

**ED WILLIAMS
RETIRED AFTER
A 41-YEAR
CAREER!**

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COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

FIVE YEAR REVIEW - DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE/ WEIGHTS & MEASURES

As I contemplate moving on to a new chapter in life, retirement in August, I am thinking back on the many issues we have dealt with over the past five years. One of the first issues that was brought to my attention when I arrived in Ventura County was a brand-new Industrial Hemp Program. Several growers were experimenting with commercial production of hemp for cannabidiol extraction. These pioneers were the first in California and among the first in the Nation. I and several of our Board Supervisors were happy to support this potentially beneficial new crop as a rotational option that used little water and had soil cleansing properties. In 2019, the State opened hemp for general production and 57 growers applied to produce 3,900 acres of the smelliest crop in Ventura County. This did not sit well with the general public with overtones of skunk wafting on the winds near residential areas. The Board continued to support growers and developed a compromise Ordinance to allow hemp in areas that would have a reduced impact on the public. Today hemp production continues but is at less than a tenth of those original levels.

Shortly after the hemp phase, the Board directed the Planning Department to revise and develop a new General Plan for 2040 that would direct County policy moving into the future. A brand-new Agriculture Element was added that proposed over a dozen new programs for the Agriculture Department. Many of these new programs complement existing programs carried out by the University of California Cooperative Extension Office here and in other areas of California. It was decided not to reinvent the wheel in these areas, but to work to augment and collaborate with the UCCE in the areas of farm nutrient management, irrigation, sustainable farming, and climate resilience. When the California Department of Conservation made our Farm Bureau Executive Director aware of the Sustainable Ag Lands Conservation Grant Funding Program we were able to dovetail some of the goals of the General Plan for 2040 into a plan for Resilient Agricultural Land Initiative (RALI) that builds a strategic framework for keeping agriculture viable in Ventura County into the future. The Department has been working with a core group from UC, Farm Bureau, Nature Conservancy of Ventura, Resource Management Agency and Department of Conservation consultants to build upon the recently completed RALI with a grant application to develop a Rural/Urban Connection - Agricultural Education Program, and to develop a Farm to Front Door-Ventura Grown branding and marketing program.



ED WILLIAMS

**VENTURA COUNTY
AGRICULTURAL
COMMISSIONER/SEALER**



Asian Citrus Psyllid (ACP) and Huanglongbing (HLB) has been a continuous existential threat hanging over the heads of our citrus industry for more than ten years. Our growers have united and worked tirelessly to stave off the establishment of the tree killing disease and to date we have been fortunate to avoid a quarantine for the disease that could severely damage our industry. Florida just reported that their 242 million boxes in 2004 has been reduced to 16 million boxes in 2022 due to HLB.

Who can forget the work done to mitigate the threat of COVID. There were weekly meetings, advisory notices, essential worker cards, vaccination clinics, 1.5 million facemasks, 40 thousand hand sanitizers, 20 thousand boxes of gloves distributed, trilingual translation services provided and more. Ventura handled the Farmworker COVID issues better than any other county because of the infrastructure that had been built at the direction of the Board of Supervisors in putting together the Farmworker Resource Program. This has left a lasting legacy and set an example for the rest of the State on how to work with farmworkers to help them navigate the California and County resource systems.

Ventura County was the last of all counties in California to adopt Weights & Measures into the Agriculture Department in January of 2022.

In May, we finished the Ventura County Pesticide Notification Pilot for the California Department of Pesticide Regulation. This program was delegated to DPR from the Governor to provide nearby residents advance notice of restricted pesticide applications. Ventura was one of four counties in California to participate. DPR has used the model developed in Ventura County to build a statewide notification system which is in a Beta testing process and is expected to be rolled out to the general public on a statewide basis in 2024 or 2025.

There were dozens of other milestones, projects, and programs in the last five years. It seems fitting to conclude this brief review of the last five years by noting that Ventura County Agriculture Department is commemorating 100 Years of Crop Reports this year. We have a long and wonderful tradition of excellence in Ventura County Agriculture, and I hope that in the last five years we've been able to contribute to that legacy, and I sincerely hope that it will continue and grow stronger over the next 100 years.



