Riverside County AGRICULTURE

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A private, nonprofit organization serving farmers throughout Riverside County since 1917
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Riverside County Farm Bureau
Over 100 Years Strong

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Inside this Issue...

Welcome New Members

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

Meet Your Board of Directors: Alex Sanchez

In our continuing series that introduces you to the Riverside County Farm Bureau's (RCFB) Board of Directors, we are delighted to feature Alejandro (Alex) Sanchez. Returning as a newly elected Director, Alex Sanchez previously served on the Board from 2006 to 2015. His wealth of experience and passion for agriculture make him a vital asset to the RCFB.

Early Life and Education

Alex was born in Sonora, Mexico, and raised in Yuma, Arizona, where his journey into agriculture began. Starting his career in a nursery as a general laborer, Alex quickly developed a keen interest in the field. He then joined Gowan Chemical Company, working as a product coordinator assistant and laboratory technologist, before advancing into product development with the Select Seed Company.

Alex pursued higher education at the University of Arizona (U of A) in Tucson, majoring in Plant Science and Crop Production. During his time there, he was actively involved in student organizations, serving as the vice president of the Soils, Water and Environmental Club and as president of the Horticulture Club. His academic pursuits were complemented by internships with Plant Genome and Hydroponics Production Projects, further enriching his knowledge and skills in agriculture.

Professional Growth and Experience

Upon graduating from the U of A, Alex embarked on a career as a farm technician, eventually becoming the farm manager for Ocean Mist (Desert Mist) Farms. In this role, he managed the cultivation of artichokes and various winter and summer crops in the Coachella Valley, gaining invaluable hands-on experience in vegetable farming.

Today, Alex holds the position of Ranch Unit Director at Grimmway Farms/Cal Organics. He oversees the growth of organic vegetables and conventionally grown carrots in the Coachella, Imperial Valley, Yuma and Parker. Alex's dedication to sustainable farming practices is evident in his work with Cal-Organic's desert farming team, where he emphasizes producing best-in-class organic vegetables during the winter season.

A Passion for Farming

Alex's enthusiasm for agriculture is palpable. He shares on Cal-Organics Farm's website, "Being part of Cal-Organic's desert farming team, we strive to produce best-in-class organic vegetables during the winter season. I truly enjoy waking up every morning to work outdoors under the Southern California sun. Not only do I feel lucky to be a farmer, but I also get personal fulfillment from growing with a company that has soul and purpose as we strive to be good stewards of our land."

Alex Sanchez's journey from a general laborer to a respected leader in the agricultural community is a testament to his dedication and passion for the field. As he resumes his role on the RCFB Board of Directors, Alex is committed to leveraging his experience to benefit the farming community in Riverside County and beyond.

Agricultural Commissioner's Office – Balancing County Enforcement with Statewide Alignment

Since stepping into the role of Agricultural Commissioner last year, I've stood by a simple but powerful mantra: compliance through collaboration. I believe that by working closely with our county's growers, we can achieve full compliance with state laws and regulations—ensuring a safe and healthy food supply that reflects both our department's mission and the values of our community.

Our mission is to promote and protect local agriculture while safeguarding public health, safety, and the environment. This mission aligns closely with that of the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR). While we often work hand-in-hand with state agencies for guidance and regulatory interpretation, enforcement at the county level is shaped by the discretion granted to our department. That local discretion allows us to take into account a variety of factors—environmental, meteorological, and cultural—when determining appropriate enforcement actions in response to violations.

This flexibility is a unique strength of local enforcement. It enables us to respond to real-world conditions in ways that a one-size-fits-all statewide approach may not allow. However, that discretion may be at risk.

DPR has recently turned its attention to county-level compliance rates. Our department has consistently achieved a strong 92% compliance rate in inspections—just shy of the 94% statewide average. But our compliance rate in DPR's oversight inspections stands at 66%, a figure that reflects a broader trend seen in several other counties as well. While the implications of this discrepancy are still unfolding, we have a clear path forward to bridge this compliance gap and ensure Riverside County upholds the highest standards of legal and regulatory adherence, safeguarding the health and safety of our community. The path forward, begins with stronger collaboration between our office and the industry we serve.

We view ourselves as a partner and a resource. We share the same goal: high compliance and safety standards. One of the most effective tools we have to support this goal is education. Whether it's reviewing inspection requirements, offering guidance on new or changing regulations, or holding Q&A sessions, our team is here to help.

We invite you to schedule an outreach session for you and your staff—at no cost. Education is free. Enforcement comes with a fine.

Let's work together to ensure our county remains a model of responsible agricultural practices. Help us help you stay in compliance.

