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Access Over Ownership: How Equipment Rentals Can Bring New Technology Within Reach

By Christie & Co

Farm equipment has traditionally been viewed as something a grower purchases and owns. That approach remains practical for machinery used consistently throughout the season, but it may not be the right financial decision for specialized equipment needed only when a particular field condition develops.

As technology becomes more advanced and production costs continue to rise, growers are exploring more flexible ways to access equipment. Renting can provide farms with the tools they need during a critical operating window without requiring an immediate capital investment.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's September 2026 Farm Sector Income Forecast, total farm production expenses are projected to increase 4.5 percent this year. Fuel and oil expenses are expected to rise 28.8 percent, while inflation-adjusted net farm income is forecast to decline 5.5 percent.¹

Financial pressure is particularly significant for specialty-crop operations. USDA research reports that labor represented approximately 40 percent of cash expenses for fruit, tree nut, vegetable, melon, greenhouse and nursery farms in 2024, nearly three times the average across all U.S. farms.² These conditions are encouraging growers to evaluate not only which technologies can improve their operations, but also how those technologies can be accessed affordably.

A Flexible Response to Seasonal Weed Pressure

Weed pressure does not always follow a predictable schedule. Weather can interrupt treatment timing, weeds may escape an herbicide program, and resistant populations can remain after other control measures have been completed. A grower may suddenly need additional equipment capacity but only for a limited number of days.

Renting can provide a practical response. It gives the grower access to specialized equipment during the period when it can deliver the most value, without requiring the farm to purchase a machine that may not be used throughout the year.

It also provides more meaningful information than a brief demonstration. By operating equipment in their own fields, growers can evaluate its performance with their crops, weed species, tractor, employees and operating conditions. They can measure acres covered, operator time and overall cost while determining how the technology complements their existing weed-management program.

Electric Weed Control Through Rental Access

LASCO offers rental access to its Lightning Weeder, giving growers another way to incorporate electric weed control into their operations. The commercial tractor-mounted system is designed to target weeds that extend above the crop canopy without applying another chemical treatment or disturbing the soil.

The Lightning Weeder uses LASCO's Electric Discharge System to deliver electrical energy into the weed through direct contact with an adjustable copper applicator bar. The energy travels through the plant and damages its internal tissue from the point of contact toward the root.

The system is designed for row crops including tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, spinach, soybeans, edible beans, peanuts, sugar beets, wheat and barley. Its applicator bar can be configured from 11 to 40 feet and mounted at the front or rear. The hydraulically controlled height allows the operator to maintain clearance above the crop, while an optional tilt feature helps the bar follow variations in crop height and field contours.

The Lightning Weeder requires a tractor with at least 120 PTO horsepower. Its digital touchscreen allows the operator to monitor and adjust voltage and current according to weed size, soil moisture, field conditions and available tractor power. Built-in safety interlocks require the grounding coulters to remain in contact with the soil and the machine to be moving before electrical power can engage.

Preparing for a Productive Rental

Before reserving equipment, growers should confirm that their tractor, PTO, crop height and row spacing are compatible with the available machine. They should also discuss delivery, setup, operator training, technical support, maintenance responsibilities and the amount of acreage that can reasonably be treated during the rental period.

Timing is equally important. Weed height and crop clearance help determine whether electric weed control is suitable for a particular field, while moisture and humidity can influence conductivity and operating settings. Because seasonal demand may affect availability, growers should contact the provider before the expected treatment window.

The goal of renting is not simply to postpone a purchase. It is to gain practical access to a tool when it is needed and collect enough operational information to make a sound decision about its place on the farm.

A Different Path to Agricultural Innovation

Ownership will continue to make sense for operations with sufficient acreage and recurring demand. For other farms, rental access can address an immediate weed problem, provide temporary capacity or introduce a new technology without creating a long-term financial obligation.

As agriculture becomes more specialized, innovation will increasingly depend on more than the development of new equipment. It will also depend on making that equipment accessible to the growers who need it.

To learn more about the LASCO Lightning Weeder™, visit www.lightningweeder.com. To schedule a field demonstration, rental or discuss the right solution for your operation, email lasco@arvig.org

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. "Farm Sector Income Forecast," updated September 3, 2026. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-sector-income-finances/farm-sector-income-forecast>

² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. "Specialty Crop Farms Had the Largest Share of Cash Expenses on Labor Relative to Other Farm Types in 2024," August 25, 2026. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/115125>

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CONTACTS

Editorial Office
California Farm Equipment
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Telephone (559) 627-2182. Website at:
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FIRA USA Expands Women in Agricultural Innovation Award for 2026, Broadening Beyond Robotics to Honor Trailblazers Across AgTech



Arha Padman of Niqo Robotics (2nd from the right), recipient of the inaugural 2025 Women in AgRobotics of the Year Award, is recognized on stage at FIRA USA 2025. The award, now expanded and renamed the Women in Agricultural Innovation Award, celebrates women advancing agriculture's future through AgTech.

Nominations are now open for the second annual Women in Agricultural Innovation Award (WiAI), as FIRA USA broadens its recognition of female leaders across agriculture's innovation landscape. Applications are due Oct. 5, with the winner honored at FIRA USA 2026.