OUT OF QUARANTINE

ERIKA ZAPIEN
SUPERVISING AGRICULTURE
INSPECTOR/BIOLOGIST

If you have ever ordered a bouquet or plant from an online florist or plant store, chances are those plants or flowers have crossed the hands of a Ventura County Agricultural Inspector/Biologist. As a line of defense against exotic agricultural pests making an entry into our county, we regularly have inspectors at all local delivery service hubs. Inspectors are tasked with enforcing entry requirements and conducting visual inspections to ensure parcels are free of any detrimental pests. Any pests found during an inspection are collected and submitted to the California State Lab for identification. When the lab sends the results, they will include a rating on the pest. Anything rated "A" or "Q" is considered detrimental to our state's environment/agriculture. "A" rated pests have the most serious potential impacts, "Q" rating is used as a placeholder for pests that are potentially harmful to agriculture and the environment.

Last year, the Agricultural Commissioner's Office conducted a total of 2,304 parcel inspections and intercepted seven "A" rated and fifteen "Q" rated pests. The counting total for this year is three "A" rated and six "Q" rated pest interceptions and two rejections for quarantine violations.

Sr. Agricultural Inspector/Biologist, Tom Yanagihara, has intercepted several "Q" rated mealybugs on parcels from high-risk states. Mealybugs are piercing-sucking insects that feed on many plants in different genera. They thrive in warm weather, especially areas without cold winters. Mealybugs will suck sap from the plant, reducing plant vigor. High populations can cause slow plant growth and leaf drop.

Sr. Agricultural Inspector/Biologist, Vanessa Cruz, has intercepted a few "A" rated scales and "Q" rated whitefly on packages from high-risk states. Scales, like mealybugs, are plant-sucking insects that insert their mouthparts into the plant. High populations can cause a plant to weaken and slow growth. Whiteflies, despite their name, are not true flies. Their name comes from the mealy white wax covering their wings and body. Whiteflies, like mealybugs and scales, are sap-sucking insects. Large populations of whitefly immatures can cause leaves to turn yellow and eventual plant loss.

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Many of these detrimental pests have a broad list of hosts. An infested plant could potentially impact a resident recipient's garden, our local agricultural crops, or even the environment, as our habitats don't support the natural predators who would traditionally control such pest populations. Whenever possible, it is important to try and source our plants locally to prevent an unwanted introduction. If sourcing locally is unattainable, checking plant crevices and under leaves to ensure there are no hitchhikers is a good alternative. If you encounter something that you are unsure of, contact the Agricultural Commissioner's Office or UC Master Gardner program.



EARLY DETECTION OF INVASIVE WEEDS WITH iNATURALIST

JOHN BEALL
DEPUTY AG COMMISSIONER
CONSUMER PROTECTION

The invasive weed Stinknet (*Oncosiphon piluliferum* globe chamomile) is a winter annual in the sunflower family several inches to three feet tall with bright yellow globelike flowers. It poses a threat to wildlands, rangelands and agricultural areas and is rapidly spreading in the last decade across Southern California with a concentration on the I-15 Freeway corridor in San Diego and Riverside Counties.

Stinknet can grow densely, carpeting an area and impacting agricultural rangeland, outcompeting native plants in addition to creating a fire hazard.

Currently only a limited number of plants occur in Ventura County so early detection and rapid response to remove the plants detected is critical to limit its spread. Recently, Ventura County Agriculture Weights and Measures (VCAWM) staff found Stinknet in a few locations including a single plant along Pleasant Valley Rd (removed) and in a mulch pile at a nursery. The nursery worked cooperatively with the VCAWM to remove the plants and will continue to monitor and remove new plants from the mulch pile to prevent spread of the plant.

A cooperative early detection rapid response effort is needed to help protect Ventura County agricultural lands, native flora, and wildlife from stinknet and other new invasive weeds. County staff from different departments and the public can use the iNaturalist application to help us detect new or limited range invasive weeds. The iNaturalist application is easy to use and provides a likely identification list of any plant (native-non-native) based upon photos taken and also provides a location. VCAWM regularly review iNaturalist locations for target early detection weeds that appear in iNaturalist and after verifying the ID can take action to eliminate them. VCAWM can provide training to any county department or community group interested in using iNaturalist to help us with early detection or just learn about the wonderful native plants of Ventura County.



