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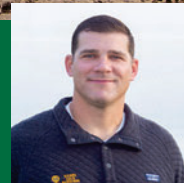
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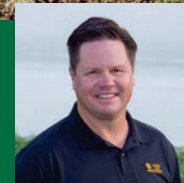
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Spring is coming and we're blooming with excitement!

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16 NEW! *Almond Breeze*® Almond & Oat Available in Stores Now and Drinking Yogurt Launches in Thailand

Blue Diamond launches Almond & Oat in the U.S. and introduces drinking yogurt to Thailand. The co-op looks forward to consumers enjoying these new products for their fantastic taste and nutritional goodness!

22 Lynn Jacquez & Stacy McBride Advocacy Report

New to the Advocacy Report section, but not to the cooperative, Lynn Jacquez and Stacy McBride join *Blue Diamond* as federal advocates who will provide a myriad of updates from Washington D.C. and beyond that impact the co-op.

26 Pollinator Care in the Orchard During Bloom Season

Project *Apis m.* provides many ways to care for pollinators during the critical shift in seasons as we go from winter to spring. Find out how to make the most of the honey bees' visit to your orchards this spring.

ON THE COVER:

Blue Diamond is excited to introduce *Almond Breeze*® Almond & Oat to the United States while *Almond Breeze*® Drinking Yogurt launches in Thailand!



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Blue Diamond, the world's largest processor and marketer of almonds, exports to over 100 countries.

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Kai Bockmann
President & CEO



As I think about what a crucial year 2023 was for Blue Diamond, it has become clear that our go-forward strategy and roadmap for growth is exactly what will elevate us into the next chapter. I feel optimistic and energized about 2024 and the journey of growth we are embarking on together.

Since joining *Blue Diamond* in January of last year, I have had the privilege of visiting orchards, attending district meetings, and engaging with our dedicated growers and their families. The heart and soul of our grower-owners drives our success.

As you may have heard at the Annual Grower Meeting, the new strategic plan is already showing exciting progress and notable wins. I am confident that we have the right people in place to drive a bigger, better, and stronger *Blue Diamond* in the years to come.

We have been hard at work establishing direct relationships and positioning *Blue Diamond* as a key player in the food service space. Recognizing the potential in Canada, we are striving to make headway by introducing popular U.S. flavors and potentially creating custom regional Canadian flavors.

With a focus on reducing operational costs, we continue to find efficiencies and provide cost benefits to our growers. Many of you were excited to hear about The Growers Connect Marketplace at the Annual Grower Meeting. More than 150 of you have already signed up! The platform is currently in development, and we will share more updates as we get closer to the launch.

Our exciting new products are now hitting more shelves too!

Almond Breeze®: Almond & Oat is now officially in U.S. stores, and we are closely tracking consumer response. Packed with essential nutrients, this latest addition combines all the flavor of almondmilk and the creaminess of oatmilk.

Thin Dipped Almonds have launched nationally and can now be found at various retailers across the U.S. We are reaching a wider audience and ensuring this sweet and healthy snack is readily available for our customers.

Ranch Flavored Almonds will be available in Walmart starting this May. Paired with our almonds, the familiar and zesty taste that many of us love is sure to be a crowd-pleaser.

The plan is not linear, but the destination is set. It has been a tough year and there will continue to be challenges. However, we have many exciting opportunities to look forward to in 2024 and beyond as we grow our business and expand into new areas. This is the time for us to grow in the right way, and I hope you are as enthusiastic as I am about this journey.

