

San Joaquin Valley **Ag** 2024

A Supplement to **The Business Journal**

PACT CAPITAL

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Cover Photo by PACT Capital

Adam Mortanian (left) and Tyler Shegerian, along with their team at PACT Capital, are a lender made for these times, combining advisory services with direct financing firepower.

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PACT Capital

An Agricultural Finance Company Founded For This Exact Moment

By Ramon Castanos

Farmers are starting 2024 in a tough position, caught between inflationary pressures, which are causing the price of everything to go up except commodity values, and higher interest rates. Even the best positioned operations are experiencing stress and having to adjust from these market dynamics.

In this environment, to survive it will require a strong capital management plan, a complete view of liabilities and general creditworthiness, and, most importantly, a lending relationship that can provide capital, time and understanding.

With the possibility that the Fed will maintain a restrictive rate policy through 2024, growers and agribusinesses need reliable options for financing their farms and operations. Banks, Farm Credit, Insurance Companies, and Agriculture Finance Companies (“AFCs”) each have their role to play in the agriculture real estate capital markets.

What is an Agricultural Finance Company?

In the wake of continued traditional bank regulatory tightening, PACT Capital’s founders had the vision to revive the time-tested, non-bank Agriculture Finance Company model and offering in preparation for this exact moment. That moment is here, and they are focused on growth.

As an agriculture finance company, PACT Capital is unencumbered by the regulatory and compliance

pressure faced by traditional bank lenders that accept deposits from the public, allowing them to move faster to fund projects for its clients, who are farmers, business owners, and real estate investors. Their rates are very competitive, programs are flexible, and they are focused on delivering a best-in-class customer experience.

“With our experience and lending capabilities, we feel we have reinvented what could be the future of how farmers and agribusiness are financed,” said Adam Mortanian, managing director and co-founder.

PACT Capital was formed in 2020 in Los Angeles as a commercial real estate mortgage banking firm and direct agriculture finance company. Mortanian, a former commercial banker, partnered with his brother-in-law, Tyler Shegerian, to bring their vision for an entrepreneurial, relationship real estate lender to reality. Mortanian’s background was in entrepreneurship and banking and Shegerian’s background was in family business (recycling and agribusiness) and the law.

Access to Credit

“Farmers today have access to more financial resources and products than ever before. While there appear to be a lot of available financing options, the farmer and agribusiness’s ability to secure such funding is becoming more challenging,” said Shegerian, managing director and cofounder. “At PACT Capital we believe by providing our agricultural clients with advice, and liquidity, we

are truly a partner with them through the good and the bad.”

Competitive advantages that PACT Capital offers ag borrowers include specialization in commodity types, access to local credit decision makers, a diverse financial product set, asset-based and alternative lending capabilities, and flexible repayment structures.

Adding in higher interest rates, the industry also faces a unique and daunting set of challenges both natural and man-made, including trade agreements, water costs, weather conditions, commodity price volatility, an aging farmer population and much, much more.

Balance Sheet Recession?

“There is concern that agriculture, like certain commercial real estate asset classes, may be undergoing a ‘Balance Sheet Recession,’ which, combined with eroding cash flows from increased farming costs, SGMA, and depressed commodity prices, is making borrowing in this space more challenging than at any point in the last 40 years,” said Shegerian.

A Balance Sheet Recession is when equity levels in portfolios or businesses deflate due to increasing interest rates and costs that follow an era of hyper low-interest rates and easy credit, ultimately forcing owners to save more and pay down debts to “right-size” their balance sheet and operation.

“We have a different view of the situation,” said Mortanian. “The majority of the volatility in this space is behind us

and the markets are on good footing. As interest rates settle, good operators will be well positioned to grow and thrive as long as they have a capital partner aligned with their vision and operation.”

PACT was Founded for this Moment

This moment in the cycle requires a lender that is familiar with lending into equity on the balance sheet, who can underwrite the collateral and commodity with a long-term view, reviewing borrower plans and structuring loans to help assist in getting through the tough times.

Traditional banks have seized up, becoming more conservative, focusing on current portfolios and slowing the pace of originations to new credits in industries under stress.

“Alternatively, PACT Capital is uniquely positioned to underwrite the entirety of a borrower’s operation, agriculture, and commercial properties. We do it looking both backward, which is typically how traditional lenders look at it, and forwards, accounting for new market dynamics or borrower’s unique ability to add value to the operation involved in the loan request,” said Mortanian.

PACT Capital remains bullish on California Agriculture and is focused on customers’ success in the long term. “We do this by carefully evaluating the borrowers plan, property and people associated with every transaction,” remarks Shegerian.



Editor's Note



Gabriel Dillard
Managing Editor
The Business Journal

We are proud to present the sixth-annual San Joaquin Valley Ag Magazine. In that time, we have witnessed seismic shifts in the industry, from the rollout of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act amidst a sustained drought to a deluge last spring. Disrupted supply chains made it harder to ship goods and inflation made everything more expensive. Certain commodities saw sustained drops in value while others rallied.

Nothing in that time has become any easier for Central Valley farmers. This creates a substantial barrier to entry for groups such as Southeast Asian growers, who have a harder time financing their small operations. This publication features sketches of three such farmers as they move past their refugee roots to go into business for themselves.

This publication also examines the current farmland real estate market, which is currently chock full of inventory resulting in a price softening that hasn't been seen in a while. We speak to the brokers on the ground about what they are seeing and how buyers and sellers should react.

Instilling a love and appreciation of farming is important in the Central Valley, and one Fresno program is using an education in the soil to teach at-risk youth about discipline and respect.

It's exciting to introduce Atef Swelam as the new director of the University of California Kearney Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Parlier, which has been helping local growers with extension and research services since 1965. Swelam has been recognized by the United Nations for his efforts to more efficiently use water in his native Egypt. Among other initiatives at the Center in Parlier is a test for growing tea in the Valley.

We also hope you find use in the ranked lists provided by our research department — data you won't find compiled the same way anywhere else.

From our editorial/research department, we hope you enjoy the 2024 edition of our San Joaquin Valley Ag Magazine. If you have feedback or story ideas, for future editions, please contact me at editor@thebusinessjournal.com or 559-490-3467.



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Extension 1



Farming in the face of hardship

Portraits of Southeast Asian growers battling against the odds

By Frank Lopez

On a foggy January morning, Bunrith Ngin looks over 40 acres of what he hopes will soon be a thriving farm.

Ngin, 56, came to the U.S. from Cambodia 11 years ago with \$20 in his pocket.

He left home after his family was killed by the authoritarian Cambodian People's Party, leaving only him and his sister to survive.

He was sponsored to visit the U.S. by the Emerald Seed Co. in El Centro, paying his own way there and remaining in the states ever since.

With help from new friends in

the U.S., Ngin eventually got in contact with a Fresno farmer who let him live in his home. He brought his partner with him – a woman he was also working as a caretaker for.

He is currently working on getting a farm started in Sanger, spending the last year clearing vegetation, disking the land, repairing a water pump and installing water pipes.

Ngin is planning on growing lemongrass, watergrass, watermelon, broccoli and eggplant. He's also planning a greenhouse, and eventually a cow barn to produce fertilizer.



Photo by Frank Lopez | Bunrith Ngin, 56, is preparing to start his own 40-acre farming operation in Fresno County. Since coming to this country from Cambodia 11 years ago, he has received help from friends and connections to get started.

A way of life challenged

Like many members of the Southeast Asian farming community, Ngin faces multiple barriers to recapturing the farming lifestyle common in their homeland. According to a 2015 survey from the

University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Cooperative Extension (UCCE) in Fresno, there were nearly 2,000 Asian farms in the San Joaquin Valley.