What began in 2025 as the Women in AgRobotics of the Year Award now celebrates women driving progress across the full spectrum of agricultural innovation, from robotics and autonomous systems to precision agriculture, data and AI, biotech, digital tools, sensors, software, irrigation and more.

The shift reflects the evolving reality of modern farming, where hardware, software and data increasingly work together. In a sector still largely dominated by men, the award spotlights founders, engineers, farmers, researchers and leaders whose determination, vision and tangible impact are shaping the future of AgTech.

"Agricultural innovation is stronger when the women shaping it are visible, heard and connected across borders," said Maialen Cazenave, the co-director of GOFAR (the Global Organization for Agricultural Robotics) and the FIRA events. "This award is an opportunity to recognize the leaders whose ideas and determination are helping agriculture evolve for the future."

Last year's winner, Arha Padman, chief marketing officer and member of the founder's office at Niqo Robotics,

set a high bar as the inaugural honoree, recognized for her leadership in advancing AI-powered agricultural robotics and for inspiring the next generation of women in the field. The 2026 award builds on that foundation while opening the door wider.

"One thing I learned working on the front lines of technology is that innovation needs translators. People who can move between the language of technology, the economics of a business and the lived reality of the consumer. That is why I believe this award matters. It is not about celebrating individual achievement, but about making the pathways of AgTech more visible to the women who will shape its next chapter. When you make the people building the future visible, you make it easier for others to believe there is a place for them in it," said Arha.

The award is open to all women holding an influential or strategic role in agriculture, robotics or AgTech more broadly. Candidates will be evaluated on

professional contributions and achievements, innovation scope, project impact, leadership and role-model qualities, and a short personal statement explaining why they should be honored. A brief video introduction (maximum of two minutes) is also requested.

Submit applications through the official application form: [Apply here](#).

A jury of leaders and advocates from agriculture, robotics and AgTech will review entries.

The winner will receive an official FIRA USA trophy and on-stage recognition at FIRA USA 2026 (Oct. 20–22 in Yakima, Washington), visibility across FIRA USA channels, use of the official award logo, potential media features in Women In Ag Magazine and Agricultural Robotics News, and opportunities for community engagement with partner organizations. Partner prizes include membership and event benefits from American Agri-Women and California Women for Agriculture, with additional prizes possibly added.

"We encourage everyone across our network to participate in this expanded. By amplifying the achievements and voices of women innovators, the award seeks to inspire more women to enter and lead in the AgTech ecosystem," said Cazenave.

For more information about FIRA USA 2026 and the Women in Agricultural Innovation Award, visit [FIRA USA](#).

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Agricultural disasters create more than crop and livestock losses. They can also bring complex applications, strict deadlines, detailed eligibility rules, and difficult agency determinations. Crop Disaster Recovery (CDR) helps producers navigate these challenges by connecting farm-level realities with Farm Service Agency (FSA) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) requirements.

With more than 15 years of advocacy, experience spanning over 45 commodities, more than \$100 million in secured funding, and assistance provided to over 1,000 farmers, CDR offers producers knowledgeable support when the stakes are high. Its goal is straightforward: to help agricultural operations pursue accurate, fair outcomes and avoid leaving eligible assistance unclaimed.

Practical Support from Application Through Appeal

CDR assists with a broad range of FSA matters, including disaster programs such as the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP), payment eligibility and payment limitations, new entity rules, foreign-person eligibility, entity structures, Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) consulting, year-end reviews, audits, adverse determinations, mediation, and National Appeals Division (NAD) appeals. This comprehensive approach can help producers understand agency notices, organize supporting evidence, identify potential issues, and present their position through

the appropriate administrative channels.

CDR also evaluates impacted determinations and advocates for consistent program implementation across counties and states. That work is especially important when similar operations receive different interpretations or calculations. By combining documentation review with policy advocacy, CDR helps ensure that a producer's circumstances are clearly understood and measured against applicable rules.

Good records remain essential. Producers should retain agency determinations, payment calculations, notices, applications, production records, loss documentation, and correspondence. These materials may be critical during a review, appeal, audit, or any future opportunity for relief.

Producers do not have to face the federal recovery process alone. Whether you are preparing an application, questioning a calculation, responding to an adverse determination, or considering an appeal, engaging CDR early can help protect deadlines, strengthen documentation, and clarify available options.

When disaster disrupts your operation, informed action matters. Crop Disaster Recovery provides the specialized guidance and advocacy agricultural producers need to pursue fair treatment and make the most of available FSA and USDA programs. Review your records, preserve every notice, and seek experienced support before an opportunity or deadline passes.



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A Vacancy On The Citrus Pest And Disease Prevention Committee Announced By CDFA

The California Department of Food and Agriculture is announcing one vacancy on the Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Committee. The Committee advises the CDFA Secretary on activities associated with the statewide citrus specific pest and disease work plan that includes, but is not limited to outreach and education programs and programs for surveying, detecting, analyzing, and treating pests and diseases specific to citrus.

The members receive no compensation, but are entitled to payment of necessary travel expenses in accordance with the rules of the Department of Personnel Administration.