I wish you and your families a happy and prosperous 2024! ♦

Kai Bockmann
President & CEO



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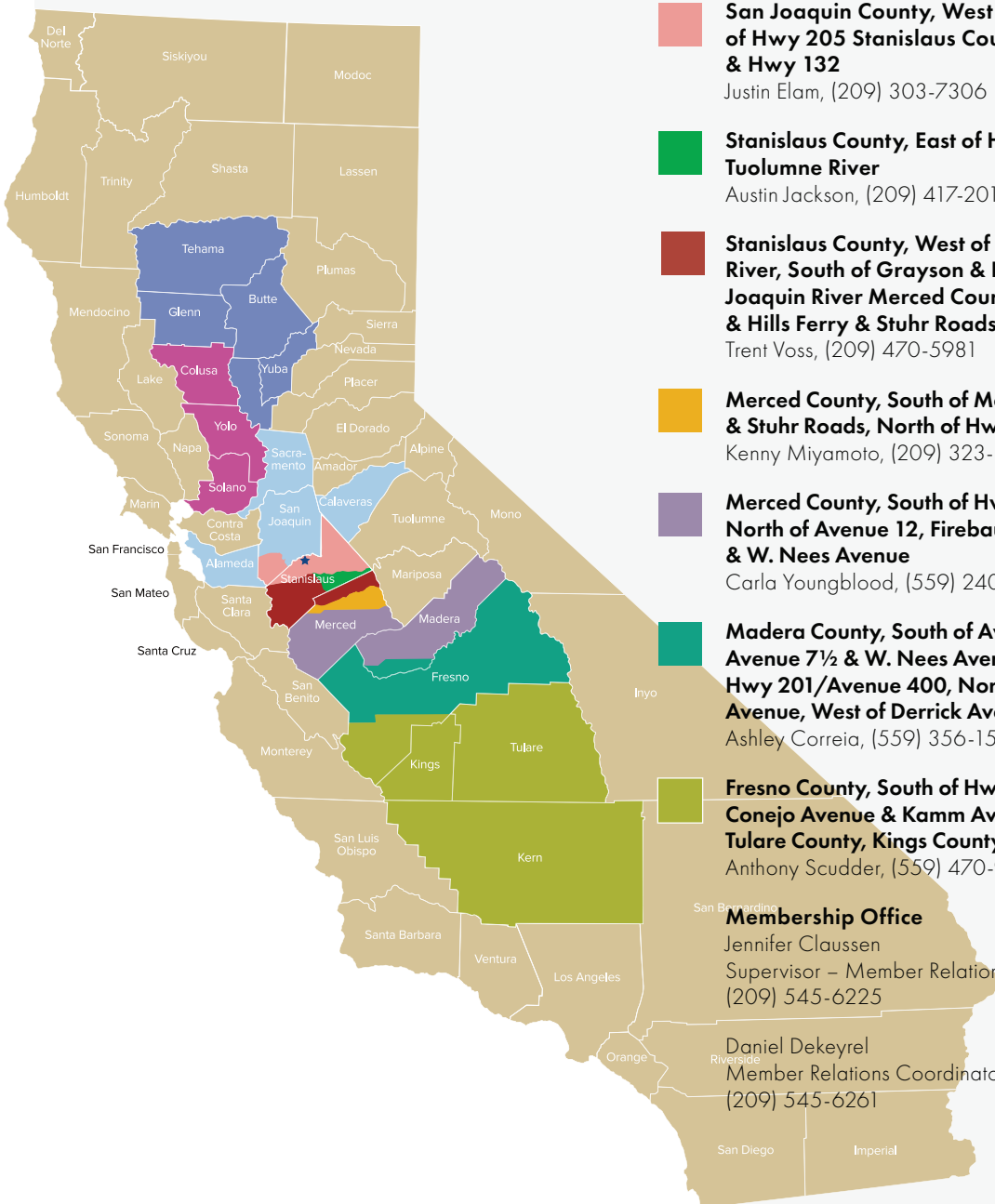
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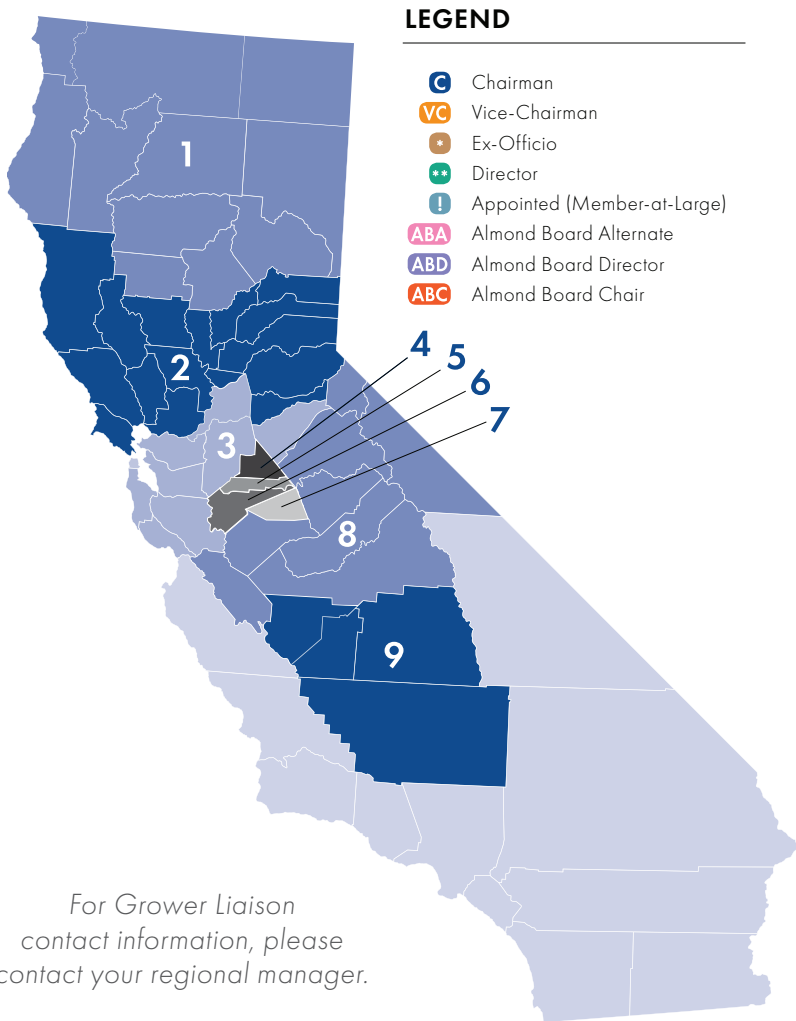
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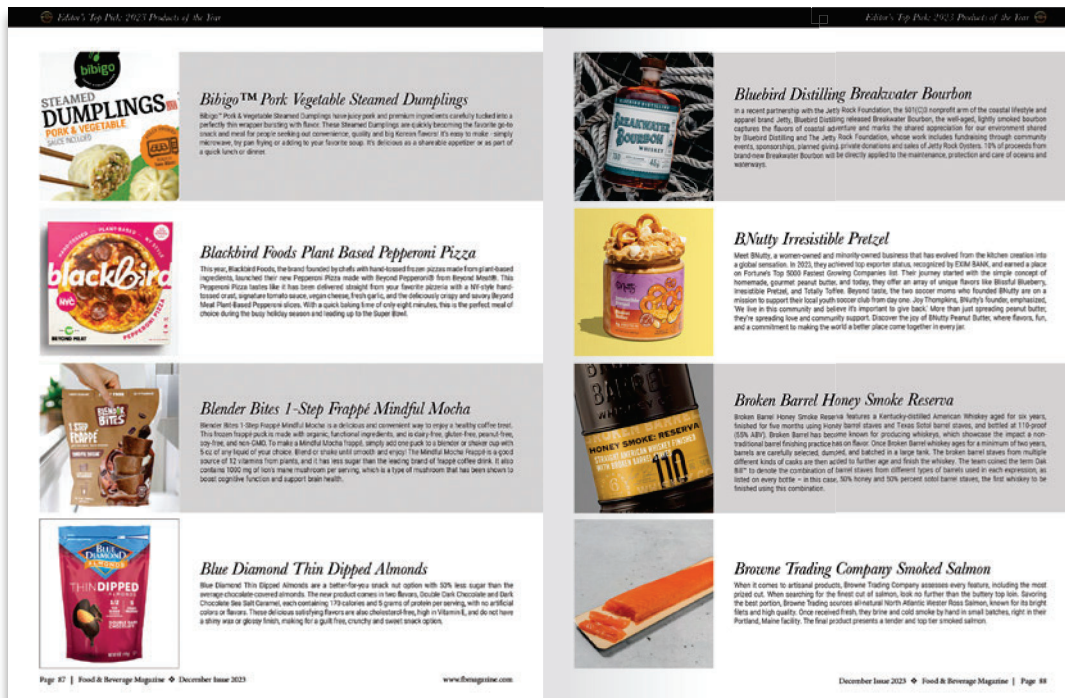


Thin Dipped Almonds Named in *Food & Beverage Magazine's* 2023 "Products of the Year" Awards!

Amongst *Food & Beverage Magazine's* top product awards of 2023 were *Blue Diamond's* Thin Dipped Almonds! The tagline mentioned the product's flavor offerings and key nutritional information. Their positive messaging included, "These delicious, satisfying favors are also cholesterol-free, high in Vitamin E, and do not have a shiny wax or glossy finish, making for a guilt free, crunchy and sweet snack option." The magazine boasts three million people in its readership base and 218 thousand newsletter recipients. ♦



FOOD & BEVERAGE MAGAZINE



Blue Diamond Thin Dipped Almonds are a better-for-you snack nut option with 50% less sugar than the average chocolate-covered almonds. The new product comes in two flavors: *Double Dark Chocolate* and *Dark Chocolate Sea Salt Caramel*, each containing 170 calories and 5 grams of protein per serving with no artificial colors or flavors. These delicious satisfying flavors are also cholesterol-free, high in Vitamin E, and do not have a shiny wax or glossy finish, making for a guilt-free, crunchy and sweet snack option.



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Current Investment Rates available as of August 1, 2023

Blue Diamond Growers offers members short-term and long-term investment programs.

The objective of these programs is to serve as a competitive investment alternative for our members and to provide *Blue Diamond Growers* with a steady source of funds. The interest rates effective August 1, 2023, for the program are listed here:

	Short-Term Investment Certificate (STIC)	Long-Term Investment Certificate (LTIC) (Maturity Date of 6/30/2026)
Initial Investment Required	\$1,000	\$50,000
Interest Rate	6.25%	4.25%
	(Variable, subject to change)	(Fixed rate)

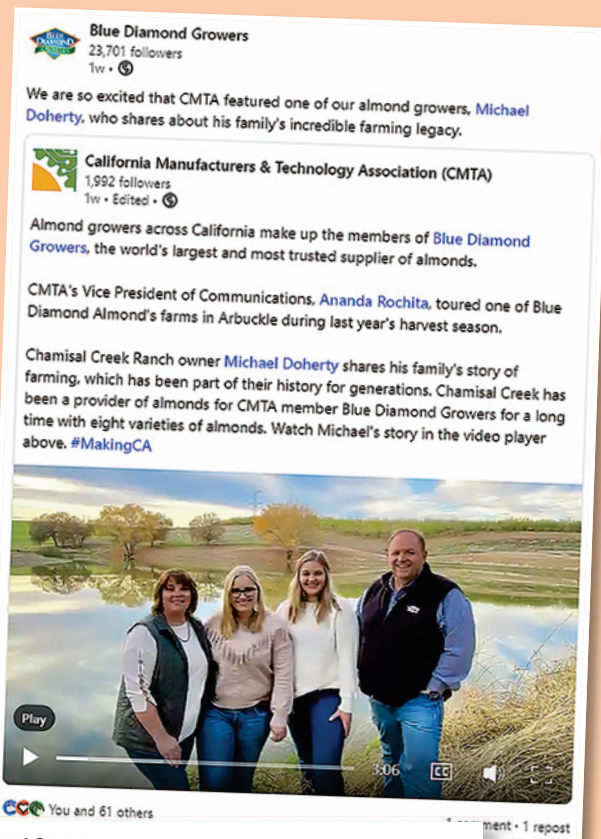
For more information, contact your local Regional Manager, or Member Services at (209) 545-6225.