About 70% of these farms

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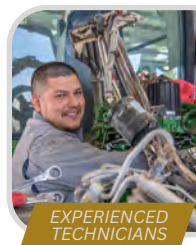
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were run by Hmong growers. The UCCE reports that Southeast Asian farms produced more than 21,000 tons of produce in Fresno County in 2019 worth an estimated \$25.7 million. This was up from the approximately 10,000 tons in 2018.

Since the late 1970s and early '80s, several thousand Southeast Asian refugee farmers fleeing their war-torn countries of Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Cambodia, have settled in the U.S. and established farms.

Many Southeast Asian family farms are considered microfarms with five acres or less, but with their sheer numbers and the variety of Asian crops they grow, these farmers contribute valuable diversity to California's agricultural offerings and help to secure food security for all communities, especially disadvantaged ones.

While these types of farmers are often able to lease their land, they have difficulty accessing the other things necessary to operate a farm, namely capital and finding, market information and an understanding of labor and environmental regulations. Many lack English language skills.

Ngin himself has had trouble getting approved for loans and applying for grants and programs to assist him in financing his farm.

"I need to build the greenhouse, get more loans, and then I can grow every day. They want to see everything is set up first before they give you money," Ngin said.

A friend of Ngin is letting him live in a trailer home on his property where the farm will be and not charging him rent, and will not be charging Ngin to lease the land until a year has passed and the farm is up and running.

Ngin will first start growing crops in the greenhouse, then apply for a \$100,000 loan with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to grow seasonal crops outdoors.

He plans to have a manure compost system for passive greenhouse heating.

Besides paying for the clearing of vegetation, Ngin is doing everything himself. He is currently working as an Uber driver to build the farm, step-by-step.

Ngin expects he will have the land ready by February or March and start planting, hopeful for a fruitful launch.

"I have no help right now, but little by little. I'm not going



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Photo by Frank Lopez | Tchuyi Tchieng, a Hmong farmer in Fresno, jokingly offers a Jerusalem artichoke to his dog, Papo. The dogs enjoy the root plants.

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to be negative. I have to be positive," he said.

Price predicaments

While many small farmers successfully grow and sell their crops, they might be getting pennies on the dollar considering all the time, effort and investment.

Tchuyi Tchieng, a Hmong farmer in Fresno, has been working with his family since they first arrived from France in the 1980s after fleeing as refugees from their original home country of Thailand.

Tchieng leases a 20-acre plot of land to grow specialty crops including Jerusalem artichoke and daikon.

His family weren't originally farmers in their home country, but they were left with few options when they arrived in the U.S. An uncle was already farming so it was a natural progression.

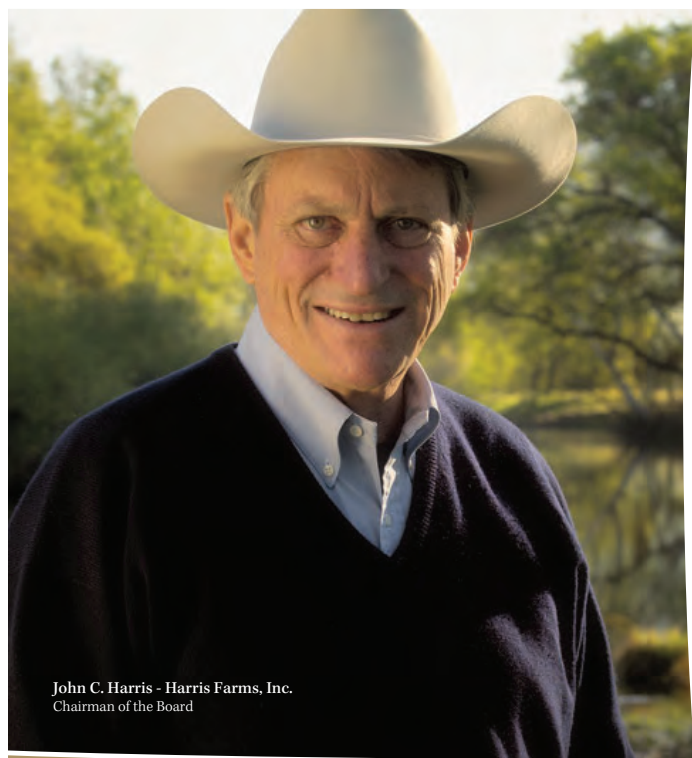
Tchieng sells his produce to wholesalers and distributes it in the Bay Area and Los



Photo by Frank Lopez | Jerusalem artichoke is also known as by the names sunroot, sunchokes and wild sunflower.

Angeles, where people are willing to pay more for specialty crops, he said.

Tchieng said many people in the Central Valley are hesitant to pay much for vegetables, making it more difficult to make a profit. He said he will sell a pound of his produce for



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about \$300-\$400 per acre per year. Since then, it has increased to about \$1,500 per acre per year.

Older Southeast Asian farmers can be very stubborn, Tchieng said, and many don't want to implement new methods of farming.

"I've shown them how to use my fertilizer, but they're stubborn. They use it, it works and then they stop using it and go back to their ways and it fails. Then they blame my fertilizer.

It's about taking the time to educate yourself and learning and experimenting to get the best results, he said.

Over time he has acquired tractors and tillers and other machinery to make the work easier.

He said farmers need to invest in machinery and other tools to make their labor worth it.

"I would not be doing this if I didn't have the tractor and other vehicles to do this. It



Photo by Frank Lopez | Tchuyi Tchieng leases a 20-acre plot of land and has acquired various tractors and tillers that make the work easier.

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\$3, and then the wholesalers will sell it for about \$18.

It's becoming more difficult to even start farming, he said, especially with increased lease prices for land. He said about 10 years ago, it would cost

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would be too hard and take too much time. Rent a tractor for \$200 a month and make life easier," he said.

The self reliant

It is not uncommon in the Central Valley to see middle-aged or even elderly women working in the fields.

Macy Xiong, 45, has two plots in Fresno, growing green beans on 50 acres. Her produce is sold in Los Angeles, the Bay Area and Seattle.

She said it is difficult to grow green beans because they need perfect weather.

Xiong was born in Laos but mostly raised in Thailand, but her family had to flee. She arrived in Fresno at 12 years old in 1990.

Her parents started farming shortly after they arrived in the U.S., and Macy would help them after school in the evenings.

The biggest challenges she said Southeast Asian farmers



face are attaining capital and understanding regulations. "Every year they come out with new laws. Everyone had to retake their pesticide license tests. It makes everything

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Photo by Frank Lopez | Bunrith Ngin is making plans to set up a farm in Sanger on this bare 40 acres of land. In the last year he has disced, repaired a pump and set up irrigation line.

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difficult,” Xiong said.

Her dad sometimes comes and helps, and sometimes they hire family members for extra help, but it’s mostly Xiong and her husband working the land.

Like many farmers, Xiong’s

children do not want to be farmers. She is not going to force her five children to do something they don’t want.

She said she is already behind this season because the ground is too wet for discing, and will have to wait a few days

after the season’s final rains.

Xiong said that she is uncertain of the future of the Southeast Asian farming community with the current trends, but she will keep growing.

“It’s hard. We can’t just

go with the flow anymore because everything is getting expensive. But I have passion. I don’t get a lot of support from my family. So it’s almost a hobby—a passion,” she said.



