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California

Precision Ag Expo assembles all-star speaker list

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

ORLAND, Calif. — Organizers of an inaugural two-day conference here in mid-November say they have assembled a veritable who’s-who list of speakers to discuss precision technology and farm business management.

Former California Fresh Fruit Association president Barry Bedwell, National Agricultural Statistics Service Pacific Region director Chris Messer and Western Agricultural Processors Association president Roger Isom will be among the more than 30 speakers at the first North State Precision Ag Expo and Farm Business Forum.

About 40 vendors will participate in a trade show at the expo, to be held Nov. 15-16 at the Glenn County fairgrounds in Orland.

“We’re incredibly amazed

at how the programming came together,” said fair director Ryann Newman, who came up with the idea for the event. “People have kept reiterating the need for this kind of information to be shared.”

The cost is \$125 per person for pre-registration or \$150 at the conference and includes a catered breakfast and lunch on both days and a hosted mixer sponsored by Heritage Insurance Agency and California Women in Agriculture.

Workshops will follow two “tracks” — how to make the most out of new technology and planning for a farm operation’s future. Newman created the event after hearing from growers that they’d like to learn more about all the new ag-related technology in California, she said.

The conference and trade show come as a recent USDA study finding that many growers aren’t fully using the

precision technology with which their farm machinery is equipped.

Newman said she was told by growers “that they didn’t have the education” to use some of their equipment’s new features and “they needed to understand it better.”

The keynote addresses will be delivered by Rabobank senior analyst Roland Fumasi, who will discuss how California land values affect growers’ opportunities, and new California State University-Chico agriculture dean John Unruh.

Bedwell, who left the Fresh Fruit Association this summer to become president of the California Agricultural Leadership Foundation, will discuss the importance of leadership skills in running a family farm operation.

Messer will talk about the USDA’s Census of Agriculture, and Isom will be joined by William Ludwig of The Zenith

Agribusiness Solutions to talk about how the Food Safety Modernization Act is affecting farmers and processors.

Among the other workshops:

- Chico State professor Eric Houk will share his research about the significance of agricultural production, processing and related industries on Northeastern California’s economy.
- University of Wyoming farm and ranch specialist John Hewlett will lead a “risk simulation competition” to help producers understand risk management decisions and their impacts.
- Scott Gregory, a program manager for AgOne Solutions, will discuss the use of drones for aerial imaging of croplands as a tool for collecting information.

For information and to register, visit <http://www.glenncountyfair.org/p/precision-ag-expo>.

Walnut industry gets new leader as marketing effort revs up

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

FOLSOM, Calif. — Michelle McNeil Connelly is taking the reins of an industry that’s exploding with growth and looking to expand its consumer base.

Connelly took over Nov. 1 as executive director of the California Walnut Board and chief executive officer of the California Walnut Commission, which work in tandem to research and promote walnuts.



Michelle McNeil Connelly

The organizations’ former senior director for international marketing, Connelly takes the top spot just as growers have wrapped up their harvest of an anticipated 670,000-ton walnut crop and the board and commission have placed a new emphasis on domestic marketing.

“We have a lot of opportunities in front of us and a lot of challenges as well,” Connelly told the Capital Press. “My goal is to execute the strategic plan that our industry has defined and set forward for us.

“I’m excited,” she said. “There’s a lot of opportunities and a lot of great things ahead of us. We’ve got a record crop to market, which is exciting, and we’ve got a lot of new programs we’ll be implementing as we go into the next cycle.”

The walnut industry will embark on a “very large advertising campaign” just after the election that will continue into the spring on television and through the full crop year for print and digital ads, she said.

As international markets accounted for 60 percent of the walnut industry’s business last year, the walnut commission will also launch a new marketing program in the United Kingdom targeting both food companies and individual consumers, she said.

A Sacramento native who got her master’s degree from the University of Denver, Connelly came to the walnut commission from a veterinary biotech firm in Colorado in 2004.

She has directed an expanding portfolio of export programs, most recently leading an initiative to open the high-potential market in India, according to a news release.

Connelly takes over for Dennis Balint, who had been the board’s and commission’s top staffer since 1995 and helped the industry grow from producing 247,000 short tons to 670,000 short tons during his service. Balint will serve as a special assistant, providing counsel on key projects, the release said.

The Walnut Marketing Board was formed in 1948 and became the California Walnut Board in 2008. Under a federal marketing order, the board’s vast duties range from varietal development and pest control to domestic marketing and inspection oversight.