FIRST ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATION-TESTED AND SEALED

JOHN BEALL
DEPUTY AG COMMISSIONER
CONSUMER PROTECTION

The rapid expansion of electric vehicle charging stations generates a need for VCAWM to ensure that the Electric Vehicle Charging stations are accurate, the equipment is type evaluated (certified for commercial purposes) and the installed by a licensed registered service agent.

California Department of Agriculture-Division of Measurement Standards (CDFA-DMS) and County Agriculture/Weights and Measures Departments around the state regulate EVCS. All EVCS used for commercial purposes are subject to regulation including being registered and tested by VCAWM.

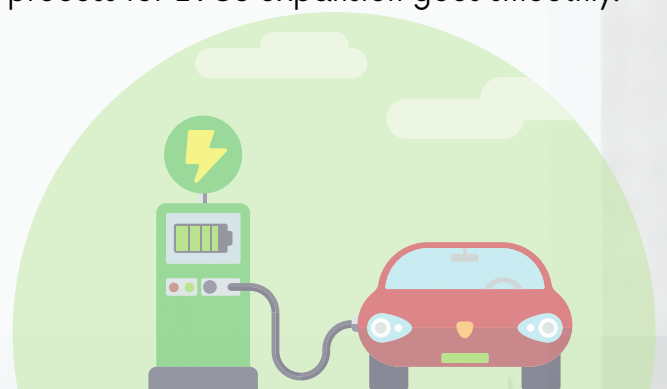
Applications exempt from regulation include;

- 1) EVCS wholly owned and operated by public utilities, public entities, and municipalities.
- 2) EVCS not used for commercial purposes; e.g., EVCS used for residential or workplace charging exclusively used by employees (for free).
- 3) EVCS that dispense electricity as motor fuel at no cost to the consumer.
- 4) EVCS that deliver wholesale electricity.

The diverse types of EVCS devices and ownership/hosts/partnerships require us to spend more time to determine if the responsible party needs to register the device. For more typical Weights and Measures device inspections we check the make and

model of the device to make sure it is type evaluated and talk to someone at the site location to determine ownership and use (commercial or non-commercial). With EVCS's we need to carefully check type evaluation status and research ownership and use because there is likely no one at the device location to talk to. Additionally, the date the device was placed in service is important in determining if an EVCS must be held to specific specifications and tolerances. All AC EVCS placed in service before January 1st, 2021, are exempt until January 1st, 2031. All DC EVCS installed before January 1st 2023 are exempt until January 1st 2033, or until replaced with new EVCS meters.

Currently VCAWM can borrow an EVCS standard from CDFA-DMS to test these devices for accuracy, but expect to purchase our own standard in the next year or so. Unfortunately, we tagged recently installed EVCS because they were not type evaluated for commercial use. We want to make sure anyone that wants to install a commercial EVCS knows the regulations/requirements in advance of purchasing a EVCS device and getting permits for installation. In addition to City and County planning/building departments should include this in your permit checklist to make sure the process for EVCS expansion goes smoothly.



You can refer any questions about EVCS regulations to.

Ventura County Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures.

- 805-654-2444
- <https://www.ventura.org/agricultural-commissioner/weights-and-measures/>

For more information see these links

Registered Service Agent (RSA) portal:
<https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/dms/rsaportal/>

California Type Evaluation Program-CTEP:
<https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/dms/programs/ctep/ctep.html>

National Type Evaluation Program-NTEP: <https://www.ncwm.com/ntep-certificates>

CDFA-Division of Measurement Standards;
<https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/dms/programs/zevfuels/>



**VENTURA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE/WEIGHTS AND MEASURES (VCAWM)
INSPECTOR AUSTIN MACPHERSON TESTED AND SEALED AN ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING
STATION DEVICE FOR THE FIRST TIME.**

WESTERN CELERY MOSAIC HOST- FREE DISTRICT AND PERIOD

GRETA VARIEN
DEPUTY AG COMMISSIONER
PEST MANAGEMENT



CELERY MOSAIC VIRUS - T.A. ZITTER, CORNELL UNIVERSITY



Celery is a prominent crop in Ventura County, continuing to contribute significantly to the region's agricultural landscape. In 2021, the harvested acreage for celery reached 14,342 acres, with a total value of \$113,358,000. This ranked celery as the 6th most valuable crop among the top ten in Ventura County.

