidance

Residents who purchased potentially affected plants are being asked to take the following steps immediately:

- **For grapevines:** Place two garbage bags securely over the plants and seal them tightly.
- **For citrus trees:** Contact your local County Department of Agriculture/Weights & Measures to schedule an inspection.
- **Do not** place plants in household trash or compost bins.
- Contact your local County Department of Agriculture/Weights & Measures for guidance on preventing further spread of the glassy-winged sharpshooter.

Costco Wholesale has been cooperative in assisting officials with tracing plant shipments and identifying affected retail locations. The chain has issued a notice to customers who purchased plants associated with this incident stating they are eligible to receive a full refund.

Because the glassy-winged sharpshooter thrives in both agricultural and urban environments, local agricultural departments actively monitor its spread throughout California. When dangerous invasive pests or diseases are detected, County Agricultural Commissioners play a central role in every phase of response, including detection, containment, eradication, enforcement, and public outreach.

"Agricultural Commissioners are the experts when it comes to local agricultural conditions, crop locations, pest pathways, seasonal conditions, and high-risk sites," Carter explained. "The role they play is critical to protecting our nation's food supply, a significant portion of which is produced in California."

Carter added that the scale and complexity of invasive pest threats facing California have increased dramatically over the past three decades due to expanding global trade and travel.

"California's pest prevention system has been strained by budget cuts, staffing shortages, and outdated infrastructure and technology," Carter said, referencing a recent report issued jointly by CACASA and the California Department of Food and Agriculture. "An emergency involving a pest capable of damaging multiple major crops only underscores the importance of strengthening these systems." 🌱



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Urbina Farm Management

By Leslie Williams, YSFB Program Coordinator

Our newest Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau (YSFB) Business Support Member and this month's producer focus is Urbina Farm Management. A father-son duo, this family's agricultural roots in Yuba and Sutter Counties run deep. Coming to the United States from Mexico at the age of fifteen in the early eighties, Jaime Urbina began his career in agriculture as a laborer working alongside his father right here in the orchards and fields of Yuba and Sutter Counties. Coming full circle, Jaime is now working alongside the youngest of his own four children, Roberto Urbina, who together operate their own successful agriculture labor contracting company serving the Yuba-Sutter region, as well as the counties of Colusa, Glenn, Butte, Yolo, and surrounding areas.

Jaime spent many years working for Filter Farms in Sutter County, where he honed his skills in orchard management and developed a passion for stone fruit before striking out on his own in 2005 with his wife, to start their own family farm located in the community of Hallwood outside of Marysville, in Yuba County. There, Jaime and his wife raised three sons and a daughter, all of whom had a role in their farming operation that was then centered on fresh produce, including a farm stand and farmers' markets. In fact, the Urbina Family was a staple of Marysville's popular Peach Festival for many years prior to starting their farm management business in 2023. Jaime's two eldest sons also now work in ag business in other regions of California, and his daughter became a nurse. Roberto, who graduated from Marysville High School and then Fresno State University with a degree in Ag Business, recalls "Growing up, I worked alongside my family and learned the value of hard work, responsibility, and customer service."

From laborer to farmer to businessowner, Jaime Urbina never lost sight of the values that guided him along the way and shaped his business model today. He and Roberto want people to know that they are committed to providing quality labor,



effective communication, and dependable service and that they strive to meet their goal of building long-term relationships by being honest, responsive, and focused on doing quality work. The scope of their services ranges from providing farm labor, to assisting with employee onboarding, communications, and workforce coordination.

Urbina's recently opened a centralized office in Marysville to better serve their employees, growers, and the local community by helping connect workers and farmers throughout the region. But if you are looking for Jaime, chances are he is not in the office, because you are more likely to find him visiting the sites where his labor teams are working. Rarely seen without a tool in hand, he personally walks the rows to ensure the work is up to his high standards. We got to meet Roberto and Jaime Urbina at a local peach orchard in early June to see labor crews in action,

thinning the late harvest canning variety. Crews worked efficiently yet delicately through the trees, obviously masters of their craft. Jaime confidently shared that his crews averaged 700 bins a day last year during peach harvest. When asked how he feels about working with his youngest son, the twinkle in Jaime's eyes said more than his words, as he simply responded "proud".

When Jaime and Roberto were asked about why they joined the Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau, they stated that they "... believe in supporting local agriculture and staying involved in the agricultural community, and the Farm Bureau provides valuable education, advocacy, networking opportunities, and resources that help strengthen agriculture throughout our region. We also believe it is important to build relationships with fellow growers, agricultural businesses, and industry leaders."

