



# Central Valley Fiber, Forage and Nut Digest

Winter 2013, Issue #8

## Water Issues, Winter Chores on Tap for Cotton Growers in 2014 by Gilbert Mohtes-Chan

In real estate, the key driver is location, location, location. In farming, it's safe to say its water, water, water.

"There's going to be some tough decisions made on how much cotton acreage is going to be planted," says Dan Munk, a cotton production and water management expert and farm advisor with the University of California Cooperative Extension in Fresno County. Water is going to be a driving issue," adds Dr. Pete Goodell, a cotton specialist at UC Statewide Integrated Pest Management.

Growers and cotton industry officials anticipate cotton acreage dropping again in 2014, especially with the uncertainty over water deliveries from state and federal water projects. Some suggest a 20 percent drop while others believe it could be less, perhaps a 10 percent decrease, mainly because of soft prices for other crops such as corn and good prices for pima cotton, which accounts for almost 70 percent of the San Joaquin Valley's cotton acreage.

In the meantime, Munk and Goodell say there is lots of work to do during the winter months. "Growers should select cotton varieties that are suited to the field conditions," Goodell says.

"This is a good time to evaluate your fields for soil salinity," adds Munk. Growers should be asking if they need to leach their fields, especially in areas that used significant amounts of well water. "It's a good time to do pre-plant irrigation," Munk says. "You'll want to apply more water if salinity is an issue." "Growers should select cotton varieties that are suited to the field conditions," Goodell says. In addition, take a look at your crop rotations with cotton.

UC IPM adds more: Rotate your cotton crop as needed with other field or vegetable crops to maintain soil productivity and reduce the incidence of various cotton pests such as nematodes, *Verticillium* wilt, seedling diseases, pink bollworm and other diseases. Different rotational crops impart different benefits to the soil and therefore to subsequent seasons of cotton production. Some include:

- Pest resistant crops: suppression of various cotton pests
- Cereals: have fibrous root systems that loosen compacted soil
- Legumes (such as alfalfa, beans): add nitrogen to soil
- Grain corn: adds organic matter to soil
- Vegetable crops: contribute high fertilizer carryover



UC IPM offers a wealth of information about what you can do year-round in an integrated pest management program for cotton. You can learn more online at the following link: <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/selectnewpest.cotton.html>

## Now is the Time for Orchard Sanitation by Gilbert Mohtes-Chan

Almond experts can't say it enough: Growers need to knock it off this winter. We're talking about the dreaded mummy nut, which can harbor overwintering navel orangeworm (NOW), and lead to the potential for aflatoxin contamination – a serious economic and human health concern.

The most common mistake growers often make during the winter is being lax on orchard sanitation and taking care of mummy nuts in the trees, according to David Doll, a Merced County UC Cooperative Extension pomology farm advisor specializing in almonds. "They don't sanitize their orchards and that leads to NOW issues later on in the season.

Experts say there should be two or fewer mummy nuts per tree. It's best to count the mummy nuts by January 15 to allow adequate time to reduce the NOW population before bloom.

UC IPM offers these tips for counting mummies:

- Check 20 trees per block.
- If there is an average of two or more mummies per tree, then remove them by shaking or hand poling the entire block.
- Destroy the mummies on the ground by disking or mowing by March 15.

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Doll says growers also should be surveying for wood spinning mites, brown almond mites and do spur sampling for scale. These tasks will determine how much orchard sanitation needs to be done this winter and whether an oil treatment is necessary for pest management.

If there is a scab issue, Doll says growers should consult with a pest control advisor about a dormant application of copper and oil. For those applying a pre-emergent treatment, make sure the berms are clean and the sprays made directly on the ground with nothing laying on top of the soil surface.

These wintertime chores should be done before the rainy season gets into full swing. The rain, Doll says, will make it harder to get into the orchard to prune the trees and shake off those mummy nuts. Indeed, there's no rest after the holidays. "Growers need to keep up their pest management from January to early spring," Doll says.

## **Tackling Weeds in Alfalfa**

by Gilbert Mohtes-Chan

Weeds can present knotty problems for alfalfa growers. If left uncontrolled, weeds can severely reduce yields and impact the quality of the alfalfa, meaning fewer dollars for the harvested crop. Some weeds are less nutritious than alfalfa and less desirable for eating by livestock, according to UC Integrated Pest Management guidelines. Also, tough, fibrous weeds can damage harvesting equipment.

Some growers will use a spring-toothed harrow to uproot weed seedlings during the late winter. But this process could harm alfalfa crowns and delay the first cutting.

Using animals (or sheeping-off) to graze in a field of winter alfalfa can expose the soil and seedling weeds and help reduce the need for chemical control. Growers should let the animals graze until enough forage is removed to approximate a cutting. This practice can maintain plant vigor throughout the winter. At the same time, growers need to avoid overgrazing, which can result in a thin, weedy alfalfa stand.

Just like with a lawn, vigorous growth produces a dense alfalfa stand and will crowd out weeds, lessening the need for treatment. For older, thinning alfalfa stands, UC IPM suggests planting oats or perennial grasses or clovers to boost yields and suppress the weeds without using herbicides. Grasses can be planted in January during alfalfa dormancy.

More information about weed management in established alfalfa is available online at <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/r1700111.html>



## **Visitors Learn ABCs of Cotton Farming**

by Gilbert Mohtes-Chan

Two buses filled with dozens visitors to Fresno County's westside had the rare opportunity to pick cotton, get close up and personal with a harvester, tour a cotton gin and meet face-to-face with farmers during the Sustainable Cotton Project's annual Cotton Tour on October 29.