However, the cultivation of celery is not without its challenges. One particular concern is the Western Celery Mosaic Virus (CeMV), which poses a threat to the celery crops. CeMV is transmitted by various species of aphids that act as vectors. When these aphids feed on the celery plants, they transfer the virus, rendering the crop unsuitable for consumption. Early infection results in severe stunting of the plants, while the foliage exhibits mosaic patterns and becomes deformed, with cupped leaves.

To combat the spread of CeMV, Ventura County adheres to Title 3, California Code of Regulations Sec. 3610(b), designating it as a Western Celery Mosaic host-free district. The primary objective of this regulation is to control the virus by implementing a host-free period during which celery cultivation is prohibited in designated districts, safeguarding the commercial celery production areas. Unless authorized by a permit from the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) or the Agricultural Commissioner of the respective county, no celery plants or plant parts, other than seeds, may be cultivated or maintained within the Western Celery Mosaic host-free district. This host-free period is strictly observed from July 15 to August 4 each year.

The host-free program primarily benefits local growers of commercial celery and celery transplants. To ensure the effectiveness and integrity of the Western Celery Mosaic Virus host-free program, all celery growers share the responsibility of clearing their fields and ditches of any celery plants before July 15, 2023. During the specified period of July 15 to August 4, no celery, whether commercial or wild, is permitted to be grown within Ventura County. To enforce compliance, our staff will actively survey, map, and conduct eradication efforts to remove any instances of wild celery found in the county. The county also inspects and certifies pest-free green houses so growers can start seeds to be ready for planting when the host-free period ends.

By upholding these regulations and maintaining a vigilant approach to the control of Western Celery Mosaic Virus, we can safeguard the livelihoods of celery growers and ensure the continued success of the celery industry in Ventura County.



SANTA PAULA'S LANDSCAPING PROJECT

GRETA VARIEN
DEPUTY AG COMMISSIONER
PEST MANAGEMENT

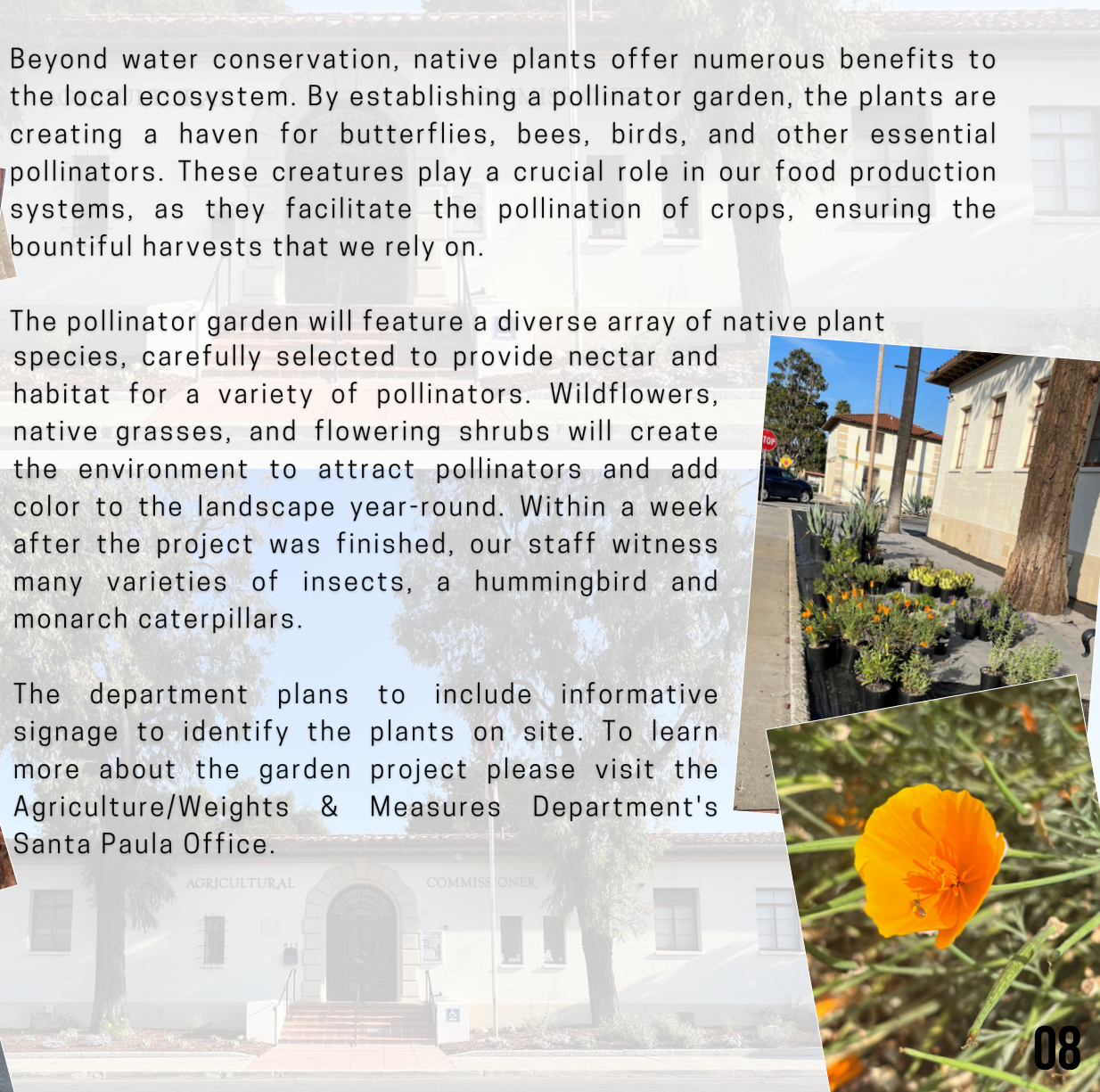
The Ventura County Agriculture/Weights & Measures – Santa Paula Office has recently established a native, drought-resistant, pollinator garden. This project not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the facility but also contributes to the preservation of local ecosystems and supports vital pollinators.