As our membership knows, one of the biggest challenges facing agriculture today is finding consistent labor while also managing the rising costs of production. Urbina Farm Management wants to help ensure that growers have access to reliable labor when they need it most and are committed to providing that operational support driven by the values that have been foundational to their family and businesses – treating people fairly, keeping their word, and taking pride in their work. You can contact Urbina Farm Management to learn more by calling Jaime at 530-218-2909 or Roberto at 559-774-7548. 📞



Presidents Corner: Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau Members Advocate at the State Capitol

By Brian Greathouse, YSFB President

On May 26th, California Farm Bureau hosted the final day of the annual Calling on the Capitol advocacy program. This program includes a series of member visits to the state capitol from March to May to meet with legislators and discuss the impacts of proposed legislation on California agriculture.

Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau (YSFB) was represented by four members who participated in meetings with seven legislative offices, including both state Senators and Assemblymembers. Throughout the four-day advocacy series, more than 51 Farm Bureau members met with 70 legislative offices, sharing agriculture's perspective with lawmakers as they considered key policy proposals. May 26th was a particularly busy day in the Capitol, with many bills being heard on the floor that week, making our visit feel particularly impactful.

During our meetings, we discussed several key legislative priorities including Assembly Bill (AB)



2646, AB 1603, and AB 1585.

We shared our concerns about AB 2646, which would establish a \$19.75 minimum wage for certain agricultural employees beginning in 2027, with future increases tied to inflation. Farm Bureau opposes this measure due to the impact it would have on California's already rising labor costs. This bill passed the full Assembly and moved to the Senate.

We also discussed AB 1603; a proposal related to PFAs compounds in pesticide products. Farm Bureau members expressed concerns that the bill potentially impacts 1,153 products used in agriculture, structural pest control and public health programs without practical alternatives being available to growers. This bill passed the full Assembly and moved to the Senate.

The last bill was AB 1585. Farm Bureau supports the truth-in-labeling measure that would require wines labeled as

"American" to be made with 100 percent American-grown grapes, like the standard already required for California wines. The bill has advanced to the Senate and was recently referred to the Senate Governmental Organization Committee for consideration.

Additional conversations focused on the Wolf Livestock Compensation Program and the need to support ranchers experiencing livestock losses as wolf populations expand throughout the state. This budgetary ask includes funding for a multipronged approach with funds available for: compensating ranchers for livestock losses, staffing for fish and wildlife, and research at the UC level and UC Cooperative Extension support to ranchers and communities. Additional funds would support a Coexistence program, recognizing that if the state wants wolves on the landscape, it must support the ranchers who live and work there.

We also highlighted the benefits of autonomous tractors and other agricultural technologies that can improve efficiency, sustainability, and workforce challenges, and the antiquated laws that prevent the use of them in California. By talking with lawmakers now, we are hopeful that as industry is ready to present changes, legislators are primed and fully informed of the necessity of updating these regulations.

Calling on the Capitol is a valuable opportunity to build relationships and provide legislators with perspectives from the people growing our food. Many of the representatives that we met serve urban districts and may not have regular interaction with agriculture. By sharing our experiences and explaining how proposed legislation affects farming operations, we help bridge that gap and ensure agriculture's voice is heard during the legislative process. We are confident that these meetings will continue to make an impact and spark the interest of our elected officials. 🌾

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Fire Prevention and Safety for California Agriculture Operations: How to Get (and Stay!) In Compliance

By Leslie Williams, YSFB Program Coordinator

Fire “season” does not really exist in California, rather it is a year-round concern and a risk that does not take time off after harvest. As temperatures rise and spring gives way to summer, ag operations from production to processing are in full swing, and with that activity comes increased exposure to potential fire activity.

Fire prevention is not only a matter of safety, but also an issue of compliance, and the liability that comes with both. Ag businesses face an elevated risk of fire from dry vegetation, equipment use, fuel storage, electrical systems, commodity drying and packaging, and the ever-present threat of wildfires that do not discriminate between landscape nor geography in the Golden State. Employers should have a solid fire safety plan that includes worker training and equipment maintenance to reduce vulnerability and maintain alignment with the various mandates that govern hazards in the workplace.