A committee member vacancy exists for a northern district representative and will expire following the first committee meeting in 2031. Applicants should have an interest in agriculture and citrus pest and disease prevention. Individuals interested in being considered for a committee appointment should send a brief résumé by November 30, 2026, to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Division, 1220 N Street, Sacramento, CA 95814, Attention: Keith Okasaki.

For additional information, contact: Keith Okasaki, Manager, Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Division at (916) 274-



Photo by Keith Weller

6300, or e-mail (Keith.Okasaki@cdfa.ca.gov).

The California Department of Food and Agriculture protects and promotes California's

\$31.8 billion agricultural industry. California's farmers and ranchers produce a safe, secure supply of food, fiber and shelter; marketed fairly for all Californians; and produced with responsible environmental stewardship.

See 'good fire' use on Oct. 10 amid redwoods at Central Coast Fair



Weather permitting, wildfire experts will light prescribed fires in the redwood grove for visitors to observe at the Central Coast Good Fire Fair.

By Pamela S Kan-Rice

Learn how fire is used to manage the natural landscape at the Central Coast Good Fire Fair on Saturday, Oct. 10. The fair is free and open to the public from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park in Felton in Santa Cruz County.

"Community members are invited to see a live prescribed burn in an old growth redwood grove, and learn how coastal ecosystems depend on fire," said event co-organizer David Benterou, UC ANR Fire Network researcher for Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, Monterey and San Benito counties.

Children and adults can learn more about fire with hands-on experiments. See live fire demonstrations, meet local organizations using prescribed fire, take quizzes to win prizes and learn tips to help protect your home from wildfire.

Weather permitting, wildfire experts will light prescribed fires in the redwood grove.

"Beneficial fire can be used to reduce fuels and wildfire risk, promoting resilience of our iconic forests and the communities within them," said Brian Woodward, UC Cooperative Extension forest advisor for the Santa Cruz Mountains, who is co-organizing the fair. "Many of our forests haven't seen fire in more than a century. Prescribed fire is an incredible tool to reintroduce fire in a safe and ecologically beneficial manner."

At the Central Coast Good Fire Fair, kids can explore a wildland fire engine. The local prescribed burn association also will lead fire behavior demonstrations, such as lighting a fire and then using a leaf blower to demonstrate how wind makes fire move faster.

Representatives of California State Parks, CAL FIRE, Indigenous groups, UC ANR Fire Network and the Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association are scheduled to have exhibits.

Snacks and beverages will be available for purchase from food trucks.

The Central Coast Good Fire Fair is sponsored by UC Agriculture and Natural Resources' Fire Network and California State Parks.

The event is free, but parking at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park costs \$10. No registration required.

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October on the Farm: Preparing California Agriculture for the Water Year Ahead

By Joe L Neyer III California Farm Equipment

October brings more than cooler mornings and shorter days to California farms. It also marks the beginning of a new water year—a good time for growers to look ahead, inspect their operations and prepare for whatever the coming months may bring.

Check and Maintain Irrigation Systems

After a long growing season, irrigation systems deserve a thorough inspection. Pumps, wells, filters, valves, drip lines and sprinklers should be checked for wear, leaks and damage. Taking care of repairs now can help prevent an expensive emergency when water is needed again.

Get Ready for Winter Weather

California farmers know that winter weather can change quickly. Before the first major storm arrives, check drainage ditches, culverts and field outlets. Remove debris and make sure water has a clear path away from orchards, vineyards, fields, roads and farm buildings.

Low-lying areas deserve particular attention. A few hours spent improving drainage in October can prevent significant problems later in the season.

Pay Attention to the Soil

Fall is also an excellent time to evaluate soil conditions. Soil testing can provide valuable information about nutrient levels and help growers make informed decisions about fertilizer applications for the next crop.

For some operations, cover crops can also play an important role. Properly selected cover crops may help reduce erosion, improve soil structure and provide additional organic matter.

Take Care of Farm Equipment

October is a good month for equipment maintenance before winter storage or the next busy season. Tractors, tillage equipment, harvest equipment and implements should be cleaned, inspected and serviced.

Check fluids, filters, belts, tires, batteries and hydraulic systems. Grease fittings and address small problems before they become major repairs. For equipment that will sit for an extended period, follow the manufacturer's recommendations for storage.

Keep an Eye on the Weather

California's water outlook can have a major impact on agricultural planning. Seasonal forecasts can provide useful information, but growers should remember that long-range forecasts cannot predict exactly how much rain will fall on an individual farm.

The best approach is to stay informed while maintaining flexibility. Monitor forecasts, reservoir conditions, groundwater information and local weather throughout the fall and winter.

An October Opportunity

The transition from harvest to the next growing season is one of the best opportunities of the year to get ahead. A little planning now can save time, money and frustration later.

October Farm Checklist



- ✓ Inspect wells, pumps and irrigation systems
- ✓ Clean drainage ditches and culverts
- ✓ Check fields for erosion or drainage problems
- ✓ Test soil where appropriate
- ✓ Consider cover-crop options
- ✓ Service tractors and implements
- ✓ Check tires, batteries, fluids and hydraulic systems
- ✓ Review winter weather and water forecasts
- ✓ Repair small problems before they become expensive ones
- ✓ Start planning for the next growing season

*For California farmers,
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of the growing season.
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Don't Wait for a Crisis: Protecting the Brand Trust You've Worked Years to Build

By Gillian Christie

Farming has always required readiness for the unexpected.