The choice to replace the original landscaping with native plant species was made due to the drought we have experienced in the past few years. Native plants are perfectly adapted to the local climate, requiring less water and maintenance compared to non-native species. Their resilience helps conserve valuable water resources and reduces the need for excessive irrigation, making them an ideal choice for drought-prone regions like California.

Beyond water conservation, native plants offer numerous benefits to the local ecosystem. By establishing a pollinator garden, the plants are creating a haven for butterflies, bees, birds, and other essential pollinators. These creatures play a crucial role in our food production systems, as they facilitate the pollination of crops, ensuring the bountiful harvests that we rely on.

The pollinator garden will feature a diverse array of native plant species, carefully selected to provide nectar and habitat for a variety of pollinators. Wildflowers, native grasses, and flowering shrubs will create the environment to attract pollinators and add color to the landscape year-round. Within a week after the project was finished, our staff witness many varieties of insects, a hummingbird and monarch caterpillars.

The department plans to include informative signage to identify the plants on site. To learn more about the garden project please visit the Agriculture/Weights & Measures Department's Santa Paula Office.



NEW PRIVATE APPLICATOR CATEGORY AVAILABLE

**ANDY CALDERWOOD
DEPUTY AG COMMISSIONER
PESTICIDE USE ENFORCEMENT**

Farmers who want to use fumigants to control burrowing vertebrate pests must, starting January 1st, pass a new exam offered by the Agricultural Commissioner. The exam adds a first-ever special category to the Private Applicator Certificate (PAC): Burrowing Vertebrate Pest Fumigation. Currently, PAC holders are qualified to handle restricted-use pesticides, including fumigants, on property operated by them or their employers. Under new regulations adopted by the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR), general fumigant use will no longer be authorized by the PAC. Anyone wanting to do field fumigation, commodity fumigation or tree-hole fumigation must obtain a commercial license such as the Qualified Applicator Certificate. The only fumigation permitted under the PAC will be burrowing vertebrate pest fumigation, such as the control of ground squirrels or pocket gophers with zinc phosphide or aluminum phosphide, but only by passing the additional special category exam.

The new test is now available and can be taken at either our Santa Paula or Camarillo office. Applicants must first pass the new initial PAC exam released late last year. Study materials for the burrowing vertebrate pest fumigation category are available from our office or from DPR's website. Both the exam and its study guide are currently available only in English, with the Spanish version expected later this year. Study manuals for the new initial exam can be purchased from our office for \$25 or online for a bit more.

Burrowing Vertebrate Pest Fumigation

A Study Manual for Private Applicators

California Environmental Protection Agency
dpr Department of
Pesticide Regulation



ED WILLIAMS

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