



# Central Valley Fiber, Forage and Nut Digest

Winter 2014, Issue #10

## Program Recap: Expanding Opportunities for Growers and Our Local Economy

As we welcome a New Year, I want to take a moment to reflect on the past 12 months – a year filled with both unprecedented challenges and opportunities for farmers across the Valley.

Of course, the drought posed enormous challenges for all our growers. It also created opportunities for growers to come together and explore innovative ideas about water and crop management during the drought.

The drought also provided a forum for one of our program's farmers, Joe Del Bosque, to lead President Obama and Governor Brown on a guided tour of his operation in February and talk about the impact of the drought on California agriculture.

The Sustainable Cotton Project and San Joaquin Sustainable Farming Program reached several milestones in 2014 as well.

We experienced record turnouts at our field days. Our annual Cotton Farm Tour had another strong turnout. And our Cleaner Cotton™ achieved a marketing breakthrough with a major retailer.

Indeed, Bay Area-based adventure wear retailer, The North Face, launched its Backyard Hoodie this fall, made with our growers' Cleaner Cotton™ blended with Sally Fox's colored Fox Fibre. The 48-year-old retailer, a division of the world's largest apparel maker (Vanity Fair), believes in the 'buy local' philosophy and produced a limited edition hoodie made with fiber within 150 miles of its Alameda headquarters and sewn by facilities in the San Francisco region. To see a great video about the making of this garment, visit [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search 'North Face Backyard Hoodie'

These achievements result from the continued support and contributions from our funders and our farmers, farm advisors and specialists from the University of California and other partners. We will continue to encourage implementation of best management practices, which promote environmental health and economic profitability. Keeping valuable land in farming and growing local food and fiber will maintain jobs and supply needed income for local economies. *(continued on next page)*



President Obama and California Governor Jerry Brown visit the farm of SJSFP grower Joe Del Bosque and his wife Maria to discuss the drought.



Long-time SJSFP growers Gary and Mari Martin (left) with James Rogers, Sustainability Manager for The North Face (right)

This is why we exist. Our reward comes from comments like this from one local grower:

“As a new farmer I have used all of SJSFP’s information and it has been extremely informative. The many different levels of experience the individuals in the program possess has been a great help. I also frequently watch their YouTube videos.” These videos recap field day talks and provide the latest crop information from UC and other specialists, and they can be found on our website (<http://www.sustainablecotton.org/videos>).

In October, we held our final almond field day of the year. More than 70 growers and PCAs attended – the largest gathering yet for a field day. We had media coverage from AgNetWest.com. The same month we hosted 40 design students and faculty members from Otis College in Los Angeles for a cotton farm tour. A week later, more than 80 fashion and textile industry representatives attended our annual Cotton Tour to get a unique, first-hand look at cotton production.

It’s heartwarming and rewarding to work with a unique group of innovative growers dedicated to sustaining Central Valley agriculture for future generations. We look forward to continuing our work with more alfalfa, almond and cotton growers in San Joaquin Valley.

**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/>



*The solar-powered irrigation pumping system array on Gary and Mari Martin’s farm.*

## **Family Farm Innovates to Stay Ahead of the Economic Curve**

**by Gilbert Mohtes-Chan**

On a sun-drenched fall morning, Gary Martin sat atop a giant piece of harvesting equipment that resembled a supersized steel dumpster.

He steadily worked the controls as the machine compressed freshly picked cotton fiber into a rectangular module resembling a giant loaf of white bread. The long-time farmer then climbed down the module builder to greet a throng of awed visitors – many of whom were getting a first-hand look at cotton being harvested.

Like a teacher dressed in blue-green coveralls, Martin explained the ins and outs of cotton harvesting to his eager audience. He pointed to a harvester working the field and a cotton buggy unloading the fiber into the module builder.

“There is so much going on,” one visitor remarks. “Everyone is so gracious to let us interrupt their production.”

That’s nothing new for Gary Martin and his wife, Mari. *(continued on the next page)*

The third-generation farmers from Pikalok Farming in Firebaugh have been long-time advocates for California and U.S. cotton, regularly hosting visitors eager to learn about cotton production. They have produced slide shows about cotton harvesting. They’ll pause busy cotton harvesters in the field to let folks snap photos of the rotating spindles.

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“When I was a boy U.S. farmers grew cotton that went into U.S.-made goods. We want to see products grown and sewn in the U.S. like it used to be,” Martin explains. “We’d like to see our local communities healthy and productive.”