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CALIFORNIA AG COUNTIES

Ranked by 2021 gross agricultural values among California counties

County		Total ag value	Top crops	Ag Commissioner(s)
County Seat	Percent change from 2020			
1 (2)	Kern County Bakersfield	\$8,341,294,840 8.76%	Grapes, citrus, pistachios, almonds, milk	Glenn Fankhauser
2 (3)	Tulare County Visalia	\$8,089,621,300 13.30%	Milk, oranges, grapes, cattle & calves, pistachio nuts	Tom Tucker
3 (1)	Fresno County Fresno	\$8,085,567,000 1.33%	Almonds, grapes, pistachios, poultry, milk	Melissa Cregan
4 (4)	Monterey County Salinas	\$4,100,240,000 4.86%	Strawberry, leaf lettuce, head lettuce, broccoli, wine grapes	Henry S. Gonzales
5 (6)	Merced County Merced	\$3,724,451,000 9.49%	Milk, almonds, sweet potatoes, chickens, cattle & calves	David A. Robinson
6 (5)	Stanislaus County Modesto	\$3,545,672,000 2.00%	Almonds, milk, poultry, cattle & calves, nursery fruit & nut trees & vines	Kamaljit Bagri
7 (7)	San Joaquin County Stockton	\$3,193,234,000 5.34%	Almonds, milk, grapes, walnuts, cherries	Tim Pelican
8 (8)	Kings County Hanford	\$2,343,144,000 7.51%	Milk, pistachios, almonds, cotton, cattle & calves	Jimmy Hook
9 (9)	Imperial County El Centro	\$2,287,312,000 12.87%	Cattle, alfalfa, head lettuce, broccoli, leaf lettuce	Carlos Ortiz
10 (10)	Ventura County Ventura	\$2,085,999,000 5.07%	Strawberries, lemons, nursery stock, raspberries, avocados	Edmund E. Williams
11 (11)	Madera County Madera	\$2,045,495,000 4.92%	Almonds, milk, grapes, pistachios, pollination	Rusty Lentsberger
12 (12)	Santa Barbara County Santa Barbara	\$1,918,186,000 5.44%	Strawberries, nursery, wine grapes, broccoli, cauliflower	Cathleen Fisher
13 (13)	San Diego County San Diego	\$1,752,999,086 -3.17%	Bedding plants/color, perennials/cacti & succulents, ornamental trees & shrubs, indoor flowering & foliage plants, vegetables, avocados	Ha Dang
14 (14)	Riverside County Riverside	\$1,418,220,000 0.00%	Nursery, milk, alfalfa, table grapes, avocados	Ruben Arroyo
15 (15)	San Luis Obispo County San Luis Obispo	\$1,081,952,000 10.55%	Strawberries, wine grapes, avocados, broccoli, cattle & calves	Martin Settevendemie
16 (16)	Colusa County Colusa	\$926,812,000 0.00%	Almonds, rice, walnuts, tomatoes, pollination	M. Anastacia Allen
17 (18)	Sonoma County Santa Rosa	\$811,446,600 19.22%	Wine grapes, milk, nursery - ornamentals, livestock & poultry products, nursery - miscellaneous	Andrew Smith
18 (17)	Glenn County Willows	\$808,720,000 8.65%	Almonds, rice, walnuts, dairy, apiary	Marcie Skelton
19 (20)	Napa County Napa	\$745,778,100 60.25%	Wine grapes	Tracy Cleveland
20 (19)	Butte County Oroville	\$609,955,303 -2.47%	Rice, walnuts, almonds, prunes, harvested timber	Louie Mendoza

WND-Would Not Disclose. NR-Not Ranked. All data has been provided by The Business Journal research. Data from California Department of Food & Agriculture website and from county Ag Commissioner websites.

Research: Alex Light
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When the going gets soft

Farmland values fall as inventory expands, prices drop and water tightens

By Estela Anahi Jaramillo

It was a turbulent 2023 for the commercial real estate market, and Central Valley farmland was no exception.

And 2024 is starting off with an offering prompted by a company failure described as “once in a lifetime.”

Scott Schuil, vice president of Schuil Ag Real Estate in Visalia, said implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) has sparked significant change in the market. SGMA introduced new rules and regulations to limit groundwater pumping, creating Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSA) that have become a new way to evaluate farm properties.

The market is also grappling with higher interest rates, making financing more challenging.

Additionally, there was a notable downturn in commodity pricing, particularly affecting high-value, permanent crops such as almonds and walnuts.

“The implementation of SGMA has fundamentally altered the dynamics of water usage in the Central Valley,” said Schuil. “Previously, farmers had more flexibility in groundwater pumping, but with SGMA, variations in pumping allowances among different GSAs influence land prices. Water security has become a crucial factor, and this regulatory shift is reshaping the valuation of agricultural properties.”

Over the past ten years, one popular strategy has been for buyers to acquire properties at the end of their useful life and redevelop them for nut crops.

Farmland values falls | Page 13

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Photo by Samuel Marshall, Schuil Ag Real Estate | Acres of crops just outside of the city of Visalia.





Photo by Samuel Marshall, Schuil Ag Real Estate | The mountain range can be seen through the orchards in Visalia.

Farmland values falls | From 12
However, this trend has slowed down due to SGMA and other factors.

Buyers have grown more cautious as the number of listed properties increases as redevelopment plans become less prevalent.

Another challenge this year was low almond prices. In 2022, tree nut prices fell to their lowest levels in at least two decades, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Almonds sold for \$1.10 per pound that year, down from a peak of \$4 in 2014.

But there might be some optimism for a turnaround. Since high interest rates have led to more inquiries for seller financing and assumable loans, there is hope rates will fall this year and usher in new buyers. Higher input costs, influenced by supply chain issues and inflation, have also made farming more expensive.

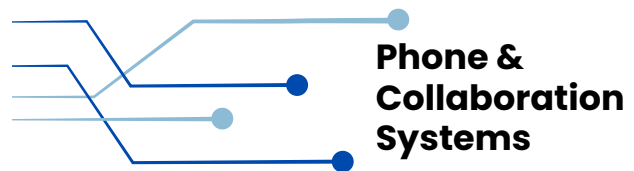
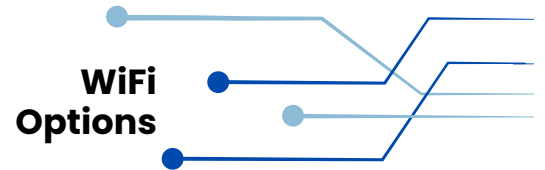
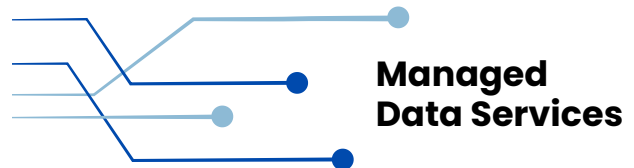
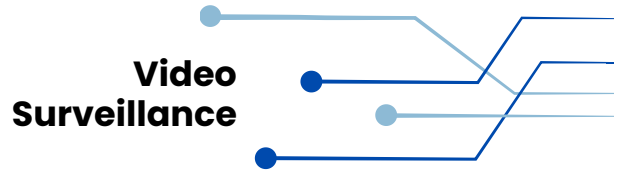
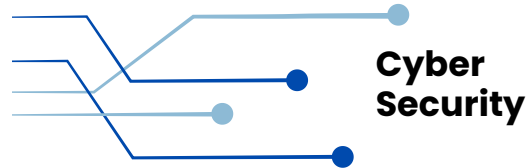
Farmland values falls | Page 14



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Photo by Samuel Marshall, Schuil Ag Real Estate | Orchards surround the countryside

Farmland values falls | From 13

Global conflict, including the war in Ukraine, have influenced commodity prices.

For the Central Valley, the surge in available properties and buyer headwinds have softened California agricultural land values.

“We anticipate that this trend will persist through 2024. Farmers are eager for an increase in commodity prices, an increase in foreign exchange rates compared to the U.S. Dollar, and abundant snowfall in the mountains this winter,” said Sullivan Grosz, ag division president for Pearson Realty in Fresno.