Fire extinguishers are one of the most well-known tools of fire safety in the workplace but simply having them around is not enough. In fact, there are numerous regulations specific to extinguishers that businesses need to be aware of in order to comply with law, and are found across two primary authorities: California Code of Regulations, Title 8 for employers that answer to Cal/OSHA, Title 19 and Title 25 for housing, and certain vehicles that fall under the California Vehicle Code and Title 13. The nuances of what kind of extinguisher is required, how many, where stored and mounted, and how often they are inspected and serviced can change with each environment, and getting any of those details wrong can mean fines, failed inspections, or denied insurance claims after a fire.

Fire extinguishers are hand-held pressurized units that contain an agent to fight fire – which might be a chemical, foam, or water. They are usually marked for fighting four different fire types, including the following:

- Type A Fire: Ordinary combustible materials like paper and wood.
- Type B Fire: Comprised of flammable liquids like grease or gasoline (can also be used for Type K fires, like cooking oils).
- Type C Fire: Involves electrical equipment like circuit breakers and appliances.
- Type D Fire: This includes combustible metals and chemicals and is usually found in chemical labs and industrial facilities.

Other types of required fire safety equipment can include hood systems, sprinklers, alarms, and emergency lighting. Like extinguishers, hood system requirements vary by location type and are not limited to just kitchen hoods. Other business types that are subject to hood regulations include industrial operations such as painting, and certain chemical storage.

These fire prevention and suppression systems require regular inspection and maintenance by a licensed technician. To learn more about the requirements and related services, we reached out to National Fire Systems, Inc., a family-owned company headquartered in Sacramento that has a dedicated service technician in the Yuba-Sutter area with a large agriculture customer base. Their company works closely with farmers and ag businesses to ensure their required workplace fire safety equipment is properly stocked, accessible, inspected and hydrotested as needed. Many companies also choose to



have National Fire Systems perform fire demos as safety training for their staff, often at the recommendation of insurers and to qualify for premium discounts. At a minimum, appointments are made annually and consist of fire extinguisher certification and maintenance. Technicians also respond if extinguishers are deployed so they can inspect and recharge the equipment. Extinguishers in need of a hydrotest are taken back to National Fire Systems shop by the technicians, and loaners from the company are often left behind for emergency use while the customer's extinguishers are out for testing. Technicians then deliver the hydrotested

extinguishers back to the customer once the services are completed. Fire safety in California agriculture is not a one-time checklist item—it is an ongoing responsibility that protects employees, property, equipment, and the future of business operations. With year-round fire risks and a complex web of regulatory requirements, employers must remain proactive in maintaining fire prevention systems, training workers, and ensuring all required equipment is thoroughly inspected and serviced. By partnering with qualified fire safety professionals like National Fire Systems Inc. and staying current on compliance obligations, agricultural businesses can reduce risk, avoid costly violations, and be better prepared to respond when emergencies occur. Investing in fire prevention today helps safeguard both lives and livelihoods for the long term. 🌱

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Water Uniformity Tool Helps Farmers Identify Savings

By Vicky Boyd, AgAlert

A recently launched online computer program not only helps producers determine whether irrigation systems are applying water uniformly but can also estimate the cost of wasted energy, water and fertilizer. Dubbed the Distribution Uniformity and Return-on-Investment Estimator, the free program is the work of irrigation experts Jim Anshutz and Inge Bisconer. Distribution uniformity refers to how evenly an irrigation system applies water throughout a field or orchard.

The online estimator identifies areas of an irrigation system needing maintenance, repairs or upgrades to improve distribution uniformity. It also translates the distribution uniformity score into an estimated financial return on investment based on estimated water, energy and fertilizer savings as well as estimated potential yield improvements.

Statewide, the impacts could be huge, Anshutz and Bisconer said. California has more than 4 million acres irrigated with low-flow microsprinkler and drip irrigation. Of those, about 3.4 million acres have not been tested. Of the roughly 5,400 drip and microdistribution uniformity evaluations conducted, more than 60% received low or poor scores, and many of those have not been upgraded.

While improving distribution uniformity potentially impacts producers' profitability, it also may affect the environment by reducing the amount of nitrogen potentially leaching below the root zone and into groundwater, Anshutz said.

The simplified distribution uniformity and return-on-investment protocol is based on methodology developed by Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, in the 1990s and long considered the industry standard. The protocol covers pressurized irrigation systems, including drip, microsprinklers and solid-set sprinklers.

Distribution uniformity testing involves measuring the output of the selected emitters, jets, microsprinklers or sprinklers in a field or orchard for a specific amount of time. It also includes testing system pressure at given points.