This summary does not constitute an offer to sell or a solicitation to purchase investment certificates. We will provide a package of documents for the programs to those members who are California residents and who express an interest in participating in the program.

#WeAreBlueDiamond Social Media Activity



Happy New Year to all of you! *Blue Diamond* was excited to show off some delicious, gluten-free recipes to celebrate Gluten Free Baking Week. We applauded grower-owner, Mike Doherty for sharing his family's farming legacy in an incredible video by CMTA. We dared fans of *Blue Diamond* almonds to celebrate International Hot 'n' Spicy Food Day by trying some of our XTREMES flavors: Cayenne Pepper, Ghost Pepper, and Carolina Reaper. Finally, the 2024 *Blue Diamond* Leadership Program participants visited the Sacramento site for the first session of the program where they were immersed in learnings and experiences from several industry experts! ♦





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Valentine Peppermint Cupcakes

Time: 35 minutes

Difficulty: Easy

Servings: 12

Ingredients

Cupcakes

2¼ cups all-purpose flour

1 cup sugar

1½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

Frosting

1 cup plus 1 tablespoon *Almond Breeze®*
Vanilla Almondmilk; divided

½ cup vegetable oil

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 can (16 oz.) regular or dairy-free
vanilla frosting

½ – ¾ teaspoon peppermint extract

1 drop red food coloring

Small heart shaped cookie cutter

2 Tablespoons mini chocolate chips;
divided



Directions

Cupcakes

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Combine flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt in a large bowl with a whisk.
3. In a separate bowl, combine 1 cup almondmilk, oil and vanilla.
4. Add wet ingredients to dry. Stir until just combined.
5. Divide batter evenly among 12 muffin cups lined with muffin liners, lightly sprayed with cooking spray.
6. Bake 20 minutes at 350°F or until a toothpick inserted in the center of a cupcake comes out clean. Cool in pan 5 minutes. Remove to a wire rack to cool completely.

Frosting

1. To prepare frosting, combine frosting, remaining tablespoon of almondmilk, peppermint extract and food coloring. Beat with an electric mixer until fluffy.
2. Frost cupcakes. Lightly place heart shaped cutter in center of a cupcake; carefully drop or spoon in mini chocolate chips. Press chips lightly into the frosting. Remove cutter. Repeat with remaining cupcakes and chocolate chips.

Pan Seared Salmon with Lemon Cream Sauce

Prep Time: 10 minutes Cook Time: 20 minutes Difficulty: Easy Servings: 4

Ingredients

3 tablespoons ghee, divided	1 small shallot, minced	1 tablespoon cornstarch dissolved in ¼ cup water
4 (3-4 oz.) salmon fillets	3 cloves garlic, minced	2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
1 teaspoon salt, divided	1 cup <i>Almond Breeze</i> ® Original Almond & Oat Blend	¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper
1 teaspoon paprika	¼ cup chicken broth	2 cups cooked white or brown rice, warmed
½ teaspoon garlic powder	1 tablespoon lemon juice	
½ teaspoon pepper, divided		

Directions

1. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, add 2 tablespoons ghee. Pat salmon dry and season with ½ teaspoon salt, paprika, garlic powder and ¼ teaspoon pepper.
2. Sear salmon, flesh side down, about 2-3 minutes, until browned. Flip and cook 2-3 minutes, until salmon is mostly cooked. Remove from pan and set aside.
3. To the same skillet, add remaining 1 tablespoon ghee. Add shallot and cook until softened, then stir in garlic and cook until fragrant. Stir in *Almond Breeze*® Original Almond & Oat Blend, broth and lemon juice. Bring to a boil.
4. Stir in cornstarch slurry, then reduce heat and simmer until thickened. Stir in parsley and red pepper. Add salmon and cook about 5 minutes.
5. Serve salmon and sauce over rice. Refrigerate leftovers.





Almond Breeze® Original Almond & Oat Blend is great for those who enjoy non-dairy beverages and cooking with plant-based alternatives.

Blue Diamond Introduces New Almond Breeze® Original Almond & Oat Blend

Blue Diamond recently launched a new addition to its selection of Almond Breeze® products: Almond Breeze® Original Almond & Oat Blend.

This product combines the delicious flavor of California almonds with the creaminess of oat for a new dairy-free milk. The Almond & Oat Blend contains more calcium than dairy milk, fewer calories and less sugar than other oatmilks on the market.

According to a recent survey of 2,000 American adults commissioned by Almond Breeze®, nearly half (48%) of respondents said their top health-related goal for the new year was eating healthier. Additionally, 45% of participants noted they would make healthier decisions if they were able to find options that tasted good.

“We know that eating healthier is on the forefront of a lot of consumers’ minds and are excited to offer this product that is both delicious and nutritious,” said Maya Erwin, Vice President of Innovation and R&D at Blue Diamond. “Almond Breeze® Original Almond & Oat Blend not only provides a great taste and creamy texture, but it is also a healthier alternative to other oatmilks.”

A one-cup serving of Almond Breeze® Almond & Oat Blend contains only four grams total sugar, 45 calories, and 450 milligrams of calcium, with 30% less sugar¹ and 50% fewer calories than the national average of the leading original oatmilk brands. It also contains 50% more calcium² than dairy milk. It can be enjoyed by the glass, with coffee or cereal, or can be used in place of dairy milk in any usage occasion. It is great for consumers with lactose allergies or sensitivities, or for those who enjoy non-dairy beverages and cooking with plant-based alternatives.

Almond Breeze® Original Almond & Oat Blend will be available in grocery stores and major retailers beginning January 2024. For more information on Almond Breeze® and other almondmilk varieties, visit AlmondBreeze.com. ◆



¹ Almond Breeze® Original Almond & Oat Blend has 45 calories and 4g total sugar per serving. The leading national original oatmilk brands on average contain 110 calories and 6g total sugar per serving.

² One cup of dairy milk contains 25% DV (300mg) of calcium vs. one cup of Almond Breeze® Original Almond & Oat Blend contains 35% DV (450mg) of calcium.

Blue Diamond Launches Almond Breeze® Drinking Yogurt in Thailand with Brand Ambassador Thanaerng-Kanyawee Songmuang

Blue Diamond Growers is excited to announce the expansion of its Almond Breeze® product line in Thailand's dynamic, health-conscious market. The brand is launching Almond Breeze® Drinking Yogurt, the first plant-based drinking yogurt in the market. The product is a blend of high-quality almondmilk yogurt and real fruit juices, available in two flavors: Tropical Fruit and Mixed Berries. This launch is a significant step for Blue Diamond reinforcing its position in the rapidly growing plant-based market segment.

To appeal to a new generation of health-savvy consumers, Thanaerng-Kanyawee Songmuang, a talented actress, model and fashion icon, has been appointed as the brand ambassador. This partnership aims to amplify the brand's reach and resonance with a younger demographic.