Weather changes. Equipment fails. Power goes out. Supply chains are disrupted. An accident can happen, a product can be questioned, or inaccurate information can begin circulating before a business owner even realizes there is a problem.

Today, farms and agricultural businesses also depend heavily on digital systems, connectivity and technology. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach recently introduced resources to help producers prepare for power and digital disruptions, noting that advance planning can reduce downtime, protect animal welfare and minimize financial losses.¹

You cannot anticipate every crisis. But you can decide how prepared your business will be when one arrives—and how you will protect the trust you have worked years to earn.

Your Brand Is More Than a Name

A brand is often confused with a logo, a website or an advertising campaign. Those are expressions of a brand, but they are not the brand itself.

Your brand is the expectation people have when they see your name. It is built through what you promise, what you deliver and what customers, employees, suppliers and your community experience over time.

When those things consistently align, they create brand trust.

For an agricultural business, that trust can be one of its most valuable assets. It is why a customer calls you again, why a supplier values the relationship, why an employee recommends your company and why people are willing to give you the benefit of the doubt when something unexpected happens.

A crisis puts that trust to the test.

Prepare Before the Problem

University of Minnesota Extension recommends that farms establish emergency action plans in advance, including essential contacts, farm maps, inventories and procedures for different types of emergencies.²

Communication deserves the same preparation.

After more than 33 years of working with businesses and entrepreneurs, I have seen how quickly an operational problem can become a communication problem. When something happens, employees need direction, customers may want answers and suppliers, partners or the media may begin asking questions.

Every business should know who has the authority to make decisions and who will communicate on its behalf.

That person does not need to have every answer immediately. Saying that you are gathering information and will provide an update when the facts are confirmed is far better than guessing.

Accuracy protects trust. Speculation puts it at risk.

Communicate Early, But Don't Rush the Facts

There is an important difference between responding promptly and responding recklessly.

Communicate what you know. Be clear about what you do not yet know. Explain what is being done when appropriate, and update people as reliable information becomes available.

Penn State Extension's agricultural crisis-management guid-

ance emphasizes that how an organization manages and communicates during a crisis can influence public perception and the future of the enterprise.³

The goal is not to make a problem disappear. It is to handle it responsibly.

Keep It Real When Things Go Wrong

I have long followed a simple philosophy: Keep It Real.

That matters even more when circumstances are difficult.

People understand that businesses encounter problems. What they remember is how those problems were handled.

Trying to minimize an obvious issue, shifting responsibility before the facts are known, or providing information that later proves inaccurate can create more damage than the original event.

Authenticity does not mean sharing everything. Safety, privacy, legal or operational considerations may limit what can appropriately be disclosed. It means being truthful about what you can say.

If you do not know something yet, say so. If a mistake occurred, acknowledge it when the facts establish that. If corrective action is underway, explain what can responsibly be shared.

Brand trust is not built by pretending everything is perfect. It is strengthened when your actions demonstrate the values your business claims to represent.

Protect What You Have Built

Brand trust develops slowly: through keeping commitments, delivering quality, answering customers, treating people well and doing what you said you would do.

A crisis can challenge that trust very quickly.

That is why preparedness is not only about protecting equipment, records or operations. It is also about protecting the confidence people place in your name.

Review who would make decisions if a key person were unavailable. Make sure critical records and contacts are accessible. Know who will communicate. Occasionally test the plan against a realistic disruption and look for weaknesses before circumstances expose them for you.

Agriculture teaches us about uncertainty every season. You maintain equipment, watch conditions and manage risk not because you expect everything to go wrong, but because preparation gives you more options when circumstances change.

The same principle applies to your brand.

You may not be able to control when a difficult situation arrives. But you can control how thoughtfully, truthfully and consistently you respond.

Because when a crisis comes, you are protecting more than today's business.

You are protecting the trust behind your name.

Sources:

1. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, "New Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Resources Help Farmers Protect Operations Against Digital and Power Disruptions," September 8, 2026.

2. University of Minnesota Extension, "Creating Farm Emergency Action Plans," reviewed 2026.

3. Penn State Extension, "Agritourism Crisis Management and Communications," updated December 2, 2024.



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USDA Improves Access to Credit by Streamlining and Modernizing Farm Loans

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is improving access to credit for farmers and ranchers by making farm loan policy and technology improvements, reducing administrative burdens and strengthening financial security. These updates will increase efficiency by expediting the application process for direct loans, streamlining the process for certain guaranteed lenders who partner with USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and laying the groundwork for an electronic interface for guaranteed loans.

"One of the biggest challenges farmers and ranchers face is access to capital," said Under Secretary Richard Fordyce. "The Trump administration is putting Farmers First by streamlining and modernizing the loan making process to get much-needed capital into the hands of farmers and ranchers who work so hard to build and preserve their legacy for generations to come. We've seen historic demand for farm loans over the last two years, demonstrating the importance of accessible, affordable credit for America's farmers and ranchers."