Grosz noted a significant influx last year of distressed sales across various commodities. Large properties — including nuts, table grapes and stone fruit — hit the market, signaling a shift from previous years.

One particular portfolio of note has hit the market with the collapse of bankrupt stone fruit giant Prima Wawona. Pearson Realty is marketing nearly 14,000 acres of land with a total list price of \$370 million in southeastern and west Fresno County — an

offering Pearson Realty Senior Vice Presiden Dan Kevorkian said was “once in a lifetime.”

Despite softer prices, crop forecasts pointed to a stronger crop for 2023. In July, the USDA’s forecast estimating 2.6 billion pounds debunked coffee shop chatter about a light crop and further exacerbated almond grower concerns of continued low prices through Q3 and Q4 of 2023.

In August, pistachio estimates showed a huge record crop going into harvest, and reports from large marketing agencies revealed prices had dropped.

Situations such as what happened to Prima Wawona, with the giant collapsing under the leadership of a private equity fund, have revealed weaknesses in long-term holding capability.

Despite financing challenges, Grosz said banks are still active and willing to lend on agriculture properties if the borrower clearly understands what they are purchasing and has a farming plan to be economically sustainable.

“Changes in lending may depend on economic conditions.

If interest rates stabilize or decrease, it could ease the financial burden on buyers, potentially revitalizing the market,” said Schuil.

Factors such as weather conditions, consumer spending, the U.S. economy and global conflicts indirectly influence farmland values and profitability. While predicting the exact factors is challenging, the outlook suggests an anticipated softening in the agricultural market.

Land values are expected to fall, with some areas witnessing a slight decline and others facing

more significant decreases. The extent of these changes will depend on the water situation and specific farming regions. With the current surplus of available properties and existing capital constraints, Realtors anticipate a challenging year. Schuil expects a significant rebound shortly if the almond price rallies and interest rates are lowered.

“Despite all the market factors, we are still transacting a significant amount of property, and buyers still see opportunity in specific areas and commodities,” said Grosz.

Photo by Samuel Marshall, Schuil Ag Real Estate | Almond trees surround the city of Visalia like blankets of snow.





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Fresno County Historical Society Kicks Off an Exciting 2024 *Fields of Fresno Ag Tour* Season

by: Ramon Castanos



The season is upon us for visitors far and wide to get up close and personal with the bounty of Fresno County!

The Fresno County Historical Society is gearing up for its *Fields of Fresno Ag Tour* series, which kicks off February 24th, 2024, with a guided trek of the world-renown Blossom Trail as orchards explode with white, pink and rosy petals.

Five, half-day excursions in Fresno County are planned for this season's tours. Tickets are \$95 per-person and \$85 for FCHS members. Every adventure highlights a different part of Fresno County's rich agricultural industry.

Each tour starts and ends at the historic Kearney Mansion Museum & Gallery. Here, guests learn about M. Theo Kearney and his Fruit Vale Estate; the foundation of which left a legacy that ripples through the business of agriculture even today.

Following a light continental breakfast and coffee, guests board a spacious motor coach, and as they travel to three agriculture sites for curated tours, they enjoy lively rounds of Ag trivia complete with prizes. Lunch and tasting at a local winery or brewery concludes the day before returning to Kearney Mansion.

Over the past three years, visitors from far and wide have come to the Valley specifically to learn about Fresno's rich farm heritage on a *Fields of Fresno Ag Tour*.

Fresno County Historical Society President, Elizabeth Laval stated, "People come from not only across our Central Valley, but from around the world, to learn about the history and economic impact of the agriculture business and how it sustains the Valley."

Visitors take part in a unique and informative experience drawn from Fresno's farming history.

There was a point in time when Fresno was known more for what was under the soil than what came out of it. Many things occurred before the country could enjoy the Valley's bounty at peak ripeness.

"In 1915, Fresno County's number one commodity was petroleum," said Laval. "At the beginning of the 20th century, fresh fruit couldn't be shipped across the country yet because we didn't have refrigerated boxcars."

This little-known fact is just a sample of the information guests can learn on the Fresno County Historical Society's Ag Tours.

Even lifelong residents find themselves walking away from the tour with a newfound appreciation of their home.

"To be able to see, hear, and touch our local history is amazing," said Karen Duran. "Not only did we get a special look at Kearney Mansion and agriculture in our community, but being able to share the day with others who love our history made it even more special."

According to Laval, guests will get an in-the-field experience and will hear from experts, farmers and industry insiders through out the day. The tours also highlight the diversity of growers that create the Valley's agricultural tapestry, for example Hmong farmers who tend traditional crops, as well as the African American Farmers of California's demonstration farming site located on property behind Kearney Mansion where they cultivate seasonal crops including okra, collard greens and more.

"We are excited to educate both tourists and local residents about why agriculture is so important," said Laval.

For more information or to secure tickets, the public may call 559-441-0862 or visit valleyhistory.org/ag-tour.

Fields of Fresno Ag Tours 2024 SCHEDULE

Held Saturdays on:
February 24th, April 27th,
June 15th, September 14th
& October 12th

tickets at:
valleyhistory.org/ag-tour

*Tour are run rain or shine.
Dates may be subject to change*



From Egypt to the Valley

Acclaimed UC researcher does more with less

By Frank Lopez

The Central Valley's agricultural landscape has long attracted people from around the world — from farmers and workers seeking a livelihood to educators and researchers.

At the University of California Kearney Agricultural Research and Extension Center (REC) in Parlier, Director Atef Swelam oversees the research and projects meant to help San Joaquin Valley farmers with an array of issues, from water conservation to soil

health. The facility is also known for bringing forth new innovations to the industry.

Swelam is also the director for the Westside Research and Extension Center (REC) in Five Points and has been at his current post since August 2023.

Along with conducting state-of-the-art research, the RECs also perform outreach and extension/continuing education activities with the industry in the San Joaquin Valley.

"This is meant to improve farm functions and raise the awareness of farmers,



Photo via Atef Swelam | Atef Swelam stands in a raised-bed wheat field in the Nile Delta of Egypt, where he developed and researched innovative irrigation techniques.

growers, irrigators, processors — any actors in the industry playing a key role in ag production and the processing system," Swelam said.

Raised beds, raised yields

As a boy, Swelam would help his father irrigate their crops in the fields around the city of Minya Al-Qamh in Egypt.

His family had been farming the land around his home village of Sharqia for



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LARGEST AGRICULTURAL REAL ESTATE TRANSACTIONS

In the Central San Joaquin Valley-ranked by dollar amount of transaction between Jan. 1, 2022 and Dec. 31, 2022

