

## California agriculture is mind blowing

### Insight

John Schlageck



Huge and nearly impossible to comprehend are words that best describe the economic impact of California agriculture as viewed through the eyes of nine Kansas farm families who toured the state beginning on March 25.

Each year, families from each Farm Bureau district in Kansas tour California agriculture as part of their recognition as Farm Family of the Year designees. This year the Kansans touched down in southern California in Los Angeles.

California's agricultural abundance includes more than 400 commodities. The state produces nearly half of US-grown fruits, nuts and vegetables. Across the nation, US consumers regularly purchase several crops produced solely in California.

An avocado and lemon ranch was the first stop in Ventura County. Leaven Fairview Ranch is owned and operated by David Schwabauer. Schwabauer is neighbors with nearly 900,000 people in just this county. The top five crops include strawberries, raspberries, lemons, celery and tomatoes.

The biggest challenge Schwabauer faces is pests and disease that threaten his avocado and lemon crops including the citrus psyllid and the boring beetle.

Applying enough water during the critical growing season and finding enough labor to harvest crops is another continual challenge for the Ventura County producer. Schwabauer and other produce growers often cannot find enough help to harvest the fruits and vegetables in their valley.

Phil McGrath has carved out an "organic" niche in Camarillo, several miles north of Leaven Fairview Ranch. The McGrath family farm takes pride in supplying its customers with the freshest organic fruits and vegetable. Their products are picked the same day as delivered with a guarantee that nothing is more than 24 hours old.

A few years ago, McGrath couldn't sell his fruits and vegetables because most of his Ventura County customers were looking to buy organic.

"They directed me to organic farming," he says. "My goal is to grow as many things as possible in their season."

The McGrath family farm grows everything from strawberries and baby vegetables to legumes and flowers. This is not only attractive to their customers but it is also advantageous to sustainable growing methods of crop diversity and rotation.

Pyramid Flowers, located on the southern California coastline in Oxnard, offers premium quality, specialty-cut flowers for the wholesale and mass market trade. Seventy percent of these flowers wind up in supermarkets including those in Kansas.

Owner Fred Van Wingerden opened his 50 acres of fertile fields and 20 acres of greenhouses to the Kansas visitors. A first-generation grower from the Netherlands, Van Wingerden began his flower business in 1979.

For Van Wingerden harvesting his flowers when they reach maturity is critical. "You have one day to harvest them at that point," he says. "One day later and the plants suffer and so does my business."

The trend at Pyramid Flowers has been to steer away from chemical pest control. Cost of chemicals like methyl bromide has rocketed out of sight so Van Wingerden uses steam sterilization to control weeds.

Another stop on the California trip included Associates Insectary. This grower-owned cooperative provides its fruit and vegetable growing members with pest control advice and beneficial bugs. This sustainable farming program began in the 1920s when citrus mealy bug infestations threatened to wipe out the local citrus industry in and around Santa Paula.

Associates Insectary was established by farmers to help fight this pest by raising and releasing millions of mealy bug destroyer beetles in their groves. An average of 800 million beneficial organisms are raised 365 days each year. They are released in the 8,500 acres of groves that are members of this cooperative throughout the year.

One other farm stop was Kallisto Greenhouses. Located within the Fontana community this family owned business was established in 1976. Located on a 10-acre parcel of land are 257,000 square feet of covered greenhouses. Kallisto sells tropical foliage plants for use indoors.

"This means there cannot be damage on the visible leaves and the plant must be artistically presented," owner Jim Rietkerk says.

The current economic downturn continues to challenge the Rietkerk operation. Input costs and regulatory burdens continue to increase, however; they believe in their product and will continue to produce plants that they believe will enhance and improve the human quality of life.



## Back home and back to work

I hate to admit that I haven't finished unpacking from our recent trip. The house still looks like the van threw up all over it. Some people (women in particular) are really good about tackling those kinds of jobs and, no matter how tired they are, getting them done. Unfortunately, I'm not wired like that.

