

Leadership Farm Bureau

# END OF YEAR REPORT



2024





# 2024 Leadership Farm Bureau

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From left: Ben Abatti III, James Moller, Danielle Vietti, Jackie Kennedy, Alex Arroyo, Tanya Brouse, Rachel Nettleton, Sy Honig, Harry Sidhu



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## Leadership is...

By Ryan Amaral, Special Programs Specialist

What is leadership? That was the question that guided the year as Leadership Farm Bureau resumed with its 2024 class. The answer, rightfully so, is different for everyone. For those of us who have been fortunate enough to be part of a leadership program, this is what makes a program like LFB unique. While leadership, to me, might be about the influence we exert on those around us, to others it's about the role they take within an organization or the ability they have to help someone grow.



Ryan Amaral

Leadership Farm Bureau opens the eyes of its participants to all that Farm Bureau offers. Learning communication skills, media relations, leadership styles and more is just the beginning of the process. As the 2024 class progressed, they took these new skills and implemented them during tours and visits across the country. What started as a leadership class quickly grew into a family that supported each other in learning, growing, serving and advocating—from the local to the national levels.

The nine young California Farm Bureau leaders represented a wide range of the agriculture industry. Whether working in production agriculture, banking, agribusiness or for a county Farm Bureau, each member added their piece of the puzzle for the growth of the whole group.

This class will join the more than 250 Leadership Farm Bureau alumni who have graduated from the program since its inception in 2000. They are the future leaders of our counties and state and will represent Farm Bureau and agriculture with the skills to lead, advocate and serve.

So, when the time comes, can you tell us what leadership is to you?

Congratulations  
to the class of 2024



# Class of 2024



**BEN ABATTI III**  
IMPERIAL COUNTY

Ben Abatti III is a third-generation farmer from Holtville. He received his bachelor’s degree from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo in bioresource and agricultural engineering with a minor in ag business. After college, he worked for J.G. Boswell Co. in farming operations as the shop engineering manager. He returned to the Imperial Valley to work on his family’s farm where they grow alfalfa, sugar beets, wheat, produce and other forage crops.



**ALEX ARROYO**  
MONTEREY COUNTY

Alex Arroyo is the general manager of King City Transplanting in the Salinas Valley. He has moved up the ranks at King City Transplanting, and he is responsible for all aspects of the operation. He studied business administration at Hartnell College and has a diverse background that encompasses many experiences across retail, automotive and agriculture industries.



**TANYA BROUSE**  
BUTTE COUNTY

Tanya Brouse works as a program coordinator for the Butte County Farm Bureau. She also works with the Butte Agriculture Foundation, which is a 501(c)(3) that benefits agriculture groups in the surrounding counties. She is the current chair for Butte County Young Farmers & Ranchers. She earned a degree from California State University, Chico, in animal science and with minors in agriculture business and food studies.



**SY HONIG**  
YUBA-SUTTER

Sy Honig is the owner of Honig Farms LLC with more than eight years of experience in the farming industry. He graduated from California State University, Chico, with a degree in crop science. Following graduation, he worked as an independent crop advisor, overseeing a variety of crops including walnuts, kiwis, almonds and many boutique seed crops. In 2019, Sy returned home to manage Honig Farms full time and now has transitioned to a partner and owner.



**JACKIE KENNEDY**  
GLENN COUNTY

Jackie Kennedy operates a multi-generation family farm in Glenn County alongside her husband, Adam, and their four young kids. She is the office manager of their farming operations consisting of rice, olives for olive oil and walnuts, as well as the founder of Knaughty Farms Olive Oil. She has a passion for agriculture, serving as a Glenn County Farm Bureau director as well as a district grower representative on the Olive Oil Commission of California.



**JAMES MOLLER**  
SHASTA COUNTY

James Moller is a seventh-generation cattle rancher where his family has been continuously ranching cattle since the Spanish first came to California. He attended Shasta College and transferred to California State University, Chico, where he studied agriculture business. After college, he managed the University of California, Davis, beef program and feedlot for 10 years. Today, he operates his family’s ranch with his wife, Star, and sons, Colten and Wyatt, raising Angus cattle. He is also a manager for Driscoll’s Inc., focusing on strawberry plant nursery production.