Nitin Batra, Managing Director for Asia at Blue Diamond Growers, highlighted the company's dedication to enhancing health and wellness through its products. "At Blue Diamond Growers, we are committed to offering our customers the goodness of California almonds through a variety of products made using high quality almonds. We strive to provide healthy

alternatives that contribute to our consumers' overall well-being. In line with this, our goal is to continually introduce products that are not only nutritious and delicious, but also align with health-conscious choices. In Thailand, our dedication to delivering these healthy and flavorful options is unwavering, as we continue to innovate and lead in the journey towards a healthier, more vibrant future for our consumers."

Khun Vasatorn Phonphaisan, an executive at Heritage Group, stated, "In response to the rising health trend and the expanding variety of plant-based food and beverages, Blue Diamond Almond Breeze® is committed to enhancing the taste and benefits of almondmilk. Our new Almond Breeze® Drinking



Yogurt, featuring a unique almondmilk yogurt and real fruit juice combination, is a first in Thailand. It is aimed at health-conscious and vegan consumers, as well as the new generation seeking tasty, healthy, and affordable daily drink options."

Each 70-calorie box offers a delicious experience, available in two flavors: Tropical Fruit, featuring kiwi, mango, and pineapple, and Mixed Berries, blending cranberries, red grapes, and blueberries. The product not

only offers an excellent taste but is also a rich source of calcium and vitamin E and is cholesterol-, dairy-, soy- and gluten-free. Additionally, the many benefits from this plant-based drinking yogurt make it a versatile and healthy beverage choice for daily consumption. This innovative almondmilk yogurt makes delicious, healthy beverage choices accessible to everyone, every day. ♦



Blue Diamond Growers partnered with actress Thanaerng-Kanyawee Songmuang to amplify the brand's reach and resonate with a younger demographic.

Austin Jackson Joins *Blue Diamond* as Regional Manager

In December 2023, Austin Jackson joined *Blue Diamond* as Regional Manager in Eastern Stanislaus County where he will manage the communications and relationships of members, hullers, and industry providers, as well as collaborating with the Membership team on special projects.

Austin was born and raised in Escalon, California in a farming family and has spent the bulk of his career involved in agricultural production. He was, most recently, employed at the South San Joaquin Irrigation District (SSJID), where he served as Division Manager.

He holds a BS in Business Administration from California State University Stanislaus while he also worked for a diversified farming operation in San Joaquin County. At that ranch they farmed walnuts, alfalfa, fresh market tomatoes, wheat and corn. Austin lives in Escalon with his wife and two-year-old daughter. Austin enjoys spending time with his family, and if time allows, he can be found hunting, fishing, golfing and snacking on his favorite *Blue Diamond* product, Smokehouse. ♦



Getting to Know *Blue Diamond* Regional Manager, Nicole Jansen

Nicole Jansen is excited to join the *Blue Diamond* team as Regional Manager for Solano, Yolo, and Colusa Counties. She had previously lived or worked in all three of the counties she will be serving. She will manage communications and relationships of members, hullers, and industry providers, as well as collaborating with the Membership team on special projects.

Jansen has spent the majority of her career in the seed business, coming from Corteva Pioneer, where she served growers across the western U.S. as Western Product Manager. Recently, she worked for Henderson Hulling, a key Huller partner in the industry and anticipates bringing a high level of service to the members in her district.

Nicole is a proud graduate of Modesto Junior College and California State University, Chico where she earned a BS in Agricultural Business, and minored in Crop Science.

Jansen was born and raised in Woodland where her family has been connected to agriculture for seven generations. Today, she, her husband and two-year-old daughter call Colusa home.

In her free time, Nicole enjoys spending time with family, gardening, traveling, and hunting with her family. She remains an active participant in 4-H and FFA and continues to serve as a leader and volunteer. Her current favorite *Blue Diamond* product is Wasabi & Soy, but she is exploring new favorites every day now that she has joined *Blue Diamond*. ♦



SAVE THE DATE



APRIL 8, 2024

BLUE DIAMOND GROWERS TOURNAMENT

*to benefit the
Blue Diamond Scholarship Foundation*

**Questions?
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209-303-7306**

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Registration information coming soon!

Stan Craig Celebrates 50 Years of Service with *Blue Diamond*!

In September 2023, Stan Craig of Blue Diamond Growers, celebrated 50 years of employment with the cooperative. We asked him to share parts of his story from how he joined the company to his experience working in our Sacramento facility over these past 50 years.

What led you to start working at Blue Diamond Growers and what motivated you to continue working with the cooperative?

"I graduated from high school in 1973. My choices were to attend school, get a job, or go into the service. I had heard about working for *Blue Diamond* from my neighbors. Their whole family worked here. I waited in line with hundreds of people out in front of [the] "California Almond Grower's Exchange" that went out the front door and all the way down 16th street to put in an application. Everyone wanted this job. When I got the call, I said I'd start [on] Monday. At the time I planned to stay for 10 years max. Now it's been over 50 years and I've never left, still riding my bike to work nearly every day. I like a physical job where I'm moving. [*Blue Diamond*] has always fairly compensated their employees, had great people, and I've always felt like I'm part of a team."

Stan states that the aspect of the *Blue Diamond* culture that resonates with him the most is "Work as Partners."

"For as long as I've been with *Blue Diamond*, safety was a top priority and people are encouraging. You really feel like you're contributing to the company. As you learn more, you gain confidence and your speed improves. My very first supervisor, John Lacey, really made me feel welcome. He never talked down to me, was a great trainer, and spoke very highly of the company [and] had a positive attitude."



“For as long as I’ve been with Blue Diamond, safety was a top priority and people are encouraging. You really feel like you’re contributing to the company.”

We believe in recognizing achievements big and small. Can you share a moment when you felt truly appreciated for your contributions over the years?

"Years ago, there was an area we needed to clean out, but I felt the way we were cleaning the area was unsafe. I turned my idea for improvement in, and within a matter of days, *Blue Diamond* modified it. There were many times that happened. Safety has always been a priority and changes [are] always quickly made to maintain this priority.

"Years ago, we had a quality issue where we had to evaluate each triwall to identify the depth of the issue. This was a job no one wanted to do, but I knew that if I had to do it, I was going to do it right. We completed this task and it made me feel really accomplished. All my jobs have just been a really good experience. Great people. An experience you'd get nowhere else."

On behalf of everyone at Blue Diamond Growers, we thank you, Stan, for an amazing career and for the many years you've served our wonderful cooperative! ♦



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Federal Update and the Current Washington Situation

2023 was one of the most politically tumultuous years in history. As the country enters 2024, Congress faces lots of unfinished business and a turbulent election landscape.

For many years, Julian Heron has contributed to the Advocacy Report in addition to serving as *Blue Diamond Growers'* federal advocate in Washington, D.C. As the cooperative enters the new year, Heron has transitioned advocacy leadership to Lynn Jacquez and Stacy McBride, federal advocates and longtime associates of Heron. Heron remains a partner and friend of *Blue Diamond Growers* on Capitol Hill.

Lynn Jacquez



With over twenty-five years of experience in Washington, D.C., Lynn has earned a reputation as one of the most effective bipartisan advocates in federal public policy on a broad range of issues. In her

law practice with JPH Law she specializes in workforce development and training, labor law and employment-based immigration policy. Her advocacy practice covers a wide range of issues including rural development, sustainable agriculture, trade, infrastructure, goods movement, energy and air quality and local government funding.