FSA makes direct and guaranteed loans to farmers and ranchers who are unable to obtain sufficient commercial credit at reasonable rates and terms. FSA farm loans can be used to purchase personal property or farmland, finance agricultural production expenses, or address day-to-day operational needs. The Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act authorizes most farm loans including farm ownership, farm operating, and emergency loans.

Fast Tracking Direct Loan Applications

Following a successful pilot program, FSA is permanently implementing the Application Fast Track (AFT) process to expedite the loan application and approval process for low-risk direct loan applicants. AFT expedites the underwriting process for direct loan applicants who are least likely to default on their loans based on financial benchmarks and historical repayment data.

Since the pilot started in 2023, an average of 23% of direct loan customers qualified for the streamlined process, which decreased the application processing time by approximately eight calendar days. This resulted in improved access to credit for borrowers and increased efficiency for FSA staff.

AFT is currently available to all qualifying producers nationwide, and these changes simply transition AFT from a pilot program into a permanent part of FSA's regulations and policies. In addition to AFT,

FSA is also making several changes to the direct loan collateral valuation process, which will expedite loan closings.

Streamlining for Preferred Lenders

FSA partners with credit unions, commercial banks, and farm credit organizations to deliver Guaranteed Loans, which help borrowers who cannot secure credit without a federal guarantee. Through Guaranteed Loans, the financial institution makes the loan, but FSA guarantees the farm loan against possible financial loss, reducing the lender's risk.

FSA is further streamlining the process for lenders in the Preferred Lender Program, which includes the most experienced and highest-performing lending institutions. These lenders will have delegated authority to certify that applicants meet FSA lending requirements for creditworthiness, financial feasibility, and adequacy of collateral in place of a more detailed agency review. This streamlined process reduces documentation requirements and expedites loan processing. Preferred lenders will receive more information and guidance on exercising delegated authority in the new electronic system before it goes live in early 2027. However, preferred lenders can begin exercising delegated authority through traditional loan narratives starting Oct. 1, 2026.

Guaranteed Loan Modernization

USDA is modernizing outdated technology systems with the goal of expediting loan delivery. This multi-year effort will begin with the guaranteed loan program and later extend to all loan types.

The new modernized system will allow guaranteed loan applications, lender notifications and supporting documents to be electronically submitted, replacing the agency's largely paper-based process. Paper applications will still be accepted, and FSA will provide notifications consistent with the submission method.

FSA is making regulatory changes ahead of implementing the new modernized system and will provide more information and training for guaranteed lenders before transitioning to the electronic interface in early 2027.

More Information

For more information on farm loans, producers can visit fsa.usda.gov, view the Federal Register notice or use the Loan Assistance Tool to check eligibility requirements and find the right loan for their operation. Producers can also make an appointment online with their local FSA farm loan office for assistance.



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World Ag Expo® Opens Applications for 2027 Top-10 Products and Seminar Series



2026 World Ag Expo® Top 10 New Products Winner, Stinger

World Ag Expo® offers a look into the latest in innovation and education through the return of the Top-10 New Products competition and seminar sessions. Exhibitors and industry experts can now apply to put their mark on the 2027 show.

The Top-10 New Products Competition at World Ag Expo provides a glimpse into cutting-edge technology and innovation. Open to exhibitors, the innovation contest showcases the latest in a competitive field of new products ranging from groundbreaking technology to simple solutions. Previous award winners have pointed to the Top-10 New Products Contest as a catalyst for success.

Stinger, a small family-owned business from Kansas, was among the Top-10 New Product winners, giving the company an opportunity to gain additional exposure and connect with customers. The company's winning product, the Stinger TerraFrame Max M120 Feed Chassis, is the first custom-designed off-road chassis developed specifically for the commercial dairy and feedlot industry. "The Top-10 New Product recognition provided additional publicity, customer engagement, and valuable feedback" said Justin Matlack, National Sales Manager.

The Top-10 New Products Competition information and application can be found at <https://bit.ly/WAE27Top-10>. Applicants must be exhibitors at the 2027 World Ag Expo and products re-

leased anywhere in the world between February 13, 2026 and February 8, 2027 are eligible. The application deadline is October 31, 2026 and winners will be announced in December.

World Ag Expo also provides a platform for learning through educational seminars. Attendees can enjoy seminars, which are included with general show admission, featuring some of the most knowledgeable professionals in their respective sectors. Each year, tracks include Dairy & Livestock, Technology, Irrigation & Water, Demonstrations, and more.

Educational seminars are held in the Seminar Center on the southeast side of the grounds throughout all three days of the show. Experts, including exhibitors, universities, government agencies, and more, provide valuable insights, aiming to expand producer knowledge and practices.

More seminar information and the application is available at <https://bit.ly/WAE27Seminars>. The final seminar schedule and speaker information will be available online and in the official show app. The application deadline is October 31, 2026 and speakers will be notified in December.

World Ag Expo is the largest annual outdoor ag tradeshow in the world. In 2026, the show saw over 100,000 attendees from across the United States and 80 countries. More than 1,200 exhibitors on 2.6 million square feet of exhibit space make World Ag Expo a premium platform for networking, education, and business in one of the most productive ag counties in the United States.