**RACHEL NETTLETON**  
KERN COUNTY

Rachel Nettleton was born and raised in Bakersfield. She attended San Diego State, where she obtained a bachelor’s degree in business marketing. Although agriculture has always been part of her surroundings, she began her professional career in the industry in 2023 when she became executive director for the Kern County Farm Bureau. Rachel’s focus is on raising awareness about the importance of this industry. Her commitment to agriculture stems from a lifelong appreciation of its vital role in everyday life.



**DANIELLE VIETTI**  
TULARE COUNTY

Danielle Vietti grew up in Santa Cruz and relocated to Visalia prior to college. She attended Fresno Pacific University majoring in business management. She fell into banking by chance in college and found a passion for agriculture finance. She has worked at AgWest Farm Credit for 13 years as a credit analyst and most recently as a vice president specializing in dairy financing. Danielle’s husband, Ian, is an LFB alumnus and heavily involved in Tulare County Farm Bureau. They have two children: Abigail and Adam.



**HARSIMERDIP (HARRY) SIDHU**  
YUBA-SUTTER

Harry Sidhu grew up in Live Oak and attended Live Oak High School. He attended Butte College and later University of Phoenix where he obtained his bachelor’s degree in business marketing. He grew up farming with his father, growing kiwifruit and walnuts, and now farming peaches. He has a career in agricultural lending in Northern California and currently works for First Northern Bank.





# February

## Welcome back, LFB!



By Tanya Brouse and Harry Sidhu

The 2024 Leadership Farm Bureau class kicked off in February with nine leaders from all parts of California, ranging from Shasta County all the way down to Imperial County. These nine individuals joined LFB to grow as leaders and learn personally about themselves along the way. Over the next 10 months, this group will gain knowledge about who they are as leaders and how they want to lead and will advocate for agriculture on a state and federal level, all while learning as much as they can about the industry. Through this program, each class member will gain the skills needed to continue as a leader in Farm Bureau and other agricultural organizations.

The first session started off with a warm welcome from California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass. They then dove into the question: What is leadership? Though they are all leaders in their

home counties in some capacity, class members were tasked with defining their ideas on what leadership is. The class set expectations for what they would like to gain from the program to implement in their daily lives. The last half of the afternoon was spent finding their “why,” which was led by Stanislaus County Farm Bureau member Deanna van Klaveren. Each in the group worked through a Myers-Briggs personality profile to determine his or her strengths and weaknesses as an individual and a leader. They quickly realized that even though they are all different, they are more alike than they had thought. Each was also given an assignment to research with a partner a chosen leadership theory to present on the final day.

These nine individuals quickly went from strangers to friends through team-bonding activities in the first session. To end the first day, the group was tasked with working as a

team at NEO Escape Room in Old Sacramento. Together they had to solve multiple riddles, puzzles and clues to escape the room in under an hour. This activity utilized everyone’s leadership skills at one point or another throughout the task, which led to them escaping the room with only 18 seconds to go.

The second day of the session focused on all things California Farm Bureau. The group was visited by different sectors of the CAFB team and took a deep dive into what goes on at the office in Sacramento. The first guests were Matthew Viohl and Isabella Quinonez from the Federal Policy team, who gave the group insight into what they do and the Washington, D.C., trip the class will take this spring.

The second guest was Dr. Amrith Gunasekara, director of science and research of the California Bountiful Foundation, who spoke about the foundation

and how research can be used to promote agriculture issues faced here in California. He informed the group about the grants that his team has received to address issues such as climate change, air quality, soil health, water quality and agricultural productivity. Following his presentation, Kate Fuso and Dan Durham, from Farm Bureau partner Nationwide, provided an overview of the company and its roots with the Ohio Farm Bureau, which the class will visit in the fall. (Durheim is now the CAFB chief operating officer.)

The next half of the day began with Judy Culbertson, then the executive director of the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom, who spoke about the foundation’s efforts to educate young minds about agriculture and healthy eating habits. The CAFB Member Advocacy team, which works daily to improve member experience and support county

Farm Bureau staff, stopped in to introduce themselves. This team is comprised of Corrin Armstrong, Cheri Smith-Comfort, Fiona Carroll, Claire Broadus and LFB Program Lead Ryan Amaral.