Lynn specializes in identifying federal policy and funding opportunities within the congressional appropriations process and creating critical programs in the authorization process. Clients benefit from her in-depth knowledge of the legislative and regulatory process — from drafting legislative provisions, to developing strategy, to securing enactment, and to impacting the regulatory process for implementation.

Lynn is a member of the District of Columbia Bar.

Stacy McBride



Stacy McBride is the Executive Vice President of Federal Government Affairs at Husch Blackwell Strategies (HBS). McBride is an experienced public policy strategist whose diligent work over

twenty years in Washington has earned her the respect and friendship of leading elected officials of both parties on Capitol Hill.

Before joining HBS in March 2023, Stacy served eight years as Chief of Staff and Committee Staff Director to U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt as he led the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, the Republican Policy Committee and served as Vice Chairman of the Senate Republican Conference. Earlier in her career, Stacy served as the Republican Subcommittee Staff Director for the Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies and as a Special Assistant in the Commissioner's Office of the Food and Drug Administration.

Federal and Congressional Update

Congress begins the second session of the 118th Congress facing a significant amount of unfinished business from the first session, which may go down in history as one of the most tumultuous years in the history of the House of Representatives. In October, California Congressman Kevin McCarthy became the first Speaker in history to be ousted, ultimately leading to McCarthy's decision to retire at the end of 2023. The House took 21 days to elect a new Speaker — Rep. Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Congressman from Shreveport, LA. The new Speaker has a razor thin majority to resolve federal government funding, federal tax policy and expiring provisions of the Farm Bill.

In November, Congress pushed a decision on federal government funding into early 2024. In mid-January, realizing it could not meet its previously set deadlines to pass full-year appropriations bills, Congress passed another continuing resolution to extend funding until early March. Using a new approach, Speaker Johnson divided government funding into two large continuing resolutions — providing continued funding to four major departments until March 1 and to the rest of the government until March 8. Funding for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is in the first resolution and will expire on March 1 unless Congress acts before then. On January 7, House Leadership and the White House announced an agreement on a \$1.59 trillion topline for discretionary spending. This agreement may stave off another government shutdown



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or a yearlong continuing resolution. Under the terms of the debit limit deal passed in 2023, this would force automatic funding cuts to almost every program in the government, including significant cuts to USDA programs.

The Administration has requested additional funding for the wars in Ukraine and Israel as well as a domestic funding request that included \$2.8 billion for farmers and ranchers experiencing losses due to natural disasters. If enacted, this additional funding could provide assistance to California growers suffering losses from Hurricane Hilary. Negotiations on Ukraine- and Israel-related funding have been tied to Congressional Republicans' request for substantial immigration reform. This conversation has largely drowned out discussions on the domestic funding for farmers, leading federal advocates to discuss the need for disaster funding with the California delegation directly. The conversation on immigration has thus far been focused on border crossings and not on the significant workforce needed by agriculture producers. An agreement on both issues remains elusive.

Congress also failed to pass a 5-year Farm Bill and extended Farm Bill programs through September 30, 2024. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glen "GT" Thompson and Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow now face the daunting task of trying to pass a Farm Bill during an election year. Expect a lot of discussion and Committee action on this in the coming year. Conventional wisdom dictates that if anything is going to happen smoothly this year, both Chambers will need to act on the Farm Bill before the month-long August recess when member focus typically shifts to campaigns and elections. While both Committees have held hearings on Farm Bill programs, neither has introduced its own version of the Farm Bill as a starting point for negotiations. Advocacy efforts by growers are critical to advancing our Farm Bill priorities.

Election years have a way of grinding Congress to a halt, which means a great deal of activity at the Federal level in the form of administrative action by Federal Government agencies. The Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services are embarking on an update for the Dietary Guidelines for Americans to set nutrition standards for 2025-

2030. The USDA and FDA are also proposing changes to nutrition standards for school meals and mandatory food package labeling, changes that we continue to monitor for impacts on the almond industry. The President has been invited by the Speaker of the House to provide the State of the Union address on March 7. During this speech, we will learn more about the President's election year priorities and he will outline his budget, which will be delayed until after he has addressed the nation.

International Update

On the trade front, engagement by our growers with the California delegation led to a letter pressing the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to engage the Government of Turkey to remove burdensome tariffs on the domestic almond industry. The USTR has engaged the issue and is presently working to schedule meetings with the Government of Turkey. Attacks on shippers in the Red Sea continue to present challenges. The U.S. Government has diverted military resources to the area as a part of Operation Prosperity Guardian to protect shipping lanes but stopping nimble drone attacks is difficult. Shippers are being forced to forgo shipping through the Suez Canal and reroute around the Cape of Good Hope in Africa. This adds significant time and expense to exports.

Election Update

And finally, 2024 is an election year. The race to temporarily replace former Speaker McCarthy in his California district is on. Governor Gavin Newsom has set March 19 as the special election date to fill the remainder of McCarthy's term. With the passing of Senator Dianne Feinstein in September, the state has scheduled a special election to fill the remainder of her term. The Special Primary election will be held on March 5, and the Special General Election will coincide with the General Election vote for other office holders on November 5. On December 28, the Secretary of State published the list of eligible candidates for both races. President Joe Biden is running for re-election in the Democratic primary, largely unopposed. The Republican primary started out crowded but has narrowed to two main

front-runners: former President Donald Trump and former South Carolina Governor and United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley. If current polling is any indication, voters can expect the 2024 race for the White House to be a re-match of the 2020 election. ♦



Lynn Jacquez
Of Counsel, JPH Law Firm,
Senior Advisor,
Husch Blackwell Strategies



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THE BEE BOX

Preparing Your Orchard for February's Busy Bees

For most of us, the beginning of the year brings with it a welcome hiatus from the busy holiday season and marks the start of our ambitious New Year's resolutions. For California's almonds, the frenzied arrival of honey bee colonies from around the country hails in the New Year, with beekeepers and growers alike preparing for the fast-approaching almond bloom. These bees are responsible for pollinating around 80% of the world's supply of almonds¹ — an impressive feat for both the humans and bees involved in growing almonds! This article provides a brief overview of our almonds' dedicated pollinators, the many challenges facing commercial honey bees, and what growers can do right now to keep their hive rentals happy and productive during almond bloom.

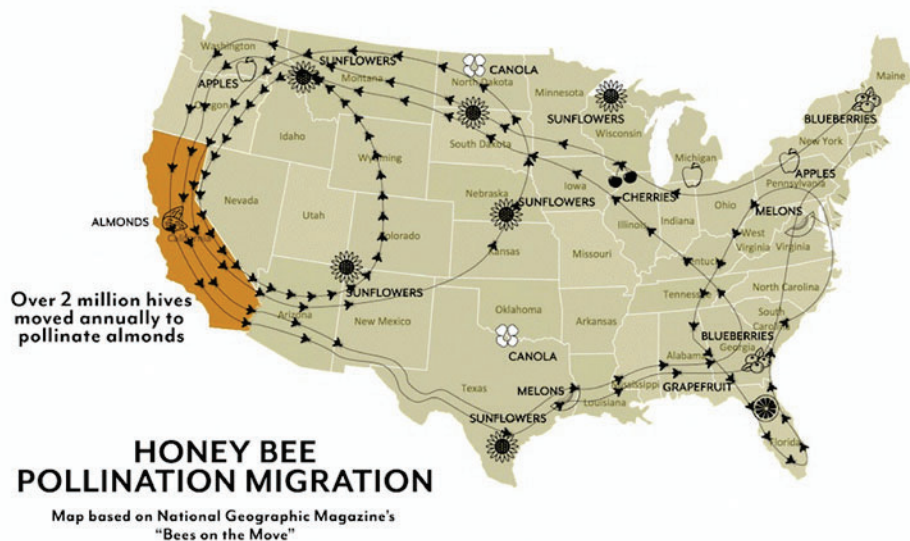


Figure 1: The almond bloom prompts the largest "pollination migration" on the planet, bringing up to 90% of the country's honeybees into California's almond orchards. In 2010, honey bees contributed \$19.2 billion to the U.S. economy through pollination services.² Credit: Project Apis m. (based on National Geographic's "Bees on the Move.")