Limited exhibit spaces are still available. To learn more about World Ag Expo® and request space, please visit <https://www.worldagexpo.com/exhibitors/>.

International attendee ticket packages are on sale now. General admission and ag tour tickets go on sale October 1st. Attendees can purchase tickets and plan their visit at www.WorldAgExpo.com.

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USDA Invests in America's Beef and Ag Producers with Funding for Value-Added Agriculture



U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins announced today the awarding of over \$26 million to farmers and agricultural producers across the country through the USDA Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) Program. Entities can use these grant funds to develop value-added agricultural products, conduct market research, and implement business and marketing strategies.

"While the Biden Administration waged economic war against our ranchers and farmers, the Trump Administration is focused on putting our ranchers and farmers first. These grants represent another investment in the Great American Cattle Herd as we fortify the American beef industry," said Secretary Rollins. "By supporting our ranchers and agricultural producers as they develop new products and increase the value of what they grow and raise, we're helping to create new revenue opportunities to grow the herd and create long-term economic resilience in rural communities across this nation."

"USDA Rural Development partners with people in rural America so

they have the tools they need to build stronger businesses and create jobs for people in their communities," said Under Secretary for Rural Development Glen Smith. "This program helps our producers eliminate the middleman, create homegrown products from the crops and animals they grow, and put more money in their pockets and their local communities. It's a win all around and we're glad to be a part of it."

USDA Rural Development is investing \$26.5 million in 194 agricultural projects across the country, with \$11.6 million going to 80 beef producer projects, including:

Light Hill Meats in Colombia, Tennessee, will use a \$199,309 grant for processing, marketing, sales and distribution as the company expands its grain-finished hormone-free beef products to new customers.

Family Farm Direct LLC in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, will use a \$145,838 grant for supplies, distribution and processing and manufacturing expenses related to transforming its Angus beef into dry-aged primal pet and beef jerky. The project

is anticipated to increase the company's customer base by almost 31,000 people and increase revenue by approximately \$165,000.

Blair Carney Farms LLC has been awarded \$48,000, which will fund marketing and processing activities for the family-owned and operated company in Adair County, Iowa. This project will help the company expand its market for multiple Black Angus beef food products.

Applications for the Value-Added Producer Grant program are typically accepted for processing from agricultural producers between January and May, depending on when program funding is allocated.

USDA Rural Development invests in rural America with programs to promote rural prosperity. These programs expand access to high-speed internet, electricity, and infrastructure, and support economic growth, healthcare, education, housing and other community essentials. Discover more investment details and historical data in the Rural Data Gateway and learn more about the agency at www.rd.usda.gov.

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.....www.grasshoppermower.com

