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# California

## Research to help cut chemicals

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

DAVIS, Calif. — Two USDA grants totaling \$7 million will enable University of California researchers to help the strawberry industry prepare for life without chemical fumigants.

A \$4.5 million grant will support a national team of experts led by UC-Davis to create varieties that are naturally resistant to certain diseases. The industry has also donated \$1.8 million toward the project.

Meanwhile, a team of scientists based at UC-Santa Cruz will continue research on bio-fumigation, a natural process that suppresses soil disease, thanks to a \$2.5 million USDA grant.

The awards were among \$35 million handed to 12 projects nationwide through the USDA's Specialty Crop Research Initiative funded by the 2014 Farm Bill.



California Strawberry Commission

A test plot used by University of California-Santa Cruz researchers compares a row of strawberries grown in soil treated with bio-fumigation with untreated rows. The search for alternative fumigation methods is included in \$7 million in USDA grants for strawberry research.

"It's two different approaches ... so one may progress a little faster than the other one," California Strawberry Commission communications director Carolyn O'Donnell said. She noted it could take as long as seven years for a new variety to get to the marketplace.

However, "if you've got the resistance and you're able to

make it stable within the plant you don't have to worry about whether you have disease in the soil," she said.

The strawberry industry has phased out its use of methyl bromide but is still using chloropicrin and Telone, which are facing increased scrutiny from regulators. Growers in recent years have invested in research

and education programs with the goal of eventually doing without fumigants.

The UC-Davis grant will let researchers identify genetic markers that are naturally present in some strawberry plants and use them to help breeders develop new varieties that can tolerate disease in the field while still yielding high-quality berries, according to a strawberry commission news release.

The award to UC-Santa Cruz will fund further research on anaerobic soil disinfestation, crop rotation and other natural means of fumigating soil. The core of the research will focus on adding a soil supplement such as rice hulls, and then adding water to cut off the oxygen supply.

The microbes in the soil naturally shift to an anaerobic state, digesting the soil supplement to clean the soil of disease, the commission explained.



California Strawberry Commission

A California Strawberry Commission food truck offers foods and recipes with strawberries during an art walk Aug. 3 in San Pedro, Calif. The commission sent the truck to various events in Southern California as part of an urban outreach effort, touting both the berries' healthful qualities and the opportunities for jobs in the industry.

## Food truck touts strawberries

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

WATSONVILLE, Calif. — A commodity group took to the road recently to tout the healthful qualities of strawberries, highlight jobs in the industry and raise funds to feed needy children.

The California Strawberry Commission took a bright red food truck to events in Southern California to sell such dishes as strawberry Nutella crepes, strawberry basil lemonade and summer strawberry salads.

Proceeds from the sales helped the Los Angeles branch of Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign provide more than 13,200 meals to kids in need, group officials said.

"We handed out samples of strawberry recipes and also had recipe cards," said Carolyn O'Donnell, the commission's communications director. "It gave us an opportunity to talk with people about strawberries and answer questions."

In addition to helping a charity, food truck vendors provided nutrition information, including recent research that suggests eating just eight strawberries a day may im-

prove heart health and reduce the risk of chronic conditions during aging, O'Donnell said.

Vendors also highlighted the industry's economic contributions, noting that 70,000 jobs are created as a result of strawberry farms and that about 25 percent of Latino strawberry farmers began as field workers before starting their own businesses.

The effort was launched on National Night Out on Aug. 1, when the truck set up shop at Pershing Square in Los Angeles. It also appeared during an art walk in San Pedro, a movies-in-the-park event in Los Alamitos and other community events.

Share Our Strength is a nationwide campaign that connects children in need with school breakfast and summer meal programs and teaches families how to prepare healthy, affordable meals, according to its website.

This was the commission's first year of taking part in the campaign. It was "a great way to make that personal connection with local communities and contribute to a good cause," O'Donnell said.

The commission will consider doing more outreach efforts during its planning meetings this fall, she said.



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## Dam rebuilding project passes midway point

Capital Press

OROVILLE, Calif. — Crews rebuilding the Oroville Dam's main spillway say their work is on schedule as the project passed the midway point for this year.

Demolition and reconstruction of the gated flood control spillway began on May 19 and is slated to be finished by Nov. 1.

Workers have finished excavations and preparation for the 2,270 feet of the spillway that will be done this year and are now placing reinforced, structural concrete, the state Department of Water Resources reports.

Crews have placed 25 slabs of structural concrete so far. When they're finished,

there will be 1,220 feet of spillway chute with structural concrete — 87 feet on the upper portion of the spillway and 350 in the lower portion, DWR officials said on Aug. 22.

Installation of reinforcing steel wall frames has begun and the first concrete wall section was slated to be finished this week.

Crews are also on schedule with work on the emergency spillway, with construction of a cut-off wall expected to be finished in late December or early January, the agency stated.

The state's \$275.4 million effort to repair and rebuild the nation's tallest dam comes after its spillways nearly failed in February.

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