For more than a decade, the Martins have been involved with the Sustainable Cotton Project, growing Cleaner Cotton™ to demonstrate an environmentally friendly way to produce the fiber. “Cleaner Cotton™ is practical and we apply what we learn through growing Cleaner Cotton™ to other crops,” Martin says. Growers participating in the Sustainable Cotton Project’s Cleaner Cotton™ program avoid using 13 most toxic chemicals used in conventional cotton production.

To the Martins, innovation is part of the family heritage.

By installing the first large horsepower solar-powered irrigation pumping system, their farm produces enough electricity to power a farm shop and the main residence. The 108-by-30 foot solar array atop a parking structure definitely catches the eye.

In the fields, they strip cut alfalfa to prevent pests from migrating to nearby cotton fields. Their conservation tillage practice has cut cultivation costs in half by reducing tractor time, showing that farmers can contribute to helping slow climate change.

Martin points out that small, family farmers need to be nimble and innovative to survive in today’s tough economic climate – whether it’s an unprecedented drought or increasingly tough environmental regulations.

“Our goal is to keep our family land sustainable for the fourth and future generations,” Martin explained in an interview with the Western Farm Press a few years ago. “We’re always looking for new ways. As stewards of the land, we feel we need to use the best management practices possible.”

## Winter Tasks for Alfalfa and Almond Growers by Gilbert Mohtes-Chan

Growers enrolled in our San Joaquin Sustainable Farming project work with our project field scouts and are advised by UC IPM experts to complete the following tasks during the winter to ensure a healthy start to their alfalfa and almond seasons in the spring.

To get your **Alfalfa** crop off to a good start in 2015, growers should be doing three main things through the end of January, according to UC IPM. More information can be found on the UC IPM Alfalfa website:

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/selectnewpest.alfalfa-hay.html>

- Take a survey of winter weeds and record that information for the future.
- Map out a weed management strategy using records from last year’s weed population. You should look at overseeding with grasses or legumes from the last year of the stand, grazing or cultivating with a spring-toothed harrow or applying herbicides.
- Start sampling for cowpea aphids in late February.
- Monitor for weevils. You can use a sweep net or look for signs of damage such as chewed leaves.
- Check for signs of vertebrates.

**Almond** growers need to start the New Year off with a final checklist of winter chores. It won’t be too long before the buds will start to swell – usually in early February.

UCCE Fresno County farm advisor Gurreet Brar says there are some key activities growers need to be doing during the dormant season. See UC IPM Almond website for more information.

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/selectnewpest.almonds.html>

- Counting the mummy nuts in the orchard. You do this by examining 20 trees per block.
- If there are two or more mummies per tree, growers need to remove or knock off mummy nuts. Be sure to shred these mummies to ensure they don’t survive the winter. Remember, mummies can become a safe harbor for overwintering navel orangeworm larvae.
- Treat the tree rows for weeds.
- Let cover crops grow and mow them before bloom. Perform spur sampling for scale, scab and mites.

## Top UC Farm Advisors, Specialists Just a Call Away

Our field days brought many leading University of California agricultural experts directly to farmers throughout the year.

However, you don't have to wait for the next field day to tap into vast expertise and experience of UC farm advisors and specialists in the almond, cotton and alfalfa arena. They are just an email or telephone call away. Here are some of the experts:

Gurreet Brar, UCCE Fresno/Madera County nut crop pomologist, specializes in almond, pistachio and walnut crops. Telephone in Fresno: (559) 600-7218.

On Tuesdays, he can be contacted at UCCE Madera office: (559) 675-7879 Ext. 7209. Email: gurbrar@ucanr.edu

David Doll, UC Cooperative Extension farm advisor and pomologist in Merced County. As a disease expert in almonds, he is well known for providing timely and pertinent information about what is occurring in the orchards.

Telephone: (209) 385-7403, Email: dadoll@ucanr.edu

Dr. Pete Goodell has worked nearly four decades in the Central Valley first as a pest control advisor and later as an Integrated Pest Management specialist and administrator for UC IPM. He brings expertise in cotton and alfalfa.

Telephone: (559) 646-6515, Email: pbgoodell@ucanr.edu

Dan Munk, a farm advisor with the UCCE, Fresno, is a soil scientist who specializes in cotton production systems, irrigation, soil quality and tillage. He provides expertise to almond and cotton growers about water use and irrigation.

Telephone: (559) 241-7521, Email: dsmunk@ucanr.edu

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