Ensuring Healthy Honey Bees For Pollination

Pollinators are essential to our food system and environment. Due to a combination of factors, there has been a notable decline in pollinator populations across the United States. Commercial beekeepers continue to experience winter hive losses of around 40% each year. (Or an average of \$200 million in economic losses for the beekeeping industry every year!)³ The lengthy list of challenges facing our nation's pollinators includes disease pressure, pesticide exposure, parasites, and lack of forage — just to name a few. Other environmental conditions, such as extreme weather events and

biodiversity losses caused by climate change, amplify these existing constraints, complicating our understanding and ability to manage these issues.

Fluctuating winter conditions significantly impact a colony's health. Honey bees spend much of the fall collecting and storing nectar in preparation for winter hibernation. Warm winters and temperature fluctuations cause bees to break their winter cluster and consume their stored food. This requires beekeepers to keep up costly feedings and other interventions to conserve the colonies' health throughout the chilly winter months.

To manage these issues and keep colonies as healthy and almond-ready as possible, beekeepers employ several strategies to care for their bees over winter. Some beekeepers chose to overwinter their hives in states with warmer winter climates

such as Florida, Texas or California. However, hives are trucked in from all over the country, from states like Maine, New York, North Carolina, Washington, Idaho just to name a few. Many more beekeepers from colder areas are beginning to overwinter their hives in indoor cold storage. While not new, this practice has become more technologically advanced over the years and is a way to hold bees in hibernation at a steady temperature. Many beekeepers now view indoor storage as an "insurance policy"...they know that if they put healthy colonies into storage, the more likely they are to get healthy colonies out. This "insurance" aids the grand effort of providing enough hives to pollinate billions of almond blooms in California's vast orchards. The practice is spreading and cold-weather states aren't the only ones adopting this practice!

A fourth generation beekeeping operation located in the desert of Southern California has started using cold storage to beat the heat during the hot summer months. After the bees pollinate almonds, they are brought back home to the Salton Sea to make honey during spring and early summer. Once the honey has been harvested and temperatures start rising by mid-summer (average daily temperatures of ~105°F), bees are prepped to be brought inside from the extreme heat. Artificial winter conditions offer safer and more comfortable temperatures for the crew to work in, and it is less labor-intensive for the beekeeper to manage dormant bees from one central location. This allows the beekeepers to inspect bees, assess colony strength, and utilize a brood break, where the queen stops laying eggs for a period of time, thus reducing the period when varroa can attack bee larvae

within the hive as a mite treatment instead of using costly chemicals. From the cold storage facility, beekeepers can also select strong hives to split, taking one hive and splitting it in two to increase the number of hives in their operation. Records show that colonies that receive this special handling are "on average 2-3 frames larger in almond pollination, and about 95% of them are double deeps."³

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Suffice it to say, emerging best management practices for indoor cold storage helps to reduce winter losses, lower costs and ensure healthier hives are arriving to pollinate your almonds.⁴

Starting the year off in almonds can go one of two ways for bees — almonds can provide a beneficial environment that pollinators thrive in, or beekeepers and growers chance bringing bees into potentially unsafe conditions. This risks harming the very insect we rely on most. The almond's close bond with honey bees can serve as a poignant reminder of our responsibility to protect this essential relationship. The healthier the honey bees are, the more efficient they are at their job, which directly contributes to orchard yields. To get the most out of your hive rental and to create a safe place for honey bees to forage and pollinate, here is a review of honey bee best practices to use in your orchards.



Large indoor storage facilities can hold thousands of colonies. When the time is right, colonies can then be trucked directly out of the storage building and to the almonds before the bloom. Credit: Project Apis m.

Growers Can Provide Beneficial Forage

Bee populations are naturally at their lowest after winter; they come out of cold storage or overwintering apiaries and are moved straight into almond orchards. These bees have not had anything to forage for months so winter cover crops provide much-needed nutrition to weary bees awaiting the signal that winter is over. If planted in the early fall, cover crops can provide this critical food source even before almond bloom. When bees find the first pollen of the new year, it triggers a positive feedback loop throughout the hive. Available pollen from cover crops stimulates even more bees to forage which leads to larvae rearing. Finally, their strength and numbers increases before the marathon of almond pollination begins!



Planting cover crops has exceptional advantages for both beekeepers and farmers by providing valuable soil benefits in the orchard alongside ample provisions for pollinators. Many beekeepers are willing to offer discounts on hive rentals if they know their bees are moving into an orchard with cover crops that guarantee access to critical nutrition and beneficial forage.⁵

Growers Can Provide Water for Bees

Honey bees require access to clean water sources. Since standing water from the orchard may be contaminated with pesticides or sprays that are toxic to bees, providing

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buckets or tubs of water is critical for the hives. Water should be provided as soon as possible after bees arrive in your orchard. Doing so ensures bees spend more time pollinating instead of searching for water. Make certain containers are new or clean of any hazardous materials, such as chemicals or other potentially harmful residues. Bees will need a “landing area” in the water container, such as screens or fabric draped across the top of the water or rocks or straw to prevent drowning.⁶

Growers Can Reduce Risks of Pesticide Exposure

Almond growers are entrusted with the complicated task of protecting both their crop and visiting pollinators. An unintended consequence of crop-protection practices is the chance for bees to become casualties of pesticides and other agricultural sprays in the orchard. It is critical to consider honey bee health and pesticide exposure throughout the entire year, especially when bees are present. Below are some recommendations from the Almond Board of California’s Honey Bee BMP Guide(https://www.almonds.com/sites/default/files/2020-12/BeeBPMs_12212020.pdf):

DON'T:

- Do not tank-mix or utilize adjuvants during almond pollination.
- Do not hit any flying bees with any spray application materials. (Spray droplets negatively impact a bee’s ability to fly)
- Do not apply insecticides during bloom.

DO:

- Do read labels, carefully follow directions, and avoid agricultural sprays that are toxic to bees or have a long residual.
- Do bloom sprays at night which will minimize exposure to bees and pollen to chemicals.
- Do replace water sources with fresh water after a treatment is made.



Figure 2: Cover crops provide a critical food source for arriving bees. If planted strategically, cover crops can bloom before almond bloom. This early forage kick-starts your rented hives, so they are geared-up to pollinate almond blossoms. Credit: Project Apis m.

By taking these simple steps to reduce pesticide risks, growers can protect the bees on their property and build trust with their beekeepers, helping them return year after year with a healthy pollinating workforce.