The California Walnut Commission does international marketing and funds health research. While growers pay handlers a penny per pound of in-shell walnuts to support the commission, the California Department of Food and Agriculture sends monthly bills to handlers to collect the \$1.89-per-kernel-hundred-weight assessment that supports the board.

As competition overseas has intensified and prices of walnuts have dropped, the commission has invested more than \$17 million in the last two marketing years on U.S. sales and resolved to spend more in the coming months.

Record October rainfall in California a tough act to follow

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Northern California had one of its wettest Octobers ever, but forecasters aren’t ready to predict that the above-average precipitation will continue into the winter.

But some promising signs exist, including the lack of a dominant high-pressure ridge that kept storms off the coast from coming in, said Eric Kurth, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Sacramento.

“The good thing is, at least we’re seeing breaks” in the ridging, Kurth said. “In years past, these high-pressure ridges were just sitting for weeks blocking everything. In this case we’re seeing more of a progressive pattern. We’re getting some warm and dry weather and we’re also getting periods of wet. That’s more encouraging.”

The frequency of storms may continue in November, as systems were expected to bring a potential for more rainfall, according to the weather service.

AccuWeather’s long-range forecast for Northern California shows periods of cloudi-



Courtesy of Calif. Dept. of Water Resources

Michelle Mead, a National Weather Service warning coordinator, examines computer models at the State-Federal Flood Operations Center in Sacramento. The weather service sees an equal chance of drier- or wetter-than-normal conditions in Northern California in the weeks ahead but is encouraged by the absence of the stubborn high-pressure ridge that has led to the state’s multi-year drought.

ness through November, but not as much rain.

The forecasts come after many areas obliterated their average rainfall totals for October. Sacramento sopped up 4.72 inches of rain in the month, well above its average of less than an inch, the agency reported.

The Northern Sierra had its second wettest October on record, netting 12.6 inches of precipitation, according to the weather service. That’s 393 percent of its normal precipitation and one-quarter of what it averages for the year.

The Sierra got 17.12

October rainfall
Here are the October rainfall totals and comparisons to normal for selected California cities, according to the National Weather Service. Totals are as of Oct. 31.

Redding: 7.78 inches (normal 2.1 inches)
Eureka: 10.92 inches (normal 2.24 inches)
Sacramento: 4.72 inches (normal 0.95 inches)
Modesto: 2.05 inches (normal 0.68 inches)
Salinas: 1.61 inches (normal 0.58 inches)
Fresno: 0.67 inches (normal 0.63 inches)

harvests, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

The harvest of late-variety walnuts continued, as did the harvest of apples, navel oranges and other tree fruit.

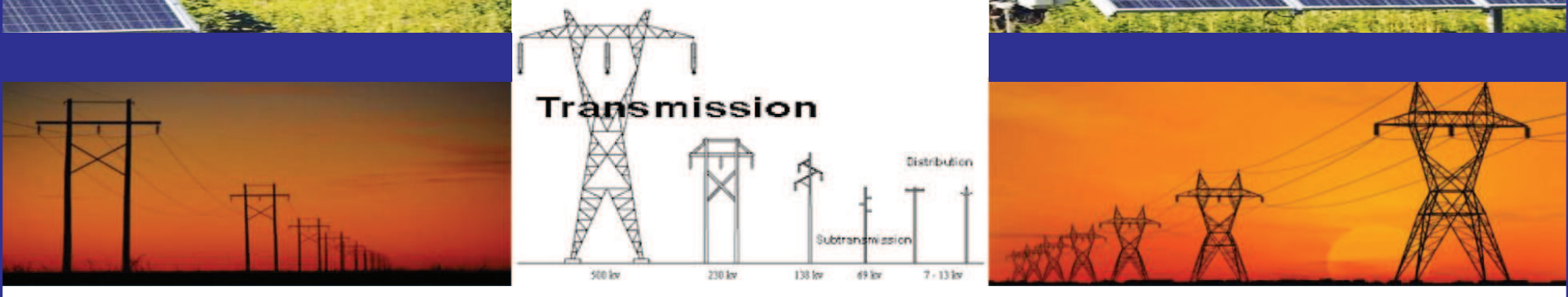
The rain was a welcome sight for ranchers, improving rangeland and non-irrigated pasture ground. But more is needed to begin recovery from the extended drought, and supplemental feeding of cattle continues, NASS reports.



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