Congratulations to Europa Village Winery & Resort

The California State Fair has announced the winners of the 2025 California Commercial Wine Competition, one of the nation's most respected wine competitions. Led by Chief Judge Mark Chandler, a panel of 39 expert judges tasted and evaluated an impressive 1,587 wines representing 309 of California's top wine brands.

Dating back to 1854, the California State Fair Commercial Wine Competition holds the title as the oldest and most prestigious wine competition in the United States. It continues its legacy of honoring the very best wines from the Golden State.

Celebrating California Winemaking

The competition is exclusively open to wines made from fruit grown and produced in California's 11 wine-growing regions. These wines are judged by class, varietal, style, and growing region, celebrating the rich depth and diversity within California's winemaking industry. The judging took place over three days at Cal Expo.

Top Honors of 2025

Several wines stood out among the entries, with top honors awarded in various categories:

- Best of Show Red: 2023 Barbera by St. Amant Winery (Lodi)
- Best of Show White: 2024 Verdelho by Las Positas Vineyards (Livermore Valley)

The most prestigious accolade, **the Golden State Winery of the Year**, was awarded to **Europa Village Winery & Resort in Temecula**. This marks their first time receiving this esteemed honor.

A Celebration of Excellence

"The Commercial Wine Competition is a true celebration of California's rich agricultural heritage and the incredible talent of our state's winemakers," said Tom Martinez, CEO of the California Exposition & State Fair. "We're proud to showcase these award-winning wines at the Fair and give our guests a chance to experience the best of the Golden State."

Congratulations to all the winners, especially Europa Village Winery & Resort, for their outstanding achievement and contribution to California's illustrious wine industry.