	Selling/Leasing Office Address	Phone	Location	Amount of transaction Crop Description	Area	Date of transaction	Sale or lease	Agent(s)	Owner/Broker	Local Executive Name
1	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Tipton, Tulare County	\$36,651,738 Dairy, Land, Feed, Equipment, Pool Quota	871 Acres	April 20, 2022	Sale	Marc Schuil, Scott Schuil, Jonathan Verhoeven	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
2	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Corcoran, Kings County	\$24,000,000 Pistachios, Almonds, Open	852 Acres	April 14, 2022	Sale	Marc Schuil, Scott Schuil, Jonathan Verhoeven	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
3	AgriWealth, Inc. 6049 N. Palm Ave. Fresno, California 93704	559-286-5587	S. James Rd. & Manning Ave.	\$17,325,000 Almonds, Pistachios and Open	488 Acres	Jan. 11, 2022	Sale	Kyle Orth & Michael Chaney	AgriWealth, Inc.	Kyle L. Orth, CEO
4	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	Cantua Creek, Fresno Co.	\$15,000,000 Almonds	794 Acres	May 17, 2022	Sale	A. J. Ferdinandi	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/president
5	London Properties, Ltd. 6442 N. Maroa Ave. Fresno, California 93704	559-436-4000	Firebaugh, Fresno County 93622	\$14,488,925	491 Acres	June 30, 2022	Sale	Adam Basila and Cody J. Bennett	London Properties	Patrick Conner - President
6	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Tipton, Tulare County	\$14,480,835 Dairy (2), Land & Cattle	628 Acres	Sept. 21, 2022	Sale	Marc Schuil, Scott Schuil, Jonathan Verhoeven	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
7	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Visalia, Tulare County	\$13,576,320 Dairy, Land, Herd, Pool Quota	580 Acres	June 3, 2022	Sale	Phil Heynen	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
8	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	Five Points, Fresno Co.	\$13,500,000 Pistachios	554 Acres	Dec. 30, 2022	Sale	Bill Enns, Dale Samuelian, Sullivan Grosz	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/president
9	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	Belmont Ave., Sanger, CA	\$12,750,000 Almonds, Olives, Pistachios, Cherries	312 Acres	Feb. 22, 2022	Sale	Sullivan Grosz	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/president
9	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Sanger, Fresno County	\$12,750,000 Almonds	312 Acres	Feb. 18, 2022	Sale	Marc Schuil, Scott Schuil, Jonathan Verhoeven	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
11	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	2 Ranches, Linden Rd. & Roxbury Rd. near Dos Palos	\$10,115,000 Open	361 Acres	Sept. 30, 2022	Sale	Dan Kevorkian, Sullivan Grosz	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/president
12	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Earlimart, Tulare County	\$9,500,000 Pistachios, Almonds, Open, Homes	248 Acres	Dec. 15, 2022	Sale	Doug Phillips & Troy Sweeney	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
13	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	Pond Road, NW of Wasco, CA	\$9,093,926 Vineyard	603 Acres	Aug. 16, 2022	Sale	Robb Stewart, Kameron Stewart	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/president
14	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	Ave. 11 & Rd. 22 1/2, Madera, CA	\$9,020,715 Almonds	261 Acres	Dec. 27, 2022	Sale	A. J. Ferdinandi, Stanley Kjar, Jr.	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/president
15	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Tulare, Tulare County	\$9,000,000 Open	420 Acres	June 1, 2022	Sale	Phil Heynen	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
16	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Huron, Fresno County	\$8,000,000 Open Land	713 Acres	Nov. 17, 2022	Sale	Marc Schuil, Scott Schuil, Jonathan Verhoeven	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
17	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Orange Cove, Fresno County	\$8,000,000 Citrus	310 Acres	Nov. 30, 2022	Sale	Rick Schuil & Timothy Murray	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
18	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Pixley, Tulare County	\$7,500,000 Almonds	279 Acres	Dec. 21, 2022	Sale	Timothy Murray	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
19	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Dinuba, Tulare County	\$7,412,500 Almonds	158 Acres	July 1, 2022	Sale	Rick Schuil & Phil Heynen	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
20	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	Riverbend Ave., Parlier, CA, Fresno Co.	\$7,300,000 Treefruit & Packing Shed	217 Acres	Oct. 3, 2022	Sale	Dan Kevorkian	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/president

WND-Would Not Disclose. NR-Not Ranked. All data has been provided by representatives of the businesses listed and The Business Journal Research. Not all sources surveyed responded to inquiries.

Research: Alex Light
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LARGEST AGRICULTURAL REAL ESTATE TRANSACTIONS

In the Central San Joaquin Valley-ranked by dollar amount of transaction between Jan. 1, 2022 and Dec. 31, 2022

	Selling/Leasing Office Address	Phone	Location	Amount of transaction Crop Description	Area	Date of transaction	Sale or lease	Agent(s)	Owner/ Broker	Local Executive Name
21	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	10 miles NE of Los Banos, CA	\$7,217,250 Pasture	1,939 Acres	May 17, 2022	Sale	Dan Kevorkian, A. J. Ferdinandi	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/ president
22	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Porterville, Tulare County	\$7,040,000 Almonds	160 Acres	Sept. 30, 2022	Sale	Phil Heynen	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
23	London Properties, Ltd. 6442 N. Maroa Ave. Fresno, California 93704	559-436-4000	Kingsburg, Tulare County, 93631	\$6,655,200	111 Square Feet	Dec. 12, 2022	Sale	Parminder Singh	London Properties	Patrick Conner - President
24	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	NEC Ave. 80 & Rd. 268, Tulare Co.	\$6,500,000 Pistachios	136 Acres	March 7, 2022	Sale	Matt McEwen, Jonathan Motl	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/ president
25	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	Colusa Ave., Five Points, CA, Fresno Co.	\$6,034,400 Row Crops	635 Acres	Dec. 20, 2022	Sale	Dan Kevorkian	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/ president
26	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	Shallock Rd. & Valpredo Ave., S. of Bakersfield	\$5,922,000 Vineyard and Open	310 Acres	July 29, 2022	Sale	Robb Stewart, Kameron Stewart, Matt McEwen, Jonathan Motl	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/ president
27	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	N. side of San Joaquin River, Madera Co.	\$5,347,860 Open	255 Acres	March 11, 2022	Sale	Dan Kevorkian, Dick Ellsworth	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/ president
28	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Porterville, Tulare County	\$5,280,000 Walnuts	160 Acres	June 21, 2022	Sale	Marc Schuil, Scott Schuil, Jonathan Verhoeven	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
29	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Dinuba, Tulare County	\$5,225,955 Table Grapes	147 Acres	March 28, 2022	Sale	Marc Schuil, Scott Schuil, Jonathan Verhoeven	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
30	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	Derrick Ave. & W. Panoche Rd., Fresno Co.	\$5,022,460 Open	264 Acres	July 20, 2022	Sale	Sullivan Grosz	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/ president
31	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	San Joaquin, Fresno County	\$4,950,000 Pistachios	87 Acres	Jan. 26, 2022	Sale	Marc Schuil, Scott Schuil, Jonathan Verhoeven	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
32	London Properties, Ltd. 6442 N. Maroa Ave. Fresno, California 93704	559-436-4000	Madera, Madera County	\$4,875,360 Open Land	2,486 Acres	Dec. 2, 2022	Sale	Mike Schuil	London Properties	Patrick Conner - president
32	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Madera, Madera County	\$4,875,360 Open Land	2,486 Acres	Dec. 2, 2022	Sale	Mike Schuil	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
34	AgriWealth, Inc. 6049 N. Palm Ave. Fresno, California 93704	559-286-5587	S. El Dorado Ave. & W. Clayton Ave.	\$4,846,815 Almonds	166 Acres	Jan. 28, 2022	Sale	Kyle Orth	AgriWealth, Inc.	Kyle L. Orth, CEO
35	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	Nebraska Ave., Fresno Co.	\$4,800,000 Vineyard, Almonds, Pistachios	120 Acres	Dec. 21, 2022	Sale	Robert Nielsen	Pearson Realty	John Stewart,
36	AgriWealth, Inc. 6049 N. Palm Ave. Fresno, California 93704	559-286-5587	S. Colusa Ave. & W. Dinuba Ave.	\$4,762,800 Pistachios	79 Acres	Aug. 30, 2022	Sale	Kyle Orth	AgriWealth, Inc.	Kyle L. Orth, CEO
37	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	3 mi. W. of Laton, Fresno, Co.	\$4,745,240 Almonds, Walnuts, Persimmons	170 Acres	Jan. 7, 2022	Sale	Dan Kevorkian, Cole Montgomery	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/ president
38	Schuil Ag Real Estate 5020 W. Mineral King Ave. Visalia, California 93291	559-734-1700	Tipton, Tulare County	\$4,558,510 Almonds	157 Acres	May 2, 2022	Sale	Doug Phillips	Schuil & Associates, Inc.	Doug Phillips
39	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	5 mi. NW of Raisin City, Fresno Co.	\$4,500,000 Vineyard and Almonds	231 Acres	Jan. 28, 2022	Sale	Dan Kevorkian, A. J. Ferdinandi, Mel Lubisich	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/ president
40	Pearson Realty 7480 N. Palm Ave., Ste. 101 Fresno, California 93711	559-432-6000	Rd. 236, Ducor, CA, Tulare Co.	\$4,200,000 Cold Storage Facility	6 Acres	Oct. 27, 2022	Sale	Doug Collins	Pearson Realty	John Stewart, CEO/ president

WND-Would Not Disclose. NR-Not Ranked. All data has been provided by representatives of the businesses listed and The Business Journal Research. Not all sources surveyed responded to inquiries.