To end day two, the class took part in two activities to further strengthen their bond and learn more about themselves. Each class member brought five items that reflect who he or she is as a person for the “Me in a Bag” activity. This activity offered the chance for all of them to show what makes them unique. The group then moved outdoors to take part in the “Privilege of Leadership,” an activity that promotes understanding and acknowledgment of one’s privileges and marginalization. This activity was done to help the participants have a better understanding of themselves and others around them and how this knowledge can help them lead.

The final day of the first LFB session

started off with a tour of the California Farm Bureau building. Afterward, Steven Fenaroli, director of political affairs, gave a brief overview of his work with FarmTeam and FarmPAC and the importance of member engagement with these programs. From there, they moved into leadership theory presentations and a discussion about each class member’s leadership style.

Overall, the first session was an eye-opening experience for each class member. Each walked away with deeper self-awareness, new leadership insight and eight new friends. The class looks forward to further developing their leadership skills. They see the value in Farm Bureau and fighting for California farmers and ranchers, and all share a common passion for agriculture. They are all extremely grateful to have been picked to be a part of the Leadership Farm Bureau Class of 2024 and are excited for the months to come creating memories together and growing as leaders.



# March

## Let's talk agriculture: Media training and state advocacy



By Sy Honig and Danielle Vietti

Session 2 began in Sacramento with the Capital Ag Conference, a meeting of the California Farm Bureau membership to discuss and develop annual policy reviews. It was a wonderful opportunity for the class to sit elbow to elbow with state Farm Bureau leadership and its membership and dive deeper into legislative affairs together.

The first order of business for the LFB class was a trip to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, where Secretary Karen Ross provided an intimate sit-down, holding an open forum for questions from the group. Discussions included California's water woes as well as the secretary's journey and view of leadership. Her leadership experience inspired us all.

The group then met Johnna "The Piranha" Miller, a media and advocacy training

specialist with the American Farm Bureau Federation. Johnna provided extensive media training for the class, giving us tips and tricks for future media encounters. Aubrey Aquino, host of California Bountiful TV, provided insight into California Farm Bureau's weekly lifestyle show and joined Johnna in mock media interviews of the class, discussing labor and water issues. The consensus was that everyone had nerves going into the interviews (some more than others!), but each left grateful for the training. This amazing opportunity to experience an interview firsthand will allow us all to be better prepared for the future. Dinner with the Young Farmers & Ranchers State Committee included further instruction from Johnna on advocacy through social media. This included encouraging

us to post even small tasks that we might consider mundane. Johnna assured us that while we might see these tasks as everyday occurrences, others who might not be familiar with agriculture could gain insight into daily life on a farm or ranch.

Tuesday began with the class joining the entire California Farm Bureau assemblage for the second day of the Capital Ag Conference. After welcoming us all, President Shannon Douglass introduced Karla Nemeth, the director of the Department of Water Resources. Karla spoke on the interesting and multifaceted issue of California water politics.

We were then briefed on the issues that are important to the California Farm Bureau and California agriculture. These issues included the wolf compensation program,

drones for agricultural purposes, agriculture overtime laws, a mill tax increase on agricultural chemicals and sustainable groundwater management. Next, Steven Fenaroli, Chris Reardon and Alexandra Biring gave us training in the art of lobbying so we could be successful in our attempt to inform state legislators of the policies impacting California agriculture. After training, we went to the Capitol to speak with our legislators. Most felt successful with the meetings, as it was an eye-opening experience to see an up-close look at how politics works in California.

The next morning, the LFB class sat down for a legislative visit debrief, discussing our experiences of the day. We felt motivated and inspired to be part of the grassroots effort to advocate for key agricultural issues. Following

the debrief, Bryan Little joined us to discuss the affiliation of Farm Employers Labor Service and California Farm Bureau. FELS is a for-profit subscriber organization that works with CAFB to assist members in complying with state and federal labor laws and to help avoid costly labor-management mistakes.

Karen Mills, director of the CAFB Legal Services Division, provided an overview of her division's priorities and accomplishments, plus detailed information on who on staff to contact as subject matter experts. The Legal Services Division employees are well-versed in energy and utilities, tax, labor and employment, land use and Williamson Act, Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, water storage, pesticides and many more important areas of California agriculture.