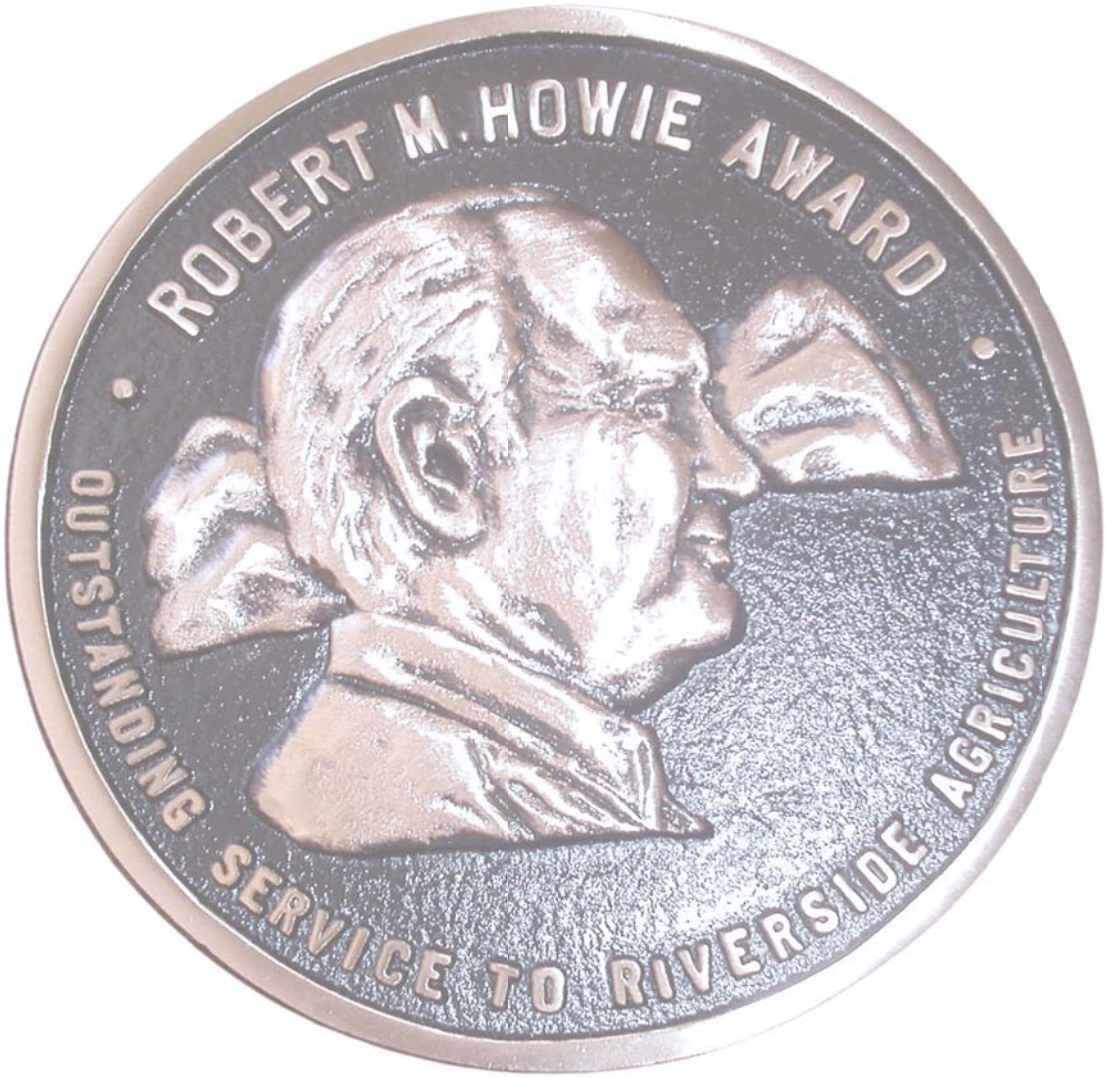
Howie Award Nomination Form

Deadline for Nomination Form is
August 1, 2025.

I nominate (name of candidate for Howie Award):

_____

Because: *(why should your candidate receive the Howie Award below, use extra pages or attach a bio/supporting information if available):*



Send your nomination to:
Riverside County Farm Bureau
21160 Box Springs Road, #102
Moreno Valley, CA 92557
or email: bell@riversidecfb.com

Your name and telephone number:

The Robert M. Howie Award

The Riverside County Farm Bureau presents the Robert M. Howie Award annually to acknowledge exceptional contributions to agriculture in Riverside County. First awarded in 1983, this prestigious honor was established to celebrate Robert M. Howie, who retired in 1982 after an impressive 28 years as the county agricultural commissioner. The award serves as a yearly reminder of Bob Howie's unwavering dedication and aims to inspire similar commitment in others within the industry.

Farm Bureau Directors Meet with Supervisor Jose Medina to Discuss Key Ag Issues

Earlier this month, Riverside County Farm Bureau President Ellen Way, Vice President Paul Cramer, and Director Andy Domenigoni met with District 1 Supervisor Jose Medina for a conversation on the challenges and opportunities facing the county's agricultural community.

The meeting touched on a broad range of issues impacting farmers across the region. Rising land value, labor shortages, and increasing regulatory pressures were highlighted as ongoing concerns that make it harder for farms (large and small) to remain viable. President Way and Director Domenigoni stressed the critical role agriculture plays in local economic security, food production, and the preservation of Riverside County's rural heritage.

Vice President Cramer discussed the importance of reliable transportation infrastructure, particularly the need to monitor developments around the 215 Freeway project, which has direct implications for ag transport and regional farm operations. Insurance costs for agricultural land and facilities were also a key topic, especially with the updated fire risk maps that could drive premiums even higher.

Supervisor Medina expressed appreciation for the insights shared and a strong interest in staying engaged with the agricultural community. The group also discussed concerns around rural crime, including theft and vandalism, which continue to impact farms across the county. Farm Bureau directors expressed their appreciation for the Riverside County Sheriff's Department and voiced strong support for the Sheriff's Rural Crime Task Force, recognizing its role in addressing these challenges and protecting rural communities.

Looking ahead, Supervisor Medina plans to attend an upcoming Riverside County Farm Bureau Board of Directors meeting to continue the dialogue. Farm Bureau will also be compiling a list of key contacts and regional stakeholders to support continued collaboration with the Supervisor's office. Both parties expressed a shared commitment to finding practical solutions that support the future of farming in Riverside County.

This meeting reflects Riverside County Farm Bureau's ongoing mission to connect agriculture with decision-makers and ensure that the voice of local farmers is heard in every policy conversation. We extend our thanks to Supervisor Medina for his time and thoughtful engagement.

Consumer Watchdog Sues Over FAIR Plan Agreement as Farm Bureau Backs Legislative Fix

The consumer advocacy group Consumer Watchdog filed a lawsuit challenging a 2023 agreement made between Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara and insurance companies regarding financial responsibility for California's FAIR Plan. The lawsuit adds to growing concerns about how wildfire-related insurance claims will be handled moving forward—especially as major losses from the recent Palisades and Eaton fires strain the system.

The FAIR Plan, which serves as a safety-net insurance provider, is financially backed by insurers operating in the state's regulated market. When the FAIR Plan lacks sufficient reserves to pay out claims, these insurers are required to step in. That threshold has now been crossed: the FAIR Plan is currently facing more than $4 billion in wildfire-related claims, with only $1 billion in available cash.

Last year's agreement with insurers aimed to stabilize the system by requiring companies to pay the first $2 billion in excess claims. For remaining losses, insurers may cover 50% by levying a one-time assessment on policyholders. While the Department of Insurance has declined to comment on the pending litigation, it is defending the agreement as a necessary action to prevent more insurers from leaving California's already shrinking admitted market.

It remains unclear whether insurers will ultimately pass along costs related to the Palisades and Eaton fires to consumers.

