



Leland Tamayo



## ... more research articles

### 83 Yellow starthistle continues its spread in California

*Pitcairn et al.*

A review of prior studies, a new county survey and an abundance map by township demonstrate the noxious weed's startling spread during the past century.

### 91 Well-placed bat houses can attract bats to Central Valley farms

*Long, Kiser, Kiser*

Bat houses on structures with shade or morning sun, and within one-quarter mile of water, were most often occupied by bat colonies, which could help boost insect control.

### 95 New crop coefficients developed for high-yield processing tomatoes

*Hanson, May*

Yields of Central Valley tomatoes have improved 50% without increasing water needs; new crop coefficients based on 4 years of field data were developed.

### 100 Fall foliar sprays prevent boron-deficiency symptoms in grapes

*Christensen, Beede, Peacock*

Vineyard boron deficiencies occur in certain soils on the San Joaquin Valley's east side, Sierra foothills and North Coast; fall foliar sprays are an effective remedy.



### 104 50 years ago in California Agriculture

## Letters

#### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The editorial staff of *California Agriculture* welcomes your letters, comments and suggestions. Please write to us at [calag@ucop.edu](mailto:calag@ucop.edu) or 1111 Franklin St., 6th floor, Oakland, CA 94607. Include your full name and address. Letters may be edited for space and clarity.

#### The politics of market incentives

At the end of his interesting article ("Market incentives could bring U.S. agriculture and nutrition policies into accord," January-March 2006), Josh Miner asks about making targeted cuts in a commodity support program to free more resources for the food stamp program.

The agribusiness lobbyists who purchased the relevant political influence to get those programs and funding in place are not going to easily acquiesce to their reduction. No governmental budget is an equal playing field where only the most worthy projects are funded.

Food stamp recipients are not likely to have money for campaign contributions, and they are not well organized into a block of committed voters on this issue. Since their numbers tend to be in urban areas, their representatives often prefer to be on committees that deal with urban issues. The way forward for Miner's proposal would be to get the food stamp program and other related programs

moved into federal health, education and welfare departments or into housing and urban development departments, where the voices of the poor are heard most clearly. Agricultural committees represent farmers and the interests of rural states that grow the food, not the people who mainly eat it.

Complicating the problem is the current trend to cut back farm subsidies in general as a part of free trade, and use world trade as a method to assist developing countries. The funds that Miner wants to use may shortly no longer exist.

Bruce Bibee  
Rosemead, Calif.

*Josh Miner responds:*

*Bruce Bibee's point about the political (un)feasibility of cutting or redirecting commodity support payments might seem intuitive, but is more appropriate to a discussion of the political climate surrounding the 2002 Farm Bill. Currently in Washington there ex-*

*— continued on page 44*

ists powerful, bipartisan support for at least capping direct payments, led by ag-friendly Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Byron Dorgan (D-ND), as well as President Bush. This, coupled with widespread public sentiment against direct agricultural subsidies and the likelihood that such payments will soon be deemed in violation of international trade agreements, makes the debate leading up to the 2007 Farm Bill a perfect time to discuss creative ways to redirect all or part of those payments.

While Bibee's assertion that that food stamp advocates have to date not been instrumental in setting national farm policy is true, describing them as being "not well organized" or lacking in political access is inaccurate. They simply focus on the wrong issue: ending hunger (a problem affecting perhaps 10 million Americans) instead of promoting healthy diets, which between 50 and 210 million Americans

could have benefited from in 2000. Were food stamp advocates to begin lobbying for a U.S. food and farm policy rooted in health promotion and equal access to affordable, healthful foods among low-income consumers, as opposed to continuing their single-minded focus on ending hunger, they would no doubt become one of the most powerful constituencies influencing the 2007 Farm Bill debate.

### Readers share their interests

*Editor's note: In our last issue, we announced a brief survey of reader interests. Several reader responses follow.*

I am a 56-year-old disabled Vietnam vet. I have a B.S. in soil science and half the work done on an M.S. in natural resource conservation and environmental planning. I have done field labor, including harvesting wine grapes and picking tree fruit. This issue's article on grape pickers' back injuries rang true ("Smaller loads reduce risk of back injuries during wine grape harvest," January-March 2006). The same hold true for warehouse construction, which I have done.

I am interested in sustainable agriculture, non-conventional/nontraditional agriculture and water issues. I consider myself a conservationist: manage and use resources wisely instead of the waste and mismanagement that currently prevails.

What I do not like to read in *California Agriculture*: articles that get bogged down in statistical analysis, probabilities and standard deviations. I realize it is necessary to prove or back up the research data, but it is a big turnoff. Also, I do not like articles that do not have a glossary or define research/subject-specific terms.

What I want to read: articles on sustainable agriculture, conservation, water issues and other types of agriculture than the current conventional (i.e., chemical/pesticide) methods. I would like to see more articles on research facilities, plus articles geared to consumers.

Dennis Bell  
Redlands, Calif.

I like to learn about innovative scientific discoveries made by UC researchers that make California agriculture more efficient.

In your January-March 2006 issue, I particularly liked the Outlook discussion on the 2007 Farm Bill. You do not find this type of conversation in the regular media. I encourage you to do follow-ups on how the major issues are resolved, and why the decisions were made.

One of America's major potential problems is the giant increase in the number of overweight/obese citizens. Josh Miner's thought-provoking proposal to use money from the commodity support funds to create price-lowering incentives has great merit. It is obvious that America must change its eating habits.

Finally, *California Agriculture* used to feature quality stories on youth and the community. I suggest that you restart coverage of California's 4-H program. Telling how the UC DANR/4-H system is helping California youth grow into responsible citizens would be powerful.

Don MacNeil

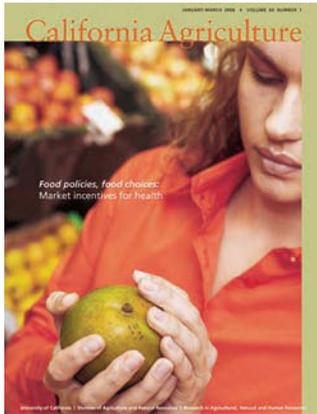
### Conveyor belts for grape harvest

After reading of all the problems picking grapes ("Smaller loads reduce risk of back injuries during wine grape harvest," January-March 2006), I picture a traveling gondola car with three belt conveyors attached. This would eliminate all of the tubs and half of the pickers. The grapes would be placed directly on the conveyor belt and end up in the gondola.

James Demin  
Glendora, Calif.



Smaller tubs reduced rates of harvesters' back symptoms.



The January-March 2006 issue

Tell us why you read *California Agriculture*, and what you would like to see in these pages in the future.

Go to <http://californiaagriculture.ucop.edu>, or write [calag@ucop.edu](mailto:calag@ucop.edu)