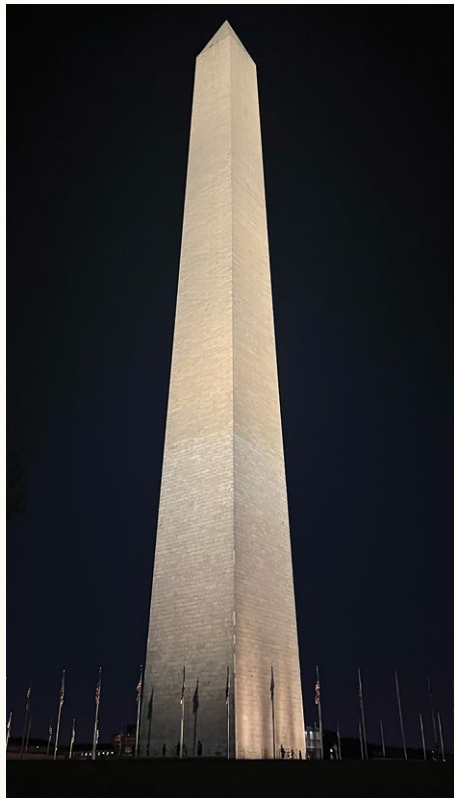
The LFB group broke mid-morning to join the Commodity Advisory Committee meetings of their choosing. Options for meetings included forestry and public lands; wheat, feed and small grains; field crops; and fruit trees. Other CAC meetings took place on the first day of the conference and included the grape, nut trees and livestock committees. Each committee provided insights on respective commodity groups and reviewed policies for discussion at Annual Meeting.

The day wrapped up with "word of the week" responses that included "motivated," "happy" and "inspired," and you sure can't beat that! Everyone is looking forward to the next class session: a visit to Washington, D.C., that will put to work all the advocacy training taught this week.



# April

## Navigating agricultural policy in Washington, D.C.



**By Rachel Nettleton and Alex Arroyo**

In April, the 2024 Leadership Farm Bureau class flew to Washington, D.C., where we engaged in a series of meetings with key policymakers to advocate for the interests of California agriculture, particularly regarding the upcoming farm bill. Throughout our time in the nation's capital, we gained valuable insights into the complex world of agricultural policy and laid the groundwork for impactful advocacy on behalf of our farming and ranching communities back home.

LFB is California Farm Bureau's emerging leaders' program that grows participants in personal and professional development areas such as public speaking, advocacy, agricultural issues, Farm Bureau knowledge and more. The 10-month program allows the class to dive into agricultural and Farm Bureau issues, advocate on the state and national levels, and learn about agriculture in other regions of the

country, to name a few. Each session focuses on a different area of growth, and as leaders this will equip our team to represent our counties and CAFB in the future.

Central to our agenda in D.C. were the legislative visits aimed at lobbying for the farm bill, a cornerstone piece of legislation that shapes the future of agricultural policy and funding. Armed with research, data and firsthand accounts from our constituents, we met with many members of Congress such as Reps. Jim Costa and Doug LaMalfa to articulate the priorities and concerns of California agriculture. We also had the opportunity to meet with representatives from the Embassy of Canada to discuss international trade policy. They emphasized the impact of the international trade relationship California has with Canada, exporting over \$5 billion of agricultural commodities in 2022 alone.

These meetings provided a platform to discuss a wide range of issues, from crop insurance and conservation programs to research funding and trade policy. We emphasized the importance of maintaining robust support for specialty crops, which are a cornerstone of California's agricultural economy. We stressed the importance of some of the major California commodities not covered by crop insurance, which include garlic, melons, broccoli, lettuce, carrots and cauliflower.

One of the key takeaways from our discussions was the recognition of agriculture's vital role in addressing pressing societal challenges, from food security and environmental sustainability to rural economic development. By advocating for policies that support innovation, resilience and equity within the agricultural sector, we are not only safeguarding the livelihoods of farmers and

ranchers but also advancing broader goals of economic and environmental stewardship.

Our meetings with members of Congress also highlighted the importance of bipartisan collaboration in advancing agricultural policy. Despite differing political affiliations and priorities, there was a shared recognition of the significance of agriculture to the nation's economy and well-being. By fostering dialogue and finding common ground, we can work together to craft policies that benefit all stakeholders across the agricultural value chain.