But Anshutz said collecting the data using the older protocol in a large field or orchard may require several days, and producing a grower report may take weeks because of lengthy data analysis. Since the distribution uniformity score isn't translated into financial terms, even after growers receive the reports, they may not fully understand what the readings mean relative to the need for system improvements.

No irrigation system is perfect or has a 100% distribution uniformity, but 90% is considered excellent. As an example, Anshutz said, testing may have determined a grower's distribution uniformity was 80%. To many people, 80% is a B grade, which is considered above average and still pretty good.

In irrigation, he said an 80% distribution uniformity means there's room for improvement that is most likely financially viable. A general rule of thumb in the industry is that for every 1% improvement in distribution uniformity, growers can expect a 0.5% improvement in yield or more, he said.

Cory Broad, a Fresno-based regional and agronomy sales manager for AvidWater, said he was first attracted to the distribution uniformity and return-on-investment estimator by its simplicity and repeatable results. Being able to provide growers with actionable data furthered its usefulness.

Since the 2014-15 drought, Broad said the irrigation industry has focused mostly on how irrigation systems can save water. But the estimator allows irrigation designers and servicers to take a more holistic approach. "We still look at (water savings), but we now know the cost of energy to move it, apply the water and the cost of fertilizer applied," he said.

Describing it as a tool, Broad said the estimator helps quantify the problem for grower-customers and show them why they need to remedy it. The fix could be something as large as upgrading to a variable-drive pump to something as small as system remediation that involves running chlorine shock for four hours to clear lines and emitters, followed by a two-hour flush.

As a Fresno-based licensed professional agricultural engineer, Anshutz developed a series of complex spread sheets to estimate how much reduced distribution uniformity was costing producers in wasted energy, water and fertilizer. It also factored in potential yield improvements. The spreadsheets were the basis for the distribution uniformity and return-on-investment estimator.

"You could say, 'Hey, you're at 20% less than you could be,'" he said. "That means you're potentially overapplying 20% of your water, fertilizer and power. Here's how much you're possibly wasting, and here's how much yield you're possibly forgoing. Combine the two, and here's basically how much you could afford to spend to fix it."

In his AGH2O consulting business, Anshutz would take it further and draft retrofit

designs to improve overall system distribution uniformity. The improvements may have cost \$500 per acre based on estimates from partnering irrigation dealers, but the grower may save \$750 per acre.

The new simplified distribution uniformity program is based on sampling just one representative block in an orchard or field and taking significantly fewer pressure and flow measurements overall than the existing standard procedure. Typically, a two-person team can finish sampling in four to six hours, depending on emitter types and flow direction, Anshutz said.

The program walks system evaluators through previsit questions as well as where to collect flow and data. After the collected data is entered into the program, it generates a comprehensive report as a PDF file to print or download and send to the grower. Compared to the Cal Poly protocol, the simplified distribution uniformity results have been found to be within 1% to 2%, which Anshutz considered statistically sound.

"The advantage here is that we can find out for the grower whether they're in the ballpark of good or in the ballpark of bad," said Bisconer, a managing member of Surf 'N Earth Enterprises in Cardiff. If producers receive excellent scores, they don't need to do anything further.

"But if they're in the ballpark of bad, well then, let's dig a little deeper and find out how much money they're really leaving on the table in terms of water, energy and fertilizer loss, and forgone yield potential," she said. That may mean the next step is conducting a more comprehensive system analysis using the standard Cal Poly sampling protocol.

With minimal training, he and Bisconer said producers, their workers, resource conservation district employees, consultants and others could conduct the simplified distribution uniformity test. For those who want to learn about the nuts and bolts behind the program, Bisconer also wrote a 600-plus page technical manual.

Anshutz and Bisconer's work was underwritten by a nearly \$500,000 California Department of Food and Agriculture Water Efficiency Technical Assistance program grant awarded to the Coalition for Urban Rural Environment Stewardship in 2022. The distribution uniformity and return-on-investment estimator can be downloaded for free at www.curesworks.org/du_roi_estimator.

Vicky Boyd is a reporter in Modesto. She can be reached at agalert@cbbf.com. ☎

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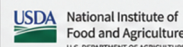
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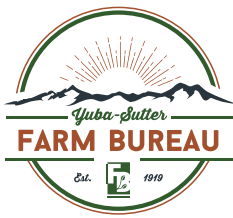
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