Research: Alex Light
Publication Date: Feb. 3, 2023
Email: alex@thebusinessjournal.com

FOOD PROCESSORS

In the Central San Joaquin Valley - Ranked by total number of local employees.

	Company Address Phone	Number of local full time employees Square footage	Types of food processed	Markets or areas of distribution	Location of headquarters Year founded locally	Top local executive
1 (1)	Ruiz Food Products, Inc. 501 S. Alta Ave. Dinuba, CA93618 559-591-5510	1,000 WND	Frozen food	National	Dinuba 1964	Kim Ruiz Beck, chairman
2 (NR)	Producers Dairy Foods, Inc. 250 E. Belmont Ave. Fresno, CA93701 264-6583	500 WND	Dairy, juice and water	WND	Fresno 1932	Richard A. Shehadey, Chairman , Scott W. Shehadey, CEO
3 (7)	Wawona Frozen Foods 100 W. Alluvial Ave. Clovis, CA93611 559-299-2901	320 WND	Peaches, strawberries, blueberries, pears, plums, mangos	US and Canada	Clovis 1963	Bill S. Smittcamp, president/CEO, Blake E. Smittcamp, VP of Sales
4 (5)	Poindexter Nut Company 5414 E. Floral Ave. Selma, CA93662 834-1555	254 WND	Retail, industrial and organic walnuts	WND	Selma 1968	Mike Poindexter, CEO
5 (9)	Sun-Maid Growers of California 6795 N. Palm Ave., 2nd Floor Fresno, CA93704 559-242-1912	220 WND	Raisins and other dried fruit	Global	Fresno 1912	Steve Loftus, president and COO
6 (13)	The Brownie Baker, Inc. 4870 W. Jacquelyn Ave. Fresno, CA93722 559-277-7070	165 70,000	Baked goods	Nationwide	Fresno 1979	Brad Lowe, VP of Food Safety and Quality Control, Chad Troop, VP of finance, Mike Collins, VP of operations, Ryan Perkins, VP of marketing, Jackie Perkins Ireland, VP of administration, Dennis Perkins, president and CEO
7 (12)	Max's Artisan Breads Inc 3021 W. Dakota Ste. 108 Fresno, CA93722 243-0875	140 76,000	Bread	Frozen food service	Fresno 2000	Scott Stanley, president

WND-Would Not Disclose. NR-Not Ranked. All data has been provided by representatives of the businesses listed and The Business Journal research. Not all sources surveyed responded to inquiries.

Researcher: Alex Scott
Original Publication Date: May 19, 2023
E-mail: alex@thebusinessjournal.com

Egypt to Valley | From 18 generations.

With barely enough water to grow their wheat and vegetables, Swelam promised to help improve the lives of others and prevent suffering experienced by his family and many others across the globe.

As an irrigation engineer, Swelam when on do that just that. He completed a master's degree in land and water management from the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari in Italy. He returned to Egypt for a Ph.D. in ag engineering at Zagazig University.

His research has been recognized around the world.

In October 2023, Swelam was designated by the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization at the World Food Forum as a "Water and Food Hero" for his innovative

irrigation techniques to save water and increase yields throughout the Nile River Delta and in other countries.

Swelam's mechanized, raised-bed irrigation program brought him several international honors.

Implementing a project at his home village, he developed a small-scale machine that would create precisely placed trenches near the raised beds to hold the exact amount of water adjacent crops needed, saving water for all crops.

He tried these methods on several projects from 2010 to 2020.

Though he didn't invent raised bed crops, his technology and application are what garnered attention.

This tech helped growers reduce water used by 25% and cut farming costs by

Egypt to Valley | Page 28



Photo by Frank Lopez | Atef Swelam and research associate Ryan Puckett work together at the University of California Kearney Agricultural Research and Extension Center.

Giving kids a path through the soil

Fresno program teaches at-risk youth to farm

By Frank Lopez

The future crop of Central Valley farmers is learning to grow food and live off the land at a church garden in West Fresno.

At the Fresno Freedom School, located at the Free Church at 806 Collins Ave., Rev. Floyd D. Harris Jr. teaches children and teenagers how to grow produce and grow themselves by providing life lessons and guidance.

For about a month during summer vacation, children visit the Freedom School on Saturdays to learn about everything from ag science to automotive classes, nutrition and life skills including personal

hygiene, sewing, respect and discipline.

Students grow and tend to the crops including bell peppers, tomatoes and cantaloupes.

They have options on what they want to spend more time learning about, “Hometown Buffet” style, Harris said.

Freedom School is open to children ages 5-18. Last year, about 20 students attended the session.

Growing up on a family farm himself, Harris — with the help of volunteers and board members — started Freedom School 10 years ago to get the next generation of children interested in agriculture and

to help at-risk youth who might not have a positive home environment.

Some of the students are also in the foster care system, Harris said.

The original location was at New Life Church of God in West Fresno, where there was a Freedom School Demonstration Farm — a vegetable farm managed by a group of nearly 40 children and their adult mentors.

Harris “blames” his grandmother for making him so interested in ag and self-reliance, teaching him how to grow food, cook, sew and other life skills.

“I didn’t know at the time as a child that I would be utilizing that today, to teach the next generation that is coming after me the things that the school system doesn’t teach,” Harris said.

Freedom School President Aline Reed joined the board in 2016. She said children have told her they feel safer at the Freedom School than at their own homes.

Reed said it’s important for children to touch the soil and connect with

generations of Black farmers from the past.

As the San Joaquin Valley was being established in the late 1880s, many Black people were recruited from the South to work on farms here.

Harris said the Central Valley used to have many Black farmers, but many were disenfranchised through the practice of redlining, or racial discrimination in housing. They were sold defective seeds purposefully and had to contend with their soil and water being poisoned, he added.

Because of the history of slavery in the U.S., many Black people today see agriculture through that lens, and it keeps them out of the field, Harris said.

Even though that was the real past, it does not have to be the future, Reed said.

Freedom School wants to frame farming and growing your own food with health, self-reliance and connection to nature.

Farm School | Page 26



Photo by Frank Lopez | The Fresno Freedom School is run by volunteers. It is located at Free Church at 806 Collins Ave.

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Photo by Frank Lopez | Rev. Floyd D. Harris Jr. started Fresno Freedom School in 2013. About 20 students are participating this summer.

Farm School | From 24

Reed also comes from the background of a family farm. She moved with her parents to Fresno from Texas in 1948 to start a farm.

“We are planting seeds with these kids,” Reed said. “We are planting seeds about responsibility, and integrity, and character and love for yourself and your community.”