When I'm tired I sits. And when I sits I thinks. And when I thinks I thinks about how tired I am. And when I thinks about how tired I am I sits. And when I sits I thinks, etc., etc., etc. I know that I would much rather build a house in Mexico or Guatemala than unpack luggage or do housework. Big sigh. But I also prefer to live in a reasonably clean house, so there you have the dilemma. Get out of the recliner and get to work or sit there and watch it all fall down around me.

-ob-

Over the weekend I did a walkabout in our yard. Winter and all the high winds we've had were hard on the place. I found boards in the fence that need fixed and lots of odds and ends

### Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



that should have a home, but don't. I also found lots of green things pushing up towards the light.

Naked lady plants are fully up all over town. I apologize to whoever it was that sent me their official name, but I can't remember it. My daffodils are in full bloom and I think I will cut a bouquet or I won't get to enjoy them at all. Iris is greening up everywhere and reminds me I really should thin out the beds some. Day lillies are coming up as well as peonies and the cone flowers. I think it's safe to say, "Spring is officially here."

-ob-

By the time this column is in print we will be great-grandparents for the

second time. Had a little scare over the weekend when we were notified that our granddaughter, Angelia, had gone into labor and was on her way to the hospital.

She was scheduled for a Cesium section Monday morning, so we assumed the delivery would just be pushed up a day or two. Not so. Little Lucian did not make his appearance so we are still waiting word of his arrival.

Lucian has a big brother, Kayden, who's world is about to be turned upside down. They've tried to prepare Kayden for the arrival of his little brother, but for almost three years he's been the center of the universe for his parents and grandparents. He is a sweet-natured little boy and I'm sure he'll gladly share the limelight with his little brother. Well...maybe not gladly.

-ob-

It's back to work this week. I've been going over in my mind what needs to be done and in what order. After almost a month away from the office, I might need to be retrained.

## An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure! Pet owners too often cut corners on wellness examinations, routine vaccinations, and preventative dental cleanings. The top three reasons owners neglect their pets well being are "I don't have the money", "I don't have time", or "it does not bother me, so my pet is just fine". Preventive care helps keep pets healthier longer, and keeps time and cost to a minimum! In fact, taking pets for wellness exams, staying up-to-date on routine vaccinations, regular dental health, and keeping pets on preventives are the best ways pet owners can avoid spending more money!

Wellness exams are an integral part of helping pets live longer, healthier lives. Since dogs and cats age much quicker than humans, a wellness exam once-a-year is equivalent to a person going to the doctor every 5 to 7 years! A lot can happen in a year, especially to older pets. That is why senior pets need to be seen a minimum of twice-a-year. Wellness

### Vet tips

Dr. Sara White



visits are invaluable for establishing parameters in pets, monitoring for weight loss or gain, and reassessing any ongoing medical problems. This information is invaluable when a pet returns ill, making a diagnosis easier. Medical conditions that are diagnosed early are easier and less expensive to treat.

Pets cannot vocalize their feelings, so the pet owner must rely on regular examinations by the veterinarian and at-home observations to assess your pet's health. Diagnostic tests including routine blood testing, urinalysis (urine testing), and digital radiography are used to evaluate your pet's health and are especially important yearly in pets

over 7 years of age. It is also very important that pet owners mention concerns or changes in appetite, activity level, routines, and bathroom habits. Any changes could be an indication of pain. Observation is the key to recognizing pain. Pain is treatable in dogs and cats, but absolutely not with human medication! Freedom from pain will increase the quality of life your pet has with your family!

Too often owners skip puppy and kitten vaccinations. When these vaccinations are neglected, pets often times become deathly sick and must be euthanized. A preventative "shot" (vaccination) would have saved the animal's life. This is heart breaking for all involved. Owning a pet is a responsibility not to be taken lightly. Never underestimate the importance of taking your pet to the veterinarian for regular wellness examinations. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, so do your part to care for your furry friend!

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