The Leadership Farm Bureau group also engaged in dialogue with several U.S. Department of Agriculture leaders, one of whom was Robert Bonnie, the under secretary for farm production and conservation. He explained the different types of programs the USDA has to offer for emergency relief for farmers as well as conservation programs. We highlighted the

importance of rapid emergency financial relief, since it is crucial to all the small farmers around the state and country.

As we reflect on our time in Washington, D.C., one thing is clear: The work of advocating for agricultural policy is ongoing and multifaceted. While our meetings with key stakeholders were a critical step in the process, they represent just one piece of the puzzle. Moving forward, we are committed to continuing our engagement with policymakers, stakeholders and the broader agricultural community to shape policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of California agriculture.

In the months ahead, as the farm bill takes shape and debates unfold on Capitol Hill, we will remain vigilant and proactive in advocating for policies that promote the sustainability of California agriculture. Our journey in Washington, D.C., may have come to an end,

but our work is far from finished. Together, as leaders in our industry, we will continue to navigate the complex terrain of agricultural policy, ensuring that the voices of California's farming and ranching communities are heard and heeded at every turn.



# May

## Stanislaus and Tuolumne agriculture: A regional look at key issues



**By Jackie Kennedy and Ben Abatti**

In the warm days of late May, the Leadership Farm Bureau class experienced the uniqueness of Stanislaus and Tuolumne counties and the issues those farmers face.

We started off with an agricultural overview of the region from Caitie Diemel, who serves as executive director of both county Farm Bureaus. We were blown away as we heard what her team has been tackling. They have partnered with local agencies to launch workforce development classes to help personnel on farms and ranches develop soft skills to more effectively assume management and supervisor roles. This type of partnership is needed throughout the state where farmers and ranchers are in desperate need of higher-skilled help.

We then took a driving tour of the agriculture campus of Modesto Junior College with Lori Marchy. It was nice to see students having so many hands-on opportunities within a two-year college. The school aims to provide as many opportunities for the students as possible.

This sets the students up with real world success to enter the workforce or transfer to a four-year college or university.

Water issues are a problem up and down the state, especially with more water regulations coming down the pipeline. We started our water lessons with Bobby Pierce of West Stanislaus Irrigation District. He showcased the district's new pumping station outfitted with high-capacity pumps that utilize VFDs (variable frequency drives) to achieve higher efficiencies, where they can pump the water and reverse the flow if necessary.

Next, we learned from Adam Scheuber of Del Puerto Water District how his board is having to get creative with supplying water and funding projects. One key project Del Puerto has implemented is a unique ground-water recharge project. The site has soils ideal for groundwater recharge and borders another water district that can assist with moving surface water to recharge their landlocked neighbors. The district is also using recycled

water from the city of Turlock, reclaiming more than 20,000 acre-feet for the district's farmers.

Our final stop was with LFB alumnus Daniel Bays, who manages his family's farm. Bays Ranch grows tomatoes, almonds, stone fruit, lima beans, forages and more—a truly diversified farm. Daniel was able to give the group the farmer's perspective and tie in the water issues and the needs of the growers. As a farmer, he is using resources from his local Farm Bureau such as having his employees attend the supervisor management training, making them more valuable on his operation. He is also a board member for the local water district and with his knowledge was able to give an agricultural perspective to the issues talked about earlier in the day.

Day one allowed the LFB team the opportunity to see how resources like water are being acquired and utilized. The theme of the day was "creativity," and we saw this through the different projects completed and the new ones planned to provide more water

to members so they can continue to farm. We saw the direct impact from the farmer's perspective on the farm and how the creativity of farmers and ranchers will help them continue operating for generations to come.