It was one of the biggest turnouts ever with close to 100 participants, including representatives from the USDA, state water agencies, major fashion brands, upstart fashion design representatives, textile companies, art and design colleges as well as folks just interested in farming and cotton.

The Cotton Tour is unique – there are few, if any, free day-long programs around that are open to the public. Conducted annually for more than a decade, this year's event drew people from across California as well as Oregon, Ohio and Florida.

Throughout the day, participants armed with smart phones, video cameras and 35 mm cameras snapped an endless stream of photos and footage, ranging from shots of sugar bushes populating a westside perennial hedgerow to shots of fluffy cotton bolls. They "oohed" and "aahed" as they inched closer to view the rotating spindles of a cotton harvester.

"It was great. It was really educational," remarked Nina Koske of Fibershed, one of 100 people who attended the all-day tour.

This year, participants learned about federal water allocations – or lack of it– the importance of farming to the Fresno County economy, good bugs and pests, cotton ginning and, of course, cotton growing and harvesting.

"It was great to see the start to finish of California Cleaner Cotton™," Tony Jagoda of San Francisco said, referring to the trademarked cotton grown by farmers enrolled in the SCP program.

## Farming an Avocation for Joe Del Bosque

by Gilbert Mohtes-Chan

Joe Del Bosque will tell you there's never a dull moment in farming.

The San Joaquin Valley farmer should know. He's been around agriculture since the day he was born. Over the years, he has seen equipment change, agricultural practices evolve, workers receive better wages and safety precautions, and new crops introduced.

"Farming is so dynamic. My whole career has been a constant change. You've have to be on the cutting edge all the time to survive," says Del Bosque, who along with his wife, Maria Gloria, operate Del Bosque Farms.



After all these years, Del Bosque remains passionate about farming. And he's more than happy to spread the message about the good work farmers are doing, whether it's leading a tour of his operations, meeting with politicians in Sacramento or Washington D.C., or promoting farm worker safety to his peers. Also active in the California Latino Water Coalition, he was appointed by the Governor to represent area farmers on the California Water Commission.

"Farmers have changed and improved over the years. We have improved our conservation practices, water efficiency and employee conditions, employ more environmentally friendly and people friendly pest control and we are better stewards. Farmers are not given enough recognition in today's world. Very few consumers ever hear this. I always mention these improvements when I speak to people about farming. And I do that a lot," says Del Bosque, who has enrolled cotton, alfalfa and almonds in the San Joaquin Sustainable Farming Project, a program of the Sustainable Cotton Project.

Del Bosque was born in the Imperial Valley, where his father Jose emigrated from Mexico in the 1920s to work in the fields. In 1953, the family moved to Firebaugh after his father earned a job as a farm manager at a local melon farm. My father thought "that a man should always have to work – work harder and better than anybody else."

Originally, Del Bosque had other career aspirations: He entered Fresno State as a pre-dental student but later took a four-year break to help his father with his trucking operations. Del Bosque eventually returned to college, switched majors and earned degree in agriculture in 1975. After graduating, he worked 10 years with his father's operation. But he yearned to start his own farm. With little money and no equipment, Del Bosque had to get creative.

His first year, he borrowed equipment from fellow farmers and rented a tractor. His goal was to grow his own melons. His wife, who worked in the fields herself before they were married, helped in the operation. "My goal was to be a melon packer and grower," he said. Proceeds from the cotton he grew helped him achieve his goal and the melon operations helped finance other crops – asparagus in 1999 and almonds in 2000. Today, he farms about 2,000 acres of crops annually.

An advocate for Latinos, Del Bosque doesn't forget his family farm roots. "I have known forever how important farm workers are. They are a vital part of my business. We should value our farm workers more. It's very important to me being able to work in a fair and safe environment. We should be more responsible not only to our workers, but to our environment, as well."

An early adopter, Del Bosque utilized 80-inch melon beds and drip irrigation before many of his peers and also joined up with the Sustainable Cotton Project who helped him when he started his organic farming program. "I was very interested in the program. I have a great deal of respect for their science-based way of thinking and their integrated management approach. They bring a great deal of knowledge to this business," he says.

Del Bosque is a firm believer that implementing innovative and new practices are essential for growers to survive the increasing challenges in farming – whether its economics or pest management.

*For the full version of this article please visit our website: <http://sustainablecotton.org/links>*

## Letter from the Director:

As we close out 2013, SCP would like to take this opportunity to thank our enrolled alfalfa, almond and cotton growers for their participation in the San Joaquin Sustainable Farming Project (SJSFP).

We also want to thank the crop experts from the University of California Cooperative Extension and UC Integrated Pest Management for their support of our project activities. With their technical expertise, our field days, blogs and newsletters have provided area growers with up-to-the-minute information about pests and practices, ensuring that growers save money and maximize profits.

The SJSFP is starting to enroll farmers for 2014 and welcome new growers of alfalfa, almonds and cotton to join with us in supporting sustainable farming practices that protect both the health of our watersheds and rural communities.

We look forward to another productive year and to highlighting the stewardship and innovations of California's farmers. If you would like more information on enrolling, contact Marcia Gibbs, Director at (530) 370-5325 or [marcia@sustainablecotton.org](mailto:marcia@sustainablecotton.org).

We wish you all the best this holiday season.

### You can find us online at the following:

**WEBSITE:** [www.sustainablecotton.org](http://www.sustainablecotton.org)

**FIELD DAY VIDEOS:** <http://www.sustainablecotton.org/videos>

**FACEBOOK:** <https://www.facebook.com/sustainable.farmingproject> **BLOG:** <http://centralvalleyfarmscout.blogspot.com/>

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