Though Freedom School is an African American based group, Reed said anyone is welcome. Freedom School is free for students. The program is made possible through volunteers.

Funding is hard to come by, Reed said, but she feels Freedom School is doing something right because other programs have modeled what they are doing. There have been attempts at grant writing in the past, but it’s a difficult and lengthy process that requires resources.

The Freedom School has been recognized for its efforts, with state Sen. Melissa Hurtado selecting it as the 2021 Non-Profit of the year in the 14th district for its Demonstration Farm



Photo by Frank Lopez | Fresno Freedom School runs during summer vacation and is available to students 5-18.

at the original location.

Reed said that even though not all the students necessarily want to become farmers, they are interested in jobs in the ag industry.

Reed hopes the school continues to succeed and grow, even without funding.

Harris’s son, Floyd Harris III, recently started working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural

Resources Conversation Service as a soil conservationist.

His work entails providing conservation planning assistance and knowledge to producers.

Through his father, Floyd was exposed to agriculture, but he didn’t consider getting into the ag sector until he got into college and wanted to branch out with

opportunities in ag.

Floyd said he is proud of his father and the work at the Freedom School, seeing the importance of what he is doing for the community.

“Growing up and being mature now, I see that learning these things at such a young age can benefit a child to become more successful than if he didn’t,” Floyd said.



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25% when compared to the traditional method of flood irrigation.

Today the method is used by more than 2 million farmers in the Middle East and North Africa.

The local RECs also collaborate and exchange information with international organizations and universities to scale and localize their innovations in ecosystems abroad and utilize the innovations of others.

Ryan Puckett, staff research associate, said some farmers might be afraid of something radical and new, but they are usually receptive of things that might help them with a problem.

“Finding out what their problems are, getting grants, getting funding, setting up the research — it’s continuously demonstrating what we’re finding to them,” Puckett said.

Along with research into water, soil and crops, the Kearney REC has a well-equipped research lab that does a lot of work in mosquito research and control.

What’s the tea?

As the team at the RECs put efforts into research and helping farmers with the growth of long-established crops in the region, they are also busy in bringing new crops into the Central Valley.

The Kearney REC is conducting research of tea production and has 26 different tea varieties growing on its 330-acre research ranch.

Tea is not commonly grown in the U.S., Swelam said, with most of the tea consumed in the U.S. being imported from other countries.

He said the U.S. imports about \$6 billion in tea annually, and researchers

are trying to find ways to grow more domestically. They envision U.S. farmers cornering a new market for homegrown, organic tea.

It would be easy to establish new fields of tea trees, he said, as branches from pruning can be transported to a new field and grown.

“It’s very economical and doesn’t require much in effort and money,” Swelam said. “It’s also not a big water consumer.”

That is one approach that they focus on — producing more for less.

When you talk to farmers in an economical language, over a technical language, they’ll listen more, Swelam said.

Other novel crops being researched at Kearney REC include Japanese Kishu mandarin oranges, which are hard to grow and rare in the U.S.; and moringa, a drought resistant tree native to India and used in South and

Southeast Asia.

Moringa has edible leaves and seeds and is traditionally used for health benefits and energy.

They also conduct extensive outreach to smaller farms and operations run by Southeast Asian growers, Mexican farmers and many other nationalities, Puckett said.

“They’re smaller farms but they are great at what they do,” he said.

Swelam is passionate about continuing to help farmers in the region and across the globe create more sustainable farming methods — and enhance global food security.

“People have to look at where their food comes from,” he said. “It comes from the hands of the farmers. If we don’t do our job, farmers will produce less. Food security is national security.”



Photo via Atef Swelam | Atef Swelam, director of the University of California Kearney Agricultural Research and Extension Center (REC) in Parlier, conducted research in the fields around his hometown of Sharqia in Egypt.

AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES

Numbers reflect combined totals from Fresno, Kings, Madera and Tulare counties - ranked by 2022 dollar value

2023 2022	Name	2022 Dollar Value	Quantity Measure / Units	Tons per acre	Major export destinations	End products
1 (1)	Milk	\$4,781,022,000	181,750,013 Hundred weight	WND	Mexico, Japan, Taiwan, Philippines	Yogurt, ice cream, butter, cottage cheese, cheese, buttermilk, half and half, whey
2 (2)	Almonds	\$2,153,354,000	590,484 Harvested acres	1.05	Germany, Spain, Japan, India, Netherlands, United Kingdom, France	Oil, cosmetics, butter, candies, bakery goods, cookies, liqueurs
3 (3)	Pistachios	\$1,588,748,000	334,534 Harvested acres	1.21	Canada, Japan, Mexico	Snacks, ice cream, cookies, baked goods, extracts
4 (4)	Oranges (Navel and Valencia)	\$1,508,136,000	101,620 Harvested acres	14.67	Japan, Canada, Hong Kong	Orange juice, peels for marmalade, orange zest, Vitamin C
5 (5)	Grapes	\$1,479,706,000	64,307 Harvested acres	12.59	United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, Netherlands, Hong Kong, Mexico, Germany	Juice, concentrates, jams, jellies, natural food coloring, cream of tartar
6 (6)	Calves and Cattle	\$1,223,960,047	1,592,479 Head	WND	Mexico, Canada, South Korea	Beef, paint brushes, soap, candles, crayons, medicine, leather products
7 (7)	Poultry	\$650,100,000	28,186,388 Head	WND	Israel, Slovakia	Tray packs, bulk, livers, dog food
8 (8)	Tangerines	\$612,036,000	62,631 Harvested acres	8.88	Morocco, Israel, Brazil, Argentina	Some varieties marketed as "Cuties" or "Sweeties" very popular with children
9 (9)	Raisins	\$543,380,000	110,541 Harvested Acres	10.7	Shipped to more than 60 countries around the world	Energy bars, baked goods, flavor additive
10 (14)	Corn Silage	\$500,892,000	212,710 Harvested acres	24.08	United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, Netherlands, Hong Kong, Mexico, Germany	Livestock feed
11 (10)	Peaches (cling and freestone)	\$463,573,000	31,251 Harvested acres	25.84	Canada, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Italy, Germany, United Kingdom	Juice, jams, jellies, canned, dried, candies
12 (12)	Tomatoes	\$446,692,000	90,418 Harvested acres	47.89	Canada, Japan, Mexico	Tomato paste, ketchup, salsa, stewed tomatoes, sauces, soups
13 (11)	Wine Grapes (crushed & juice)	\$407,496,000	97,045 Harvested Acres	15.68	All over the world	Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel & more
14 (16)	Nectarines	\$387,793,000	20,907 Harvested acres	9.16	United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, Netherlands, Hong Kong, Mexico, Germany	Juice, jams, jellies, canned, dried, candies
15 (13)	Cotton (Pima and upland, seed and lint)	\$371,506,000	94,721 Harvested acres	1042.26	South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Taiwan	Oil, cosmetics, medicines, clothing, soap
16 (NR)	Plums (including pluots and prunes)	\$319,906,000	21,408 Harvested acres	6.93	Canada, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Italy, Germany, United Kingdom	Juice, prunes, paste, jams, fruit roll-ups
17 (17)	Pollination (value of service)	\$277,934,300	645,573 Colonies	WND	N/A	Pollination for seed crops, fruit and nut crops, melons, vegetables
18 (NR)	Lemons	\$206,621,000	18,640 Harvested acres	23.85	Canada, Japan, Netherlands, Middle East	Frozen lemonade, juice, wood cleaner, air freshener, soft drinks
19 (19)	Alfalfa Hay	\$186,421,830	82,145 Harvested acres	8.75	Japan, Southeast Asia	Cubes, pellets, hay, co-generation fuel, honey
20 (20)	Nursery	\$185,193,000	385,450,900	230	United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, Netherlands, Hong Kong, Mexico, Germany	Ornamental shrubs, Christmas trees

N-Not Disclosed. NR-Not Ranked. N/A-Not Available. All data has been compiled from the annual crop reports of the agricultural commissioners' offices of Fresno, Kings, Madera and Tulare counties.