Hanford Equipment Company
.....www.hanfordequipmentco.com

Kubota Corporation
.....www.kubotausa.com

LAForge Systems Inc
.....www.laforgegroup.com

Lane Tractor Sales Inc
.....www.lanetractor.com

Linder Equipment
.....www.linderequipment.com

Live Earth
.....www.liveearth.com

Massey Ferguson
.....www.masseyferguson.com/en_us

N & S Tractorwww.nstractor.com

New Holland
agriculture.newholland.com/en-us/nar

Pacific Ag Rentals
.....www.pacificagrentals.com

Peltzer Enterprises Inc
.....www.peltzerenterprises.com

Pioneer Equipment
.....www.pioneerequipment.com

Plantel Nurseries
.....www.plantelnurseries.com

Powerland Equipment
.....www.powerlandequipment.com

Precision Air Systems Inc
.....www.precisionairsystems.com

Quality Machinery
.....quality-mc.com

Quinn Company
.....www.quinncompany.com

Rubicon Equipment
.....www.rubiconequipment.com

San Joaquin Tractor
.....www.sanjoaquintractor.com

Sonsray Machinery
.....www.sonsraymachinery.com

South Kern Machinery
.....www.kernmachinery.com

Tractor City Inc
.....www.tractorcityinc.com

Trailer Superstore
.....www.pjtrailers.com/stores/trailer-super-store/

Valley Forklift Inc
.....www.valleyforklift.com

Valley Tractor
.....www.valleytractor.com

Wilkinson International
.....www.wilkinsoninternational.com

Manufacturers

McIlroy Equipment
.....www.mcilroyequipment.com

Nikkel Iron Works
.....www.nikkelironworks.com

Smith Welding & Machine Shop
.....www.smithweldingshop.com

Farm Shows

Antique Farm Show
.....www.antiquefarmshow.org

Colusa Farm Show
.....www.colusafairgrounds.com/colusa-farm-show/

World Ag Expo
.....www.worldagexpo.com/

Federal Government

Army Corps of Engineers
.....www.nwpl.sec.usace.army.mil

Bureau of Land Management
.....www.blm.gov

Farm Service Agency
.....www.fsa.usda.gov

National Weather Service
.....www.weather.gov/

Organizations

Almond Board of California
.....www.almonds.com

California Assn. of Winegrape Growers
.....www.cawg.org

California Cattlemen's Association
.....www.calcattlemen.org

California Dairy Research Foundation
.....www.cdfr.org

California Farmland Trust
.....www.cafarmtrust.org

California Poultry Federation
.....www.cpif.org

California Raisins
.....www.calraisins.org

California Rangeland Trust
.....www.rangelandtrust.org

California Strawberries
.....www.californiastrawberries.com

Associated Equipment Distributors
.....www.aednet.org/

Real Estate

Valley Real Estate
.....www.valleyre.net

State Government

Department of Agriculture
.....www.usda.gov

Department of Conservation
.....www.consrv.ca.gov

Department of Food and Agriculture
.....www.cdfr.ca.gov

Department of Pesticide Regulation
.....www.cdpr.ca.gov

Department of Water Resources
.....www.dwr.water.ca.gov

Synthetic Grass

Synthetic Grass Solutions
.....www.SGSfresno.com

Weather

National Weather Service
.....www.weather.gov/

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Common tree disease may contribute to reduced longevity of almond orchards

Elizabeth Fichtner, PhD, UCCE Farm Advisor

Recent studies conducted by scientists at UCCE and CSU Bakersfield demonstrate that a common disease prevalent in vineyards and orchards may impact long-term orchard longevity of almonds in the southern San Joaquin Valley. Almond orchards with a high incidence of crown gall, a disease caused by a ubiquitous soilborne pathogen, exhibit high rates of tree failure caused by a newly identified wood rotting disease.

Crown gall is common in walnut and almond orchards and can be readily identified by the tumors it induces on the roots and crowns of trees. Unless severe, crown gall generally does not cause tree mortality, but may limit tree size, thus affecting overall yield. Growers with crown gall-affected orchards often replant young trees that exhibit girdling by the tumors but leave mature trees untreated. Within the past decade, however, growers have noticed heightened prevalence of tree mortality due to butt rot in crown gall-affected almond orchards. The butt rot disease is caused by an introduced fungal pathogen, *Ganoderma adspersum*, that was first reported in California in 2016.

From 2024 through 2026, UCCE researchers have surveyed over 23,000 almond trees in Kern and Tulare Counties, documenting prevalence of both butt rot and crown gall. Molecular identification of the butt rot pathogen in each surveyed orchard was conducted by scientists at CSU Bakersfield. The study found that *Ganoderma adspersum* was the only species of *Ganoderma* isolated in all surveyed orchards. Additionally, the results indicated that orchards with crown gall were six times more likely to have butt rot disease. Trees with historic or active signs of butt rot also exhibited 1.5 times the mortality rate of healthy trees over a 26-month survey period.

The results of this work demonstrate that the introduction of the new butt rot pathogen may elevate the importance of crown gall as a predictor of orchard longevity. The implication of this finding is that the planting of crown gall-free rootstocks during orchard establishment may be key to future reduction of risk from *G. adspersum*. Similarly, Mohammad Yaghmour and Elizabeth Fichtner, Farm Advisors in Kern and Tulare Counties, respectively, found that crown gall was also associated with increased incidence of thousand cankers disease on walnut. Fichtner has also reported that crown gall is related to heightened root predation by ten-lined June beetle on walnut.

The current study was conducted with support from the Almond Board of California and as a collaborative effort between UCCE scientists including Elizabeth Fichtner, Santosh Bhandari, Mohammad Yaghmour, and Raymond Mireles, and CSU Bakersfield Professor Isolde Francis and Chance Kophamer, graduate student.

UPCOMING EVENTS

OCTOBER 2026

2: Join us for the AgVentures! Luau for Learning. Enjoy an evening of tropical food, live entertainment, and community while supporting hands-on agricultural education for the next generation. International Agri-Center, 4500 South Laspina Street, Tulare, CA 93274. For more information <https://iacagventures.org/luau/>

3: Cow Palace Annual Women of Rodeo performance, and enjoy an action-packed night of the fastest growing women's sport in the Nation! Daly City.

9-10: Cow Palace Grand National Rodeo & Livestock Show- Daly City. Annual Grand National Rodeo. Come see these high-energy rodeo competitions complemented by comedy, music and jaw-dropping performances, including trick riding.

15-16: First North Fork California Meat Summit. Ranchers, meat processors, butchers and agricultural industry partners from across the West are invited to gather in Siskiyou County for the North Fork California Meat Summit, the first meat summit to be held on the West Coast. "Any rancher, especially those interested in selling direct – from shipping individual cuts to wholesale to cooperative models – is welcome to attend." For information: northforksummit@gmail.com or call (530) 842-1638.

27: Theodore Roosevelt's Birthday: The U.S. Forest Service Recreation fee-free day. For more information visit www.fs.usda.gov/visit/passes-permits.

NOVEMBER 2026

11: Veterans Day: The U.S. Forest Service Recreation fee-free day. For more information visit www.fs.usda.gov/visit/passes-permits.

JANUARY 2027

26-28: 2027 Unified Wine and Grape Symposium. Every January, the Unified Wine & Grape Symposium trade show is home to over 650 suppliers to the wine and grape industry. With thousands of industry professionals attending and over 700 booths, the Symposium is the largest wine & grape industry conference and trade show of its kind in North America. SAFE Credit Union Convention Center, Sacramento, CA.

To list your special event in California Farm Equipment send details to CFEM, PO Box 1128, Visalia, CA. 93279. or email to: info@cfemag.com.