While almond production has tripled in California since 2002, the number of honey bee colonies has remained unchanged over the same period.⁷ Increasing acreage and wide-ranging dependence on migratory pollination services places tremendous pressure on the entire system. Diminishing honey bee populations have impacts across the food system. Almonds (along with 90 other crops reliant on honey bees) play a critical role in this cycle, directly affecting whether bees decline or endure. Following Best Management Practices and providing forage and fresh water are just some of the ways the almond industry can continue to support the health and survival of our pollinators... your bees and trees will thank you! ♦

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USDA Climate-Smart Grant for *Blue Diamond Growers*

Honey bees and almonds go together, with almond growers and beekeepers depending on one another to safeguard the health of their respective “crop”— be it healthy hives or healthy nuts! With legislative changes on the horizon and government programs supporting the adoption of climate-smart practices, now is a good time to consider trying something new in your fields to support bee health. Last year, *Blue Diamond Growers* was awarded \$45 million by the USDA to implement cover crops and pollinator habitat to support member-growers to plant more acres of bee-friendly forage. Growers enrolled in the program will receive free seed and direct financial reimbursement for several practices. The next application cycle for the *USDA Climate-Smart Grant* will open this spring! (<https://bluediamondgrowers.com/usda-climate-smart-grant/>)

If you have any questions about cover crops or the Climate Smart Grant, please contact me at brett@projectapism.org

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Another Challenging Year but Hope Lies Ahead

California almond growers have experienced yet another taxing and financially draining season over the past 12 months. Before growers could recover from the aftershock of last year's hardships, a wave of new difficulties overcame the industry.

However, this year's 51st Annual Almond Conference lifted spirits for some as it provided an opportunity for camaraderie, collaboration on resources, and insight into the factors that the industry can control.

"For the short-term outlook, things will remain difficult and tough decisions will have to be made," said Alexi Rodriguez, chair of the Board of Directors at the State of the Industry Presentation. "But... we do believe there's good reason to remain optimistic about the future of almonds and their profitability."

Production and Consumption Stay Favorable

"A lot has changed in terms of growth, production and additional plantings, and it's important to assess how almonds measure up against other tree nuts," said Richard Waycott, former Almond Board of California (ABC) president and CEO.

Today, 3.5 billion pounds of almonds are being produced globally — approximately 1 billion more than 10 years ago. Production remains high in California, making up about 75% of global production, but this number has been higher in the past, which suggests increased competition from producers in Spain and Australia.

Almonds aren't the only nut that has seen this amount of scale. Collectively, tree nuts have increased total trade net supply in the world by 64% in the last decade. Positively, almonds are still the favorite nut and hold a hefty consumption lead over their nearest competitor, cashews, but there is still ample room for increased consumption globally, Waycott noted.

Acreage Drops

"On the other hand, for the second year in a row, the industry is witnessing a decrease in total almond acreage from the year previous,¹" said Bryce Spycher, ABC senior manager of Marketing Order Services. Nonbearing acres are down by nearly 100,000 acres — almost half of where the industry was in 2021, and the number of orchards removed continues to rise.

Additionally, one of the lasting effects of the 2022 season was 438 million pounds of excess inventory, accounting for two months of the industry's shipments. ABC has been vigilant in discovering new export markets to offload these nuts, particularly in their target regions of Asia-Pacific, Western Europe and the Middle East/Africa.

Trade Environment

Following last year's difficulties, trade has been a troubling concern for the industry. U.S. Ambassador Doug McKalip, chief agricultural negotiator at the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR)² addressed some of these concerns with the audience, stating there have been "boots on the ground" to make progress in this area.

Top of mind for many growers are the trade restrictions with China, India and Turkey due to retaliatory tariffs. While the United States faced obstacles with these countries, our competitors simultaneously negotiated solid trade relationships with them, which undoubtedly hindered California almond shipments.

¹ <https://www.almonds.com/about-us/press-room/california-almond-acreage-drops-again-2023>

² <https://ustr.gov/>

³ <https://www.almonds.com/almond-industry/industry-news/almond-byte-september-2023-india-tariffs-eu-challenges-port-worker>

To combat this, Ambassador McKalip explained the efforts being made by the USTR to better establish one-on-one relationships with trade partners and their resolution of a bilateral engagement with the Indian government to eliminate the tariff. A step in that direction came last year in early September when India announced the elimination of retaliatory tariffs³ on several U.S. products, including almonds.

McKalip noted that their team has also worked towards reducing farmer input costs.

"In November, we announced a reduction of the duty on phosphorus-based fertilizer from Morocco and that duty is going to decrease from about 19% down to 2%," McKalip said. "In addition, USDA announced a \$900 million initiative for domestic fertilizer development."⁴

Additionally, the administration is collaborating with trade partners to develop better transparency on standards and protocols to avoid the rejection of containers — like the industry has seen this fall in Italy — or any loss of revenue throughout the supply chain.

Maximizing Efficiencies with Research

The resiliency of almond farmers over this past year helped ABC pivot its focus to strategy, innovation and further research to drive efficiencies.

"Irrigation has always been an area that can be costly for growers, so ABC has invested in research focusing



With the help of ABC Board Chair Alexi Rodriguez (left) and outgoing CEO Richard Waycott (right), new ABC President and CEO Clarice Turner (center) detailed the challenges facing the California almond industry and how more promising times may lie ahead.

on actual evapotranspiration, or actual ET⁵, to precisely dial in tree water demand," said Josette Lewis, ABC chief scientific officer.

Lewis also mentioned that ABC is funding research to update honey bee stocking recommendations, with the hopes of saving growers money and providing more insight on self-fertile almond varieties.

Driving Global Demand

ABC Vice President of Global Market Development, Emily Fleischmann, discussed the current campaigns ABC has worked on over the past year to drive global demand, including their biggest partnership to date with Deion Sanders⁶, also known as Coach Prime, and the 2023 Sports Illustrated Sportsperson of the Year.

Additionally, Fleischmann highlighted two other new campaigns in Germany and India. A "Mother Nature" spokesperson touting almonds as the mother of all snacks is currently featured in Germany, and

California almonds were broadcast digitally, on TV and on billboards during the Cricket World Cup in India.

Finding a Silver Lining

All things considered, there is a silver lining amidst these challenges; many challenges are no longer new, meaning the industry can more clearly and effectively define and address these issues. In doing so, growers must remain robust, positive and steadfast to weather the storm.

"Today as the industry struggles to deal with challenges, many of which we don't control, it's critical to pull together and focus on what we can control and what we can influence to find our way forward," concluded Clarice Turner, ABC president and CEO. "We have some difficult times to endure. But I'm certain that strong leadership, focus, and the industry DNA of grit and innovation will get us to a better place in the near future."

Article contributed by the Almond Board of California ♦

⁴ <https://www.rd.usda.gov/newsroom/news-release/usda-invests-nearly-13-million-increase-innovative-domestic-fertilizer-production>

⁵ https://www.almonds.com/sites/default/files/content/attachments/irrigation_scheduling_using_evapotranspiration.pdf

⁶ <https://www.almonds.com/about-us/press-room/deion-sanders-california-almonds>

TIME TO CONSIDER

Can you believe it’s already 2024? It might be hard to believe, but there is no time to look in the rearview mirror. 2024 is here and it’s time to start looking forward to the year to come and how you can be prepared.

It seems like we are having a warmer winter, which can be related to the Northern Hemisphere experiencing an El Niño year. Barring any significant changes, this warm weather may lead to bloom being right around the corner, which provides a good chance that we will experience some rain during that time. Growers all know what warm temperatures and wet weather bring to almond orchards: disease. First, let’s dive into a few of those bloom-time diseases and what can be done to prevent them. Second, we’ll look at the importance of bees during pollination. Finally, let’s talk about the importance of a budget and how to plan for those costs.

