

Riverside County AGRICULTURE

The official publication of Riverside County Farm Bureau, Inc.
A private, nonprofit organization serving farmers throughout Riverside County since 1917

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Welcome New Members

We would like to "Thank You" for becoming part of the Farm Bureau Family.



**Riverside County Sheriff's Agriculture Team (AG Team)
Owner Applied Number**

Marking your equipment

Why mark equipment? Marking leads to recovery of stolen property.

With the recent increase in Agricultural thefts, it is important that you get your farm machinery, equipment and even household goods stamped with an Owner Applied Number (OAN). If you mark it the sheriffs have a better chance to recover it if it gets stolen.

The OAN is a unique number used to protect and identify equipment, tools, vehicles and other valuable items from a ranch, farm, dairy, winery, or any other agriculture related business. It is a 10-digit number that represents an individual agriculture business. Each business will be assigned their own unique OAN that can be imprinted on their equipment.

The program is supported by numerous organizations and agencies including: the California Rural Crime Prevention Task Force, the California Highway Patrol, California Farm Bureau, United Agri-Business League, and California State Grange.

This FBI established system allows state and county to be assigned a number, which is recorded in the NCIC (National Crime Information Center). A directory containing these numbers is available to each law enforcement agency for use in identifying the various state and counties.

It has been proven that thieves are hesitant to take items that can be readily identified. Placing signs, decals, and other visible information warning potential thieves that this equipment has been marked and registered with the local law enforcement officials my help to prevent a possible theft.

The Sheriff's Ag Team is happy to facilitate getting your OAN assigned to you and they are currently able to stamp it on a wide range of materials. This program is free to help combat agricultural theft. If you are interested in getting your own OAN, please call the Riverside County Farm Bureau at (951) 684-6732 and we will forward your information to the Riverside County Sheriff's Department.

LEGISLATIVE SPOTLIGHT

SB-505, authored by Senator Susan Rubio (D-Baldwin Park) and sponsored by the California Farm Bureau, passed from the Assembly Committee on Insurance as a Consent Calendar item earning automatic unanimous and bipartisan support without any opposition. As discussed previously, the bill expands an existing clearinghouse program in the FAIR Plan to include commercial property insurance policies that admitted market insurers might pursue back in the competitive market. The clearinghouse serves as a relief valve for the FAIR Plan to move appropriate policies back to the admitted market. Until SB 505, the clearinghouse has been limited to residential policies. The bill moves next to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

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Date palm irrigation research provides economic, environmental benefits

Historically, date palms are grown along riverbeds or in areas with groundwater because they require an abundance of water to produce a good crop. Unlike lettuce or table grapes, date palms are deceptive in that they do not immediately wilt if underwatered. Eventually, however, the lack of water hurts yields and fruit quality.

The default for date growers is to apply excessive water, but doing so is neither economically nor environmentally sound. To help growers, Ali Montazar, UC Cooperative Extension irrigation and water management advisor for Imperial, Riverside and San Diego counties, has developed knowledge that enables growers in the region to establish irrigation guidelines they can use with confidence.

"Water issues in California's desert are very different than in the Central Valley," said Montazar. "There is no groundwater to recharge so growers in the desert only have the Colorado River."

Since 2019, Montazar has been focused on irrigation management for date palms in the Coachella Valley, the largest producer of dates in the United States. Montazar's research identifies how much water is needed for the crop and the best water delivery method according to location, soil type and conditions, and date cultivars.

"Dates require a lot of heat and light, which is why they do well in the desert. But they also need a fair amount of irrigation," said Robert Krueger, a U.S. Department of Agriculture horticulturist and Montazar's co-author of a paper on date palm irrigation management.

Much of what we know about date palm production comes from the Middle East, which has a climate similar to the low desert of California. "That information is from many, many years ago though," explained Montazar, whose research shows that drip irrigation cannot be the only form of irrigation for date palms.

"Ali is the first to really look at micro-sprinklers and flood irrigation for date palms," said Krueger, adding that the other advantage of Montazar's research is that it prepares growers for production during times of reduced water supply.

Albert Keck, president of Hadley Date Gardens, Inc. and chairman of the California Date Commission, described Montazar's research efforts as "subtle yet incredible and profound," adding that his findings not only benefit other farmers but also cities relying on water from the Colorado River.

Keck, one of the largest date growers in California