Farm Robotics Challenge launches 2027 season with new divisions and Startup pathway

By Kelly D Scott

Pre-registration is open for student teams, from middle school through graduate school, to develop real-world ag solutions and gain global recognition

The Farm Robotics Challenge launched its 2027 season on Sept. 15, unveiling a new three-division competition structure, a Startup pathway for teams committed to launching a company, and more than \$200,000 in prizes and startup support backed by a coalition of industry partners.

Watch the 2027 Launch Webinar replay to learn about the new divisions, awards, Startup pathway and key dates.

Organized by UC ANR Innovate (a part of University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources) and the AI Institute for Next Generation Food Systems (AIFS), the annual competition brings together student teams from across the United States and around the world. Teams work directly with growers to identify agricultural challenges, then design, prototype and field-test solutions incorporating robotics, artificial intelligence and related technologies.

The 2026 Challenge drew nearly 100 teams representing 13 countries. For 2027, the expanded structure will create opportunities for students from middle school through graduate school to participate.

"The Farm Robotics Challenge gives students an opportunity to work directly with growers and apply their technical skills to problems that matter," said Helle Petersen, director of UC ANR Innovate. "This year, we're opening the Challenge to more students, creating clearer ways to recognize achievement and providing a new pathway for teams ready to take their ideas beyond the competition."

New divisions and awards expand opportunities

The 2027 Challenge introduces three divisions based on teams' educational level. Division I is open to undergraduate and graduate students at four-year colleges and universities, Division II serves students at two-year colleges and trade schools, and Division III is open to middle and high school teams. Each institution is welcome to field multiple teams.

With support from the California Jobs First Regional Investment Initiative, the Challenge welcomed middle and high school teams in California in 2026. Division III builds on that foundation by opening the secondary school competition to eligible teams nationwide in 2027.

As sponsor of the Championship awards, the California AgTech Alliance is providing over \$50,000 for first-, second- and third-place teams across the three divisions, with the first-place Division I team earning a \$25,000 prize. The new structure provides clearer recognition of teams' overall performance while allowing them to compete alongside others at similar educational levels.

"The future of agriculture depends on people as much as technology," said Sarah Masterson, director of the California AgTech Alliance. "By supporting teams from middle school through college and beyond, we're helping more students see a future for themselves in ag tech and encouraging them to build the skills that growers and agricultural communities will need in the years ahead."

Startup pathway takes projects from prototype to market

New for 2027, the Startup pathway gives Division I and Divi-

sion II teams the opportunity to take their innovations beyond the competition. Designed for aspiring founders, the pathway will help teams evaluate their ideas, build the foundations of a company and prepare to raise capital.

Startup pathway sponsor Reservoir will help shape company-building programming with webinars held from January through April. Experts from business, academia and technology transfer will introduce teams to company formation, intellectual property, fundraising, cap tables and equity, and legal fundamentals.

"Students in this competition are already engineers – what they may not realize yet is that they can be founders," said Nicola Kerslake, general partner of Reservoir VC. "The hardest part isn't creating the prototype; it's building a business. This pathway gives teams the practical roadmap to start a company, and it points the next generation of innovators toward the problems that deliver the biggest impact: food, water, climate and labor."

Following final project submissions, selected teams will be invited to an in-person Pitch Day at Plug and Play Tech Center in Sunnyvale. Based on the finalists' projects, pitches and readiness to form a company, Reservoir will select a Grand Prize recipient for a \$100,000 SAFE investment, subject to due diligence, applicable terms and separate investment documentation.

Bonsai Robotics provides technology and team support

Returning technology partner Bonsai Robotics will sponsor Amiga Innovation Awards in all three divisions, including \$10,000 for Division I, \$5,000 for Division II and \$2,500 for Division III. The awards recognize teams that demonstrate innovative uses of the company's Amiga robotic platform.

There's no substitute for putting students in front of the hard problems in agriculture, and that's exactly what the Farm Robotics Challenge does," said Brendan Dowdle, chief business officer at Bonsai Robotics. "Working alongside growers gives them a real understanding of the market needs and builds skills that carry directly into the working world. We're excited to support these teams with access to the Amiga platform, technical guidance and awards that recognize the most innovative work."

Bonsai Robotics will work directly with participating teams throughout the season, offering technical office hours and helping teams access Amiga robots at educational pricing. If the Grand Prize winner of the Startup pathway develops its project using an Amiga, Bonsai will also donate an Amiga Flex robot valued at \$25,000 to help the team continue its work.

Pre-registration opens for the 2027 Challenge

Academic advisors may pre-register teams now through the Farm Robotics Challenge website. Pre-registration allows teams to begin receiving program information and preparing their projects before submitting formal registration, team rosters and project proposals by Nov. 13.

Project work is self-paced and may begin at any time, with final project videos and written reports due May 2, 2027. The season will conclude with an awards ceremony held in conjunction with the Plug and Play Summit in Sunnyvale in late May.

Students interested in participating who are not yet part of a team may contact the Farm Robotics Challenge for help connecting with prospective teammates and advisors.

Complete competition details, pre-registration and updates are available at farmroboticschallenge.ai.



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