In response, the California Farm Bureau has endorsed Assembly Bill 226, introduced by Assemblymembers Lisa Calderon (D–City of Industry) and David Alvarez (D–Chula Vista). AB 226 would authorize the state's Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank (iBank) to issue bonds that would help the FAIR Plan cover claim losses—providing an alternative to direct consumer assessments. The bill is advancing with bipartisan support and includes an urgency clause, allowing it to take effect immediately upon the Governor's signature.

The Farm Bureau continues to monitor developments closely and advocates for long-term solutions that protect both agricultural and residential policyholders across the state.

ORGANIC DATE RANCHES
COACHELLA VALLEY & BLYTHE

PORTFOLIO OF 8 DATE RANCHES

RANCH INFO

- Piedmont Ranch $656,000 ($32,000/AC)
  20.5 AC SWC Pierce St & Ave 58, Thermal
- Meyers Ranch $1,[illegible] ($45,000/AC) SOLD
  29.6 AC W Ja[illegible] & Ave 60, Vista Santa Rosa
- Indian Palms Ranch $1,173,600 ($30,000/AC)
  39.12 AC SEC Lincoln St & Ave 81, Thermal
- American 74 Ranch $1,425,900 ($35,000/AC)
  40.74 AC S of Ave 74 & W of Polk St, Thermal
- Codekas Ranch $2,075,000 ($50,000/AC) SOLD
  41.5 AC W of [illegible] & S Ave 61, Thermal
- Chuchian Ranch $1,288,200 ($30,000/AC)
  42.94 AC W of Pierce St & Ave 63, Thermal
- Larson 64 Ranch $1,456,800 ($30,000/AC)
  48.56 AC NWC Pierce St & Ave 64, Thermal
- Kelsey Ranch $1,866,750 ($25,000/AC)
  74.67 AC Expressway 86 & Ave 76, Oasis
- Triple E Ranch $2,625,000 ($35,000/AC)
  75 AC W of Pierce St & N Ave 62, Thermal
- Thermal 80 Ranch $[illegible]00 ($25,000/AC) SOLD
  79.82 AC E of Polk & N Ave 58, Thermal
- Portola Ranch $6,694,220 ($13,000/AC)
  514.94 AC 1095 Midland Rd, Blythe

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Video series aims to help young farmers grow vegetables

A new video series by the University of California aims to provide free virtual training in how to grow vegetables. The training was designed to reach younger farmers and those entering the field for the first time. "The average age of agricultural producers in California is currently about 59.2 years," said Jeff Mitchell, UC Cooperative Extension specialist in the Department of Plant Sciences in Davis. "Therefore, there is an urgent need to encourage and recruit young people into agriculture to sustain current and future production."

"Farm Bureau Working for You"

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 11, 2025 ~ 5:30 PM, Riverside County Farm Bureau Board of Directors meeting. In person at the CA Date Commission office, Palm Desert and via Zoom Conference. Please call our office at (951) 684-6732 for more information.

Food and Farm News

Courtesy of CFBF

Newsom budget proposes fast track for delta water conveyance tunnel

Gov. Gavin Newsom released his revised budget last week, saying the state faces a $12 billion budget deficit. The governor's $322 billion spending plan for 2025-26 includes a proposal to fast-track the construction of the Delta Conveyance Project, a $20-billion tunnel beneath the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. The tunnel would create a second route to move water to State Water Project pumps that transport water to urban and agricultural users south of the delta. The project supplies water to 27 million people and 750,000 acres of farmland. "While the project has received some necessary permits, its path forward is burdened by complicated regulatory frameworks and bureaucratic delays," the governor's office said in a statement.

Committee rejects tax credit bill that aimed to offset farm overtime costs

Farm advocates and farmworkers left the state Capitol disappointed last month after a proposed tax credit aimed at boosting farm employment opportunities and assisting farms in California failed to advance out of the state Senate Labor, Public Employment and Retirement Committee. Senate Bill 628, authored by state Sen. Shannon Grove, R-Bakersfield, would have created a tax credit to offset the cost to farmers of paying overtime wages. The bill was designed to address unintended consequences of California's 2016 agricultural overtime law, which proponents said would boost farmworker pay but ended up causing workers to lose hours and income, according to research from the University of California, Berkeley.

Bankruptcies show stress in farm economy

After a four-year downward trend, U.S. farm bankruptcies are on the rise again, with growing concern that the financial health of farms across the country will continue to falter. A total of 216 U.S. farms filed for Chapter 12 bankruptcy last year, up 55% from 2023. With 17 filings, California led the nation. "It's just the tip of the iceberg," said Shawn Gill, a Central Valley almond grower who has been trying to reorganize his debts under Chapter 12. "You're going to see a lot more bankruptcies or people going under."