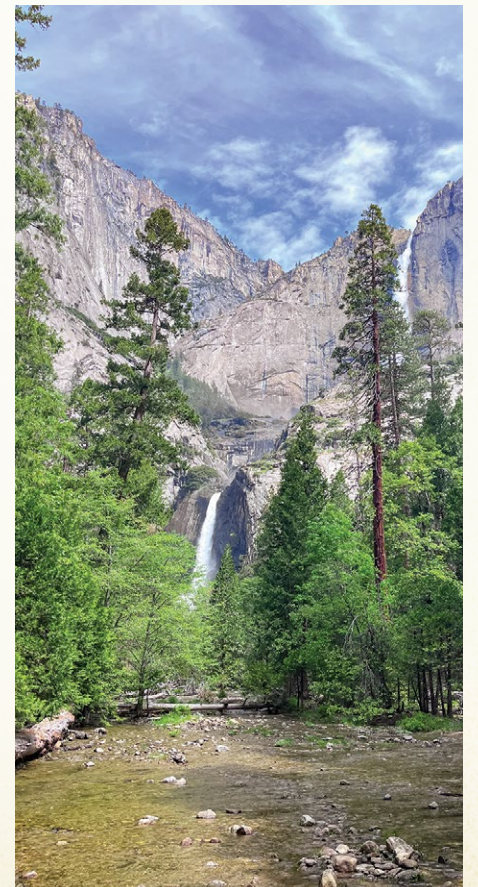
The LFB team hit the ground running on the second day with Tom Orvis representing Oakdale Irrigation District. We heard about more projects being put into place to better benefit the farmers in the district. The main goals of the district are to increase system efficiencies and flexibility utilizing automation and intermediate water storage. By automating the main district canals, Orvis said the district's system spillage has been reduced to near zero.

We then headed up the hill to Strawberry Ridge in Tuolumne County to visit Shaun Crook, of Crook Logging, who showed us a generation logging operation he and his brother own and operate. Farming looked a little different that afternoon for us, as we watched them pull logs up a steep incline to a pad where another machine stripped

and sorted the massive trees. Shaun told us this is part of a multiyear project of thinning trees on government land near utilities.

Our last stop was at Standard Mill with Steve Kafka with Sierra Pacific Industries. The class toured the large SPI Mill and saw how the timber was milled from a large log down to the common two-by-four. A unique aspect we heard about Sierra Pacific is all they do for their employees, with an uplifting view towards personnel and development within the company. This has resulted in lower turnover and higher retention, which shows the loyalty of their employees.

We finished off our three days together with a trip to Yosemite National Park, a perfect site for hiking and team building opportunities. We concluded with a recap of each person's perspective with a one-word check-in, including "influenced," "grateful" and "hopeful." This trip left the LFB class of 2024 feeling motivated for the rest of what the year has to bring.





# September

## Insights and experiences from Ohio and Kentucky



### By Tanya Brouse and James Moller

The thunderous sounds of hooves pounding the track, the sweet smell of caramel from the drying tobacco leaves and the dusty haze from recently harvested cornfields—these are just a few of the sights, sounds and smells that marked our tour of Ohio and Kentucky in September as the 2024 Leadership Farm Bureau team completed our out-of-state agriculture tour of the Midwest.

Our first stop was Columbus, Ohio, where we met with the Ohio Farm Bureau to learn about agriculture in the Buckeye State. We heard from leaders Pat Petzel, Paul Lyons, Jack Irvin, Rose Hartschuh, Marlene Eick and Tim Hicks, who shared insights into the challenges they face in agriculture and membership. These challenges mirrored many of our own, making it a valuable starting point for the tour. A key difference we noted was Ohio’s focus on water quality versus California’s struggle with water quantity. One interesting historical tidbit: The Ohio Farm Bureau started the Farm

Bureau Mutual Automobile Insurance Co. in 1926 to advance their members’ needs and help reduce costs for farmers and ranchers. As they expanded into other states, this small, private insurance company evolved into what we know today as Nationwide.

After learning about Ohio agriculture, we toured Nationwide Insurance, where Mandy Jennings guided us through the company archives. We enjoyed seeing how the company’s history intertwines with that of Farm Bureau. On the 38<sup>th</sup> floor, Devin Fuhrman, Michelle Floyd and Elizabeth Black hosted us for lunch and a session on “Authentic Conversations.” The session emphasized the need to recognize emotions during difficult conversations. We wrapped up the day with a scavenger hunt at the North Market, where we explored local vendors and enjoyed some of Columbus’ best food options.

Day two started with a visit to Select Sires, the world’s leading supplier of genetics

in the dairy and beef industries. We toured the facilities, witnessing the collection and processing of samples. We also learned how, through science and innovation, the company has helped U.S. and international producers increase their productivity and profitability.

Next, we visited Corcoran Farms, a multi-generation family farm in Chillicothe that specializes in high-quality freezer beef and row crops. The family shared their experiences with the daily operations of the farm, including their struggles and the importance of community involvement and Farm Bureau membership. They spoke about the support and lifelong friendships they’ve gained through their Farm Bureau involvement on all levels.

