

Farm groups relieved as ag overtime bill dies in Assembly

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Agricultural leaders are relieved that legislation that would do away with agricultural exceptions to California's overtime laws failed to make it out of the Assembly.

The bill by Assemblywoman Lorena Sanchez, D-San Diego, would have phased in a requirement that ag employers observe the same eight-hour work day and 40-hour work week as other employers. State law now requires overtime to be paid to farmworkers who exceed 10 hours in a day or 60 hours in a week.

The bill needed 41 votes to pass in the Assembly before a June 2 deadline to move legislation out of its originating chamber. It was favored by only a 37-34 vote.

Its defeat offers a bit of a reprieve to growers who are still reeling from this year's passage of legislation gradually increasing the state's minimum wage to \$15 an hour, noted Justin Oldfield, the California Cattlemen's Association's vice president of government relations.

But he said the proposal could be added to another bill later in the year or reintroduced next year.

"As we get later in the year, there absolutely could be a play to try to do that," Oldfield said. "We definitely do expect this issue to resurface again, whether it's in this legislative session or next year."

"It's definitely a good victory for the day and we just can't be complacent," he said. "We have to continue to work to address the issue and move

forward."

California Farm Bureau Federation President Paul Wenger said on the organization's website the bill's demise "shows what farmers and ranchers can do when they work together." He noted that California is one of only five states to offer premium pay for farm work under rules established in 1976.

The CFBF and CCA opposed the bill, asserting that imposing the standard work week on agriculture could bring drastic cost increases and could prompt some growers to leave the state.

A bill similar to Gonzales' failed in the California Assembly in 2012, two years after then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed another such proposal. The latest attempt comes as lawmakers quickly approved a bill this spring that will take the state's minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2020.

"I think the action that was taken earlier in the year caught everyone off guard, including many in the Legislature," Oldfield said. He added the proposed overtime changes would "certainly be a double whammy and one that would just be piling on impacts to farmers and ranchers."

In other legislative activity, the Assembly did pass a bill by Assemblyman Jim Wood, D-Healdsburg, that would tax the sale and distribution of medical marijuana to pay for law enforcement efforts to crack down on illegal grows and for cleanup of illegal cultivation sites. Farm groups support the legislation, which now moves to the Senate.

University of Idaho ag dean 'fully committed' to Parma station

By **SEAN ELLIS**
Capital Press

PARMA, Idaho — Since being slated for closure in 2009 and on its last breaths, the University of Idaho's Parma Research and Extension Center has made a comeback and is now targeted for a revival.

On June 2, Michael Parrella, the new dean of UI's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, told researchers and industry members the university solidly backs the Parma station.

Parma and the university's other eight research stations are integral parts of CALS, Parrella said.

"Investing here is a priority. I am fully committed to that," he told members of the Treasure Valley Ag Coalition, which formed in 2009 to save the station.

Parrella assured TVAC members that he understands "having these research centers is very important to you as an industry" and added that UI is "partners in moving your industry and the state of Idaho forward (because) ag is a tremendous part of Idaho's economy."

TVAC co-chairman Jon Watson, who represents onions and other row crops on the committee, told Parrella that his words were well received.



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Michael Parrella, dean of the University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, second from right, tours a new cold storage facility at the Parma research station June 2, along with researchers and industry members.

"We like what we hear," he said. "That's very good to our ears."

The 200-acre Parma station houses nine faculty members who conduct research on many of the crops grown in the region, including vegetables, forages, cereals, hops, mint and fruit and seed crops.

The station has entomology, soils, horticulture, crop management, pomology, viticulture, nematology and plant pathology programs.

After CALS lost nearly \$5 million in state funding for research and extension efforts during the recession, Parma

was slated for closure.

Entomologist Jim Barbour, the station's superintendent, said the center was closed on paper at one point but the intervention of the quickly formed TVAC began a series of events that saved it.

TVAC members provided temporary funding to keep it operational and then an agreement between UI and Simplot that provided the Parma station \$300,000 a year for five years assured its survival.

The fruit industry also provides \$30,000 a year to help keep the pomology program afloat.

A new \$500,000 state-of-the-art cold storage facility at the Parma station that was finished last month is proof that the university is solidly behind the center, Barbour said.

"It's evidence of that commitment to the station," he said. "People here really feel that the ... college is behind them."

Parrella thanked TVAC members for "stepping up and supporting the station when times were very difficult" and told them the station would soon be fully funded by the state, aside from the Simplot dollars.

After storms, 2016 prune crop could be smallest on record

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

RED BLUFF, Calif. — Prune production in California this season will be less than half of what it was last year because storms in March disrupted the bloom, leaving growers with perhaps the state's smallest prune crop in nearly a century of record-keeping.

This year's crop is expected to weigh in at about 45,000 tons, down 58 percent from the 107,000 tons that came out of dryers in 2015, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

If the prediction comes true, this year's crop would be the smallest on record since official estimates began in 1920, NASS officials said.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press
Plums develop in an orchard near Red Bluff, Calif., on June 6.

The forecast, which is based on surveys returned by 217 growers statewide, follows cold, wet and windy weather that created adverse conditions for bees during the height of the pollination period.

The prediction wasn't a surprise to growers, including Michael Vasey, general manager of Lindauer River Ranch in Red Bluff.

"I'm down that much or

a little more," Vasey said. "I think the impact was greater ... between Yuba City and Red Bluff, where it's a very light crop — we think about a third of the normal crop. People in the San Joaquin Valley got a good crop because the weather wasn't quite like ours."

The severity of disruption varied greatly among regions, agreed Donn Zea, the California Dried Plum Board's executive director.

"I think everyone was providing educated guesses of between 40 and 60 percent of last year's crop" statewide, Zea said. "It came out to be just where we thought it would be. The quality looks good; when there are less prunes on the tree, the prunes that are there are a little larger, which

is good for our customers."

While the March storms filled reservoirs, they caused spotty, uneven pollination of plum trees which resulted in a much heavier-than-normal shed of the developing fruit in subsequent weeks, the Prune Bargaining Association reported.

The PBA was warning growers in the fall that a warm and wet winter could threaten the 2016 crop, although industry insiders were more concerned about disease problems in trees.

California's prune production has already dropped considerably since nearly 200,000 dry tons came out of dryers in 2006, according to NASS. Just four years ago, producers put out 138,000 tons.

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