

Subscribe to our weekly California email newsletter at [CapitalPress.com/newsletters](http://CapitalPress.com/newsletters)

## California

# Most USDA new farmer trainees still in the industry

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

BERKELEY, Calif. — More than half the participants in new farmer training projects the USDA has spent more than \$150 million on since 2008 are still working in agriculture, a group's survey has found.

Funded in the 2008 Farm Bill, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program has helped more than 250 training projects across the country, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition noted in a report.

Among the 40 percent of projects led by land grant universities, several key ones are conducted by the University of California Cooperative Extension, including farm business training sessions and workshops in more than a dozen counties.

The survey's findings should encourage the UC to seek more grant funding for similar projects elsewhere, said Jennifer Sowerwine, an extension specialist based at UC-Berkeley who was on an advisory board for the USDA's evaluation.

"As the metropolitan agriculture and food system specialist, I see several opportunities ... to expand (the UC's) offerings to support aspiring and beginning urban and peri-urban farmers," Sowerwine told the Capital Press in an email.

Urban agriculture is "on the rise" yet growers face numerous challenges, including securing land, marketing and distribution, implementing best practices and navigating laws that govern urban-produced foods, she said.

Over the next few years, Sowerwine and other experts will seek ways of "improving



Rob Bennaton, center, in the white T-shirt, a University of California Cooperative Extension adviser, talks with beginning urban farmers at the UC Gill Tract Community Farm. The training was funded through the USDA's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, which was part of the 2008 Farm Bill.

UCANR

urban farming profitability, ecological sustainability and fresh food access, and will be translating that research into practical guides and educational programming," she said.

Congress initially appropriated \$75 million from fiscal 2009 through 2012 for education, training, outreach and mentoring programs for new farmers, then provided an additional \$20 million per year for 2014 through 2018. The renewed interest came as the average age of U.S. farmers continued to rise and there was a projected decrease in farmers and ranchers nation-

wide, the USDA explained on its website.

The NSAC, a advocacy group for federal policies supporting agriculture, surveyed project leaders who estimated that more than half their participants are now engaged in a farming career and nearly three-quarters felt more prepared for successful careers after completing the programs.

Among the programs, 56 percent were led by nonprofit organizations, 40 percent by land-grant universities and 4 percent by other universities, according to a news release.

In California, the UCCE

has been providing beginning farming and farm business training in Nevada and Placer counties for more than a decade.

In a 2016 survey of producers in the two counties, 72 percent said they had taken a business class from UCCE and another 9 percent had taken other business training, the release stated.

Elsewhere, the university offers "Farming 101" workshops in Sonoma County on the second Tuesday of each month, and is wrapping up a three-year project for immigrant and low-income farmers that has trained 340 peo-

ple in 10 counties.

Sowerwine said she hopes the success stories relayed in the survey persuade Congress to continue the beginning farmer program in the 2018 Farm Bill.

She said 100 million acres of farmland is set to change hands in the next five years.

"There is a critical need to provide ongoing support to both aspiring and retiring farmers in order to secure the transference of that land to the next generation, and equip these new farmers with the knowledge, skills and resources they need to succeed," she said.



Tim Hearnden/Capital Press

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation workers replace a pump near a levee next to the Sacramento Weir Oct. 23 in preparation for flood season. State officials held a news conference on the levee to highlight ongoing flood preparedness efforts.

## State makes repairs to levee system

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Water agencies in California spent \$80 million this summer to repair 30 of the most critically impaired levees after last winter's rains, but they couldn't get to 10 others, officials said.

Many of them were in the San Joaquin Valley, where reservoir releases to accommodate late-season snowmelt kept rivers swelling well into June. Officials had to wait for the water to recede to assess the impact on the levees, said Jon Ericson, acting chief of the Department of Water Resources' Division of Flood Management.

"There are still sites that we haven't repaired, and we're going to have contingency plans for those," Ericson said during a recent news conference on a levee overlooking the Sacramento Weir, which is undergoing repairs.

The state has prepared designs for those 10 future sites and worked with local water districts and others to prepare contingency plans for 100 other compromised levee sites in preparation for this year's rainy season.

A sense of urgency prevailed this summer after high river levels during a historically wet winter exposed weak spots in roughly 1,600 miles of levees in the Central Valley. Among the most troubled areas is the Feather River below the Oroville Dam, whose spillways nearly failed in February.

Crews spent more than \$40 million, most of it state funds, to shore up those levees, including a \$12 million project to refurbish a one-mile stretch of levee protecting agricultural land near Yuba City that needed emergency repairs last winter.

Officials gathered on Oct. 23 to urge flood preparedness among residents and to highlight the monstrous task ahead in refurbishing a century-old levee system that was built for agriculture but now protects many urban areas as well.

"The Central Valley is one of the highest flood risk areas in the nation," said Bill Edgar, president of the Central Valley Flood Protection Board. "The levees have been successful in protecting agriculture, but over time people began building homes ... and high-value permanent crops (in the floodplain)."

California has spent more than \$4 billion on repairs since 2007 under a flood control plan passed by the Legislature, Edgar said.

The effort in the Central Valley could cost as much as \$21 billion over a 30-year period.

California has about 14,000 miles of levees, including those that protect urban areas, those that protect coastal areas from flooding because of storm surges and others.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

WHEAT U™

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2017  
SPOKANE, WA

Spokane Convention Center  
334 W Spokane Falls Blvd, Spokane, WA 99201

Wheat U is a farmer-focused event that provides resources to make informed production decisions on your operation. Come learn with experienced farmers and industry leaders how wheat can contribute to the profitability of your operation.

For more information and to register,  
visit [wheatu.com](http://wheatu.com).

#WheatU2017

**Capital Press**  
The West's Ag Weekly

**BASF**  
We create chemistry

HIGH PLAINS/MIDWEST AG  
**JOURNAL™**