To wrap up the day, we headed to Hirsch Fruit Farm, where we explored the world of growing and selling fruit with Steve Hirsch. Steve explained how his family has grown by focusing on quality and has expanded to multiple storefronts and farmers markets. Although

Hirsch Fruit Farm is a smaller operation, the family faces issues similar to the larger operations we visited and, like them, also champions the importance of advocacy for agriculture through Farm Bureau. As a parting gift, Steve offered us freshly made apple cider—perfect for starting our journey to Kentucky.

The final day began with breakfast at The Track Kitchen at Keeneland, where Dr. William Snell and Taylor Nash joined us. Afterward, we toured Keeneland’s historic racecourse to learn about horse racing and the high-end horse market. The cool, crisp air set the stage for us to watch morning workouts and later tour the sale ring, where prospective owners hope to find the next championship horse. Next, we visited a nearby horse farm with Hoppy Henton. People from across the country bring their mares to the operation to breed them with one of the award-winning stallions.

We then headed to Donald Mitchell’s

tobacco farm in Midway, where we discovered that tobacco farming is not what we thought it was. We arrived just in time to see the team hanging the cut tobacco leaves in the barn from one end to the other, a labor-intensive process that involves strength and careful teamwork. After drying for 60 days, the leaves will be turned into the final product—cigarettes.

Our final stop was at Woodford Reserve, one of Kentucky’s premier bourbon distilleries. We learned about the distillation process, which included the very corn we had seen harvested earlier that afternoon at Mr. Henton’s farm. After the tour, we celebrated an amazing trip to Ohio and Kentucky with a tasting.

Our out-of-state agriculture tour was unforgettable. It’s not every day that a group from California gets a firsthand experience of agriculture in a different part of the country. Despite our geographical and operational differences, our mission is the same: to feed America.





# October

## Robots, workshops and etiquette...oh my!



**By Harry Sidhu and Jackie Kennedy**

Our Leadership Farm Bureau class gathered for our final session before California Farm Bureau’s Annual Meeting in December. October is a busy month to leave our farms, ranches and jobs, but once together, our class was able to set work aside and enjoy a productive few days.

We kicked off session 6 at the FIRA conference in Woodland, which was an amazing opportunity to witness upcoming agricultural technology firsthand. We saw live demonstrations in drone application and row-crop plantings, and heard from various ag tech leaders. Robotics and AI have made tremendous advances in agriculture, and it was impressive to see how these innovations are transforming our industry.

Alex Arroyo, a nursery transplanting

manager on our LFB team, summed it up this way: “For me, it was a great experience since I was able to see the latest cutting-edge technology and how it’s being incorporated in the different aspects of agriculture. I was also amazed with all the robot demos they offered. The PlanTape automated tomato transplanter machine, the Stout Industrial Technology Inc. mechanical weeder and the ‘Burro,’ the fully autonomous robot that works alongside people, were a few of the highlights.”

On day two, we got down to business. Our task was to develop workshops for the Young Farmers & Ranchers State Conference in December, based on topics preselected at the YF&R Summer Leaders Conference. We spent the next few days with Maegan Meredith from American Farm

Bureau, who led us through the workshop training. She helped us discover the difference between a facilitator (who guides the conversation) and an educator (who imparts knowledge directly). She also shared tips on how to design sessions that engage participants and ensure the best retention of information.

We later had the opportunity to attend a family-style lunch with the California Farm Bureau Board of Directors and guest speaker Congressman John Duarte. He shared insights into his work advocating for farmers and ranchers, including his efforts on water policy and land-use issues. After lunch, we wrapped up the day with a session on “The Art of Public Speaking” and then left to do some good, old-fashioned team bonding.

Day three began with more workshop

preparation as we continued learning the basics of facilitation. As facilitators, our goal is to make the workshop content easier to understand, so the skills we learned will help us present in the future. Under Maegan’s guidance, we spent the morning developing our own workshop presentations, which we would later share with the full group.

Danielle Oliver joined us before lunch to discuss opportunities within the California Farm Bureau after our graduation from the LFB program. She highlighted the many ways we could continue to serve the agricultural community, whether at the state level, on commodity committees or serving within our own counties. This session reminded us how we can stay involved and make a lasting impact.

