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California

Western Growers' Nassif to be named Agriculturalist of the Year

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Western Growers chief executive officer Tom Nassif will be honored this summer as the California State Fair's Agriculturalist of the Year.

Nassif, who took the helm at Western Growers in 2002, is being recognized for elevating the immigration reform debate to focus on the need for a reliable and legal workforce for agriculture, according to a news release.

The fair's Ag Advisory Council also considered his work in pushing for a new specialty-crop title in the Farm Bill, helping to get the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement off the ground and opening Western Growers' Center for Innovation and Technology in Salinas.

Nassif said in a statement that he is "humbled" to receive the award considering past recipients. Last year's



Dan Wheat/Capital Press File

Tom Nassif, president and CEO of Western Growers, in his office in the association's Irvine, Calif., headquarters. Nassif will be honored this summer as the California State Fair's Agriculturalist of the Year.

honoree was Sarbjit "Sarbj" Johl, a founder of the Sacramento Valley Walnut Growers LLC.

"Truly I owe my success to the pioneers of California agriculture who have come before me, and to the thousands of hard-working and ingenious men and women

who are currently leading our industry into a new era of abundance and prosperity," Nassif said.

Nassif and others will be recognized at the State Fair Gala on June 22 at Cal Expo, which raises funds for the Friends of the California State Fair Student Scholarship Program.

The fair defines the Agriculturalist of the Year as someone who has contributed extensively and in a professional capacity to California's agriculture industry. The nomination process is open to the public.

Among other ag-related honorees this year:

- Paul Draper, who recently retired after 46 years as the chief winemaker at the Cupertino-based Ridge Vineyards, will receive the Wine Lifetime Achievement Award. He helped bring about a resurgence of the old vine Zinfandel in California.

- Dutton Ranch Vineyards in Sebastopol will receive the Vineyard of the Year Award. The ranch grows 1,100 acres of premium wine grapes using the Sustainable Winegrowing Program, which promotes practices that benefit the environment and are socially equitable as well as economically rewarding, according to the program's website.



Courtesy California Department of Water Resources

Water rushes into the diversion pool April 21 from the ravine carved out from the damaged Oroville Dam flood control spillway. The state Department of Water Resources is holding a series of meetings in Northern California to discuss repairs and reconstruction of the spillways.

Water agency to hold community meetings on Oroville Dam project

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

OROVILLE, Calif. — State officials are set to answer questions from the public about the Oroville Dam spillway repair project during a series of community meetings.

Leaders from the California Department of Water Resources and other experts will also take comments about the recovery process during the meetings, the first of which was this week at the Butte County Fairgrounds in Gridley.

The meetings are part of an outreach effort that has also included communications with local leaders and interest groups, said Bill Croyle, the DWR's acting director.

"We are committed to pushing as much information as we can out," Croyle said in a recent news conference at the project's command center in Oroville.

The meetings will all have a similar agenda and format, beginning at 5:30 p.m. starting with presentations of information and continuing with questions and answers. In addition to the Butte fairgrounds meeting, other gatherings will be held on the following dates:

- May 2 at the Oroville Municipal Auditorium, 1200 Myers St., Oroville.
- May 3 in the Sierra Nevada Room of the state Department of Transportation District 3 office, 703 B St., Marysville.
- May 4 at the Oroville Church of the Nazarene's fellowship hall, 2238 Monte Vista Ave., Oroville.
- May 9 in Franklin Hall at the Yuba-Sutter Fairgrounds,

442 Franklin Ave., Yuba City.

- May 11 at the Chico Masonic Family Center, 1110 W. East Ave., Chico.

In addition, a similar meeting will be held at 1:30 p.m. May 15 at the Tsakopoulos Library Galleria, 828 I St., Sacramento.

The meetings come as the DWR on April 17 awarded a \$275.4 million contract to the Omaha, Neb.-based Kiewit Infrastructure West Co. for permanent repair work on the Oroville Dam's spillways, which is expected to continue through the summer.

The agency wants to have its system operating by Nov. 1, the traditional start of the winter rainy season, officials have said.

Kiewit's bid beat out two others — Bozeman, Mont.-based Barnard Construction's estimate of nearly \$277 million and a high bid of \$344.1 million from California-based Oroville Dam Constructors, according to the DWR.

The agency's latest cost estimate for the project is \$231.7 million.

The state plans to fully repair or replace sections of the spillways, which will require multiple phases because of the enormity of the project and the fact that construction must be done during the dry months of the year, officials said.

Crews have already begun to prepare ground for future phases, doing things like road construction and slope stabilization around future work areas. This preparation can be done regardless of spillway recovery design decisions, officials said.

Congressman fends off criticism of USDA budget, Oroville Dam crisis

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

REDDING, Calif. — Lawmakers are working with President Donald Trump's administration to soften the impact of a proposed 21 percent cut in the USDA's budget, a key Western member of the U.S. House Agriculture Committee says.

In particular, Rep. Doug LaMalfa, R-Calif., said he understands concerns about how such a proposed cut would impact agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service, but said it's too early to form an opinion on the overall budget.

"The budget is a proposal," LaMalfa told the Capital Press. "It's a long way to go as we work through the process."

He said President Donald Trump is listening to lawmakers' concerns.

"He wanted to propose a quality budget with numbers that work and that boosts the military, which I agree with," said LaMalfa, who was in Redding on April 19 to hold a town hall meeting.



Rep. Doug LaMalfa

Trump's proposal for the 2018 fiscal year would cut discretionary funding to USDA by \$4.7 billion to \$17.9 billion. The current USDA budget includes \$25 million in discretionary spending for various programs, including Rural Development, food safety and the Forest Service.

LaMalfa, who serves on the ag panel's Conservation and Forestry Subcommittee,

serves a vast northeastern California district that has suffered numerous devastating wildfires in recent years. In 2015, wildfires, most ignited by lightning, burned 186,300 acres of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest.

Nancy Van Susteren, a retired USFS employee, said she worried the proposed cut would hamper the agency's ability to fight fires, clear waterways to prevent flooding and complete other tasks.

"I'm not sure LaMalfa sees the whole picture," Van Susteren said in an interview. "My concern is for the firefighters. ... If they cut the Forest Service by 20 percent, that means they'll lose employees."

But LaMalfa said the blow could be softened if Congress passes bipartisan legislation that would treat catastrophic wildfires the same as other di-

sasters when it comes to funding and end the practice of "fire borrowing," in which the Forest Service has to raid its management coffers when it exceeds its budget for firefighting.

The proposal hasn't made it out of the Senate in the past four years despite backing from then-President Barack Obama.

"It would be much less of an issue" if the USFS could protect its operational budget against encroaching firefighting costs, LaMalfa said.

Teacher Alysia Krapfel said LaMalfa opposed fixing the Oroville Dam spillway when he was in the state Assembly and asked if he would favor federal funding for repairs now.

As a rice farmer LaMalfa might have had to help pay for the fixes, she said.

LaMalfa said he agreed that overlooking the dam's shortcomings was "a severe oversight," adding that legislators voted based on assurances they received from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and state Department of Water Resources.



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