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Top-10 New Products highlight some local offerings

By Gabriel Dillard

Results are in for World Ag Expo's 2024 Top-10 New Products Competition. The winners will be showcased Feb. 13-15 during the World Ag Expo in Tulare.

The field of new products were submitted for the contest by exhibitors of the largest annual agricultural show of its kind. Products ranged from simple solutions to autonomous robots. The contest judges consisted of farmers, ranchers and industry professionals.

Here are the winners describing themselves in their own words, plus the space at the International Agri-Center where the winning companies will exhibit during the World Ag Expo.

As always, a few of the companies have local ties and are familiar favorites. This includes a new generation of the GUSS automated sprayer built in Kingsburg that is electric-powered. Another, BlueSpray by Bluewhite, brings autonomous spraying to orchards and vineyards via a tractor platform. The Israeli firm established its U.S. headquarters in Fresno.

Another, the Burro Grande, is the bigger brother of the Burro autonomous robot meant to aid workers in the field. The product was tested in the Central Valley.

Blue Spray by Bluewhite Fresno, Calif.

BlueSpray brings autonomous precision spraying capabilities to growers in orchards and

vineyards. BlueSpray leverages Bluewhite's autonomous tractor sensing capabilities to provide plant-based spraying in high resolution that can integrate into any existing sprayers, adjusting spray volume and pressure in real-time based on plant size and density, reducing the amount of chemicals used and reducing spray drift without compromising on coverage. The BlueSpray data feeds into the Bluewhite data platform and is immediately available to the grower and to an agribusiness ecosystem for data insights, compliance, and business optimization.

Space: R37, R39 | bluewhite.co

Electric GUSS by GUSS Automation Kingsburg, Calif.

Electric GUSS is an autonomous electric herbicide orchard sprayer manufactured by GUSS Automation in Kingsburg, California. Electric GUSS is the first electric autonomous herbicide orchard sprayer in the world and allows a single employee to operate and monitor a combination of up to eight GUSS machines from the safety of his or her vehicle using a laptop computer. This driverless electric herbicide sprayer uses a combination of LiDAR, GPS, cameras, and more to safely and autonomously drive through the orchard, day or night, row after row reducing emissions and saving spray material.

Space: RD5 | gussag.com

Burro Grande, plus Atlas Online Route Creation by Burro Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

As a fully autonomous robot powered by AI and outfitted with computer vision plus LiDAR, Burro Grande is the 'Big Brother' to the existing Burro platform and boasts

a 5,000 lb towing capacity and 1,500 lb pallet scale carry capacity. When paired with Atlas, Burro's online route creation platform, users can construct, manage, and share routes across their fleet. Whether towing, carrying, or following, Burro Grande allows your existing equipment operators to step away from the seat of a Tractor/UTV, saving valuable labor.

Space: P34, P36 | burro.ai

EZ Cut Seal Remover by Country Enterprises Lucan, Minnesota

EZ Cut Seal Remover quickly and safely removes seals from most chemical containers without getting debris in the spray or sprayer. This item holds up to 25 seals and comes with an ejection tool to dispose of the seals without ever touching the chemical. Customizable decals are available for a great promotional item. This product was made by a farmer, for the farmer. A twist is all it takes!

Space: Corteva Agriscience Center 3827 | stores.countryent.net

Top 10 | Page 32



Photo contributed by Bluewhite | Will Oliver, president and CEO of the Fresno County Economic Development Corp., poses for a photo with Ben Alfi, CEO of Bluewhite.

Model B Smart Sprayer by Verdant Robotics Hayward, Calif.

The Verdant Robotics Model B Smart Sprayer is the ultimate solution to eradicate weeds in specialty crops. The Model B works in any field, whether organic or conventional, no-till or cultivated. What sets it apart is Verdant Robotics' proprietary Bullseye Technology, delivering unmatched millimeter-level targeting of weeds in both high-density and low-density crops, over an extended operational window. This remarkable Smart Sprayer operates day or night, regardless of weather conditions. With its lightweight design, it swiftly accesses the field, and its formidable power takes on even the largest weeds.

Space: U35 | verdantrobotics.com

Oliver Colibri by Sutton Ag Enterprises Salinas, Calif.

The Oliver Colibri is the only mechanical weeder available for high density weeding applications. Utilizing automated camera technology, the Colibri identifies the exact position of the crop and precisely places sawtooth blades between the seed lines. The Colibri's steel weeding discs are mounted on hydraulic parallelograms with an independent hydraulic system to ensure uniform and consistent cultivation

performance. The Colibri can be used on row spacings as tight as 1.75" making mechanical cultivation possible for the first time in high density crops such as spinach and carrot.

Space: T31 | suttonag.com

Shark Wheel SWIFT Irrigation Wheel by Shark Wheel Agriculture Mission Viejo, Calif.

The Shark Wheel was invented to solve all wheel issues in center pivot irrigation. The Shark Wheel SWIFT eliminates flat tires, solves rutting, has 60 second repairs if needed, increases crop yield, and reduces soil compaction. The center pivot/lateral move irrigation wheel leaves a DNA helix footprint in the soil. The front wheel pushes the soil right-left-right, and the rear wheel pushes the soil left-right-left right back where it started!

Space: Pavilion B 2524 | sharkwheelag.com

Shockwave X by OMC Orchard Machinery Corp. Yuba City, Calif.

Shockwave X is the World's First Autonomous Tree Shaker. Orchard Machinery Corp along with Bonsia have created the first Driverless Tree Shaker with no Lidar or GPS. The machine will also be outfitted with a deck for shaking pistachios. Built on a Proven OMC chassis that allows continuous movement and efficiency, including 100 Vision based Autonomy that



Photo via Burro | The Burro Grande is designed to work alongside people in the fields as an autonomous force multiplier.

allows the machine to work in heavy dust and Zero cell service conditions.

Space: M19, M21, M25 | shakermaker.com

Standard PTO Kit by Tractor Protection Products Blue Ridge, Texas

The Standard PTO Kit was designed to offer protection for both the PTO driven implement and the tractor PTO shaft. The Standard PTO Kit eliminates the difficulty found when hooking up a PTO driven implement to the tractor PTO shaft. The most important feature of the Standard PTO Kit is that ALL farmers who have a tractor(s) and implement(s) will benefit, regardless of size of operation, crops grown, or location of the farm. If you have a tractor with a PTO driven implement, the Standard PTO Kit can help.

Space: Pavilion A 1014 | tractorprotection.com

Amiga V7 by Farm-ng Watsonville, Calif.

Amiga V7 by Farm-ng is an electric, configurable, 1.3HP platform that allows farmers, developers, and researchers to haul, tow, spray, apply composts and assist in other essential roles. The platform is the erector set of farm tools where the same machine can be configured over the row, wide, narrow, with intelligence and tools that lift or rotate. The intelligence platform has an open API allowing students, developers and even elementary school students to code and configure the machine to collect data, integrate with other tools, and perform repeated robotic tasks. With the GPS guidance system, it can perform precision steering and weed the same plots it seeded earlier in the year with minimal or no operator intervention.

Space: U35, U37, U39, U41, T38, T40, T42 | farm-ng.com



Photo via GUSS | The classic GUSS has been kicked up a notch, now running on electric power as an autonomous sprayer platform.

Raised by a generation when a handshake stood for something.



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