Afterward, we participated in etiquette training with Eileen Amaral. We covered both business etiquette and dinner etiquette, focusing on proper introductions and respectful communication. Eileen’s session was interactive, so we were able to ask questions and do a few practice tests as we learned. Later, our LFB team, along with Eileen, Maegan and Ryan, went to dinner at Preserve in Winters to put our newfound skills to the test. A class favorite was the tip that the “napkin is your best friend,” which we found both helpful and humorous as we enjoyed our meal.

On our final day, the team came together and worked through our “stand and deliver” presentations for our workshops. Each of us had the opportunity to practice what we’d learned the previous

two days. We learned not to ask “yes or no” questions, as they limit discussions, and that directions should be the last thing you give before a task. The experience gave us more confidence, as our small groups finalize our workshops for the YF&R State Conference.

The session ended with a reflection on our leadership journeys. Deanna van Klaveren, whom we met during our first session, led us through self-assessment. We reevaluated where we started and where we are now as leaders. Each of us was able to see how our personal leadership journey has changed and how our “why” has evolved. The fun part is that we now can give back to Farm Bureau and the agricultural community after they have invested in us over the past year!



# Congratulations

to the class of 2024







## What is Leadership Farm Bureau?

Leadership Farm Bureau, sponsored by the California Farm Bureau, equips emerging leaders with the essential knowledge, skills, experiences and networks for effective agricultural advocacy. This comprehensive curriculum encompasses training in core competencies vital to Farm Bureau and agricultural leadership. Participants undergo competency training in every session, with continuous reinforcement of developmental topics through both session activities and assignments. Key development areas encompass leadership, communication, interpersonal skills, a deep understanding of state and national politics, insights into the agri-business sector, and fostering connections among farmers and ranchers spanning California, the nation and the global stage.



### Learn

Seven sessions and activities over 10 months will enhance participants' leadership skills, self-awareness and confidence. Sessions include training on leadership styles, emotional intelligence, team building, public speaking, communications and media training.



### Advocate

Participants will learn how to engage with policymakers, understand government structures and advocate for policies that benefit farmers and the agricultural industry. Participants will personally advocate on the local, state and national levels.



### Serve

The program includes practical experiences, such as field visits, project work and interactions with policymakers. These hands-on experiences can deepen participants' understanding of real-world challenges and opportunities in agriculture.



## Who Should Participate?

Farmers, ranchers and agribusiness professionals who are active in the county Farm Bureau are eligible to apply for Leadership Farm Bureau. Whether you're a seasoned agriculturalist or just starting your journey, our program is designed to help you grow as a leader. Participants must be a Farm Bureau member in good standing with the county Farm Bureau.

## Program Details

Members must apply to participate in Leadership Farm Bureau. County executive directors, county board members, state board members and members at large can submit a referral to members to encourage them to apply to the program. Members are also



encouraged to self-nominate for the program. Members must complete an application and participate in an interview to be accepted into the program.

The program consists of seven sessions, including two out-of-state sessions.

Members will complete 250 hours of instruction.

## What Alumni Are Saying

*"Through Leadership Farm Bureau, I gained confidence in representing agriculture and Farm Bureau. I learned skills in speaking to the media and engaging with legislative officials and got a better understanding of policy that impacts farmers and ranchers. Since completing the program, I have served as the president of my county Farm Bureau, hosted numerous tours for legislative offices and the general public and served on other agricultural boards."*

**JENNIFER BERETTA**  
Beretta Dairy, Sonoma County

*"Leadership Farm Bureau was an eye-opening experience. Seeing other operations in other states and around California was enlightening. I appreciated the effort put forth by the program to give the class exposure on how to educate and prepare. Going through LFB offers an experience that I otherwise would not have garnered!"*

**SHANE BICKNER**  
Woolf Enterprises, Kings County

*"Through the farm tours and meeting with members, we learned how much regulations affect day-to-day business. We told our stories and those of others to educate our legislators, policymakers and regulators on how these things impact us. Leadership Farm Bureau helps develop future leaders in Farm Bureau, in agriculture and our communities."*

**DANIEL BAYS**  
Bays Farms, Stanislaus County



@cafarmbureau





Learn more about the program at:  
[cfbf.com/lfb](https://cfbf.com/lfb)