Bloom-time Diseases

Being prepared for any weather event is critical to the success of a fungicide application. The first spring disease that usually comes to mind is **Brown Rot**. The disease doesn’t need much moisture to be a problem. Brown Rot can be present with little to no rain because of the natural moisture present in the flower itself; even the morning dew can set us up for a problem. The next disease that I’ve seen grow in prevalence in the Central Valley is **Jacket Rot/Green Fruit Rot**. This disease, like many others, must have the right conditions to be present. Jacket Rot usually appears later in bloom when the fungus effects the dropping petals, jackets, or other parts of the flower. Because of the moisture, the flower material sticks to the young almonds. Jacket Rot is most prominent in dense clusters of almonds because the falling plant material becomes trapped in the almond cluster, leading to the infection of the whole cluster. **Shot Hole** is another common springtime disease but has become less of an issue over the years. This disease is usually easy to discover, as it develops small reddish spots on the leaves, typically leaving a dark spot in the center. These lesions can show

up on other parts of the plant, but are most commonly found on the leaves. Dr. Jim Adaskaveg with UC Riverside says shot hole “hasn’t been much of an issue over the past decade or longer, however, in large part because fungicides used to control other diseases have kept it at bay.” The last disease I’ll touch on is **Anthracnose**. Like the diseases mentioned earlier, anthracnose is dependent on environmental conditions. Heavy moisture or rain along with warmer temperatures will lead to the development of the disease. Symptoms appear as blossom blight, fruit infections, and spur and limb dieback. Anthracnose is not a disease you want getting a foothold in your orchard. The disease can have a multiple-year effect because of the infection to spurs and limbs. Growers may have to prune out the infection and use a strong fungicide program to eradicate it.

Preventing Bloom-time Diseases

We’ve identified the diseases that cause growers so many headaches during bloom, but how do we control them? There are several fungicides that you can choose from. It is vital to select the correct fungicide for the disease you are trying to prevent along with the correct timing to apply the fungicide. In *Figure 1*, you will find a chart of different diseases and an effective application time. The chart is on a 0-3 scale, with 0 being ineffective and 3 being most effective. This can help you target past disease issues. For

Disease	Bloom				Spring ¹		Summer	
	Dormant	Pink bud	Full bloom	Petal fall	2 weeks	5 weeks	May	June/July
alternaria	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	3
anthracnose ²	0	2	3	3	3	3	3	2
bacterial spot	1	0	2	3	3	2	1	0
brown rot	0	2	3	1	0	0	0	0
green fruit rot	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	0
hull rot ⁷	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
leaf blight	0	0	3	2	1	0	0	0
rust	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	1 ⁶
scab ³	2	0	0	2	3	3	1	0
shot hole ⁴	1 ⁵	1	2	3	3	2	0	0

Figure 1: UC Davis IPM

example, a grower has had a history of high Jacket Rot infection, that grower can look at this chart and know they need protection at the Full Bloom timing.

Now that we know when to target a specific disease, how do we know which product to use? The UC Agriculture and Natural Resources IPM website has a great chart for this. (See the bottom of this article for the address.) The Almond Fungicide Efficacy Chart lists multiple products and the FRAC group associated with that fungicide. FRAC stands for “Fungicide Resistance Action Committee” and it is a set of numbers and letters used to distinguish fungicides based on their mode of action. In order to prevent resistance to these fungicides, growers need to rotate FRAC groups to prevent developing resistant diseases. For example, if a grower’s first bloom spray contains a FRAC Group 3 fungicide, the second bloom spray application should not. The second should contain a different mode of action like a FRAC Group 7/11. Rotating FRAC groups keeps more “tools” in a grower’s “toolbox,” and growers have enough tools removed by external forces so they do not need to remove their own.

Bees and Pollination

Pollination may be the single most critical step in the year for a successful almond crop. That success is highly dependent



Bee Bucket

on the bees that are in your orchard. There are a few factors that can effect the success of your almond pollination. First is the number of frames in your hives. A single, eight frame hive will collect 2.5 times more pollen than a four frame hive. The contract with your beekeeper should state the strength of the hives so you know what you should be receiving. Second is hive placement. You should avoid placing hives in high traffic areas, shade or in a concentrated area. Place hives

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no more than a quarter mile apart in places where the morning sun can quickly warm the hive. Third is water. If your bees cannot find water in your orchards, they will leave your orchard to search for it. Bee buckets like the one shown here are a great water source to place next to hives to keep the bees hydrated. *Blue Diamond* has some to hand out as well! Contact your Regional Manager so you can get your hands on one. Last is spray applications. Growers should know to not use insecticides during bloom, but fungicide applications are common during bloom. Remember to apply sprays late in the day and in the evening while bees are back in the hives, remove or cover any water sources, and never spray the hives directly. If you want more tips for bees and bee health, please check the California Almond Board website for best management practices.

Figure 2: Example Budget

Costs	Estimated	Actual
Bees	\$ -	\$ -
Liability Insurance	\$ -	\$ -
Crop Insurance	\$ -	\$ -
Electricity	\$ -	\$ -
Water	\$ -	\$ -
Pink Bud Fungicide Spray	\$ -	\$ -
Full Bloom/Petal Fall Fungicide Spray	\$ -	\$ -
2-5 Week Post-Petal Fall Fungicide Spray/Plantbug Spray	\$ -	\$ -
May (Mummy) Spray	\$ -	\$ -
Mow/Weed Control	\$ -	\$ -
Hull Split	\$ -	\$ -
2nd Hull Split	\$ -	\$ -
Ant Bait	\$ -	\$ -
Post-Harvest Foliar Nutrient	\$ -	\$ -
Fertilizer 1	\$ -	\$ -
Fertilizer 2	\$ -	\$ -
Fertilizer 3	\$ -	\$ -
Post-Harvest Fertilizer	\$ -	\$ -
Potash	\$ -	\$ -
Liquid Potassium	\$ -	\$ -
Winter Burndown	\$ -	\$ -
Pre-emergent	\$ -	\$ -
Burndown	\$ -	\$ -
2nd Burndown	\$ -	\$ -
Shaking	\$ -	\$ -
Sweeping	\$ -	\$ -
Hulling/Shelling	\$ -	\$ -
Winter Shaking	\$ -	\$ -
Labor	\$ -	\$ -
MISC. (Soil Amend, Emergency Spray, Tissue/Soil Labs	\$ -	\$ -
Total	\$ -	\$ -
Production	Estimated	Actual
lbs/acre		
Total Acres		
Total Production		
\$/lbs	\$	
Total Revenue	\$	\$ -



Budgeting During Bloom

Budgets are critical for a successful farming operation. No one wants to open a bill a month later and realize the material you sprayed was \$40-\$50 per acre instead of the \$20-\$30 per acre expected. A budget can remove that unwanted surprise and the best part is they are not that difficult to develop. I have put together a sample budget that I would be happy to send to anyone who would like one. If you email me at tvoss@bdgrowers.com, I will happily email you a copy of this budget. This "Example Budget" (Figure 2) lists multiple common operating costs, including bees, insurance, electricity and labor. It also contains areas for multiple spray applications, so you can tailor it to your specific operation. All the costs you enter will be the "Estimated Costs," and as you go through the year you can enter the "Actual Costs" to make sure you are on track. At the bottom of the budget you can enter your estimated production, total acres and estimated price per pound. The spread sheet will do the math for you and provide you with an estimated total revenue, which you can compare against your estimated total cost. Being able to compare these costs allows you to adjust your budget by adding or subtracting from it. When identifying the costs of chemicals and fertilizer, a PCA is the best person to speak with. This budget will allow your PCA to forecast their needs and put a plan in place for your operation in the coming year. I get it, budgets are not the most fun part of farming, but they are incredibly important to your future success. ♦

UC ANR Fungicide Efficacy Website:

<https://ipm.ucanr.edu/agriculture/almond/fungicide-efficacy-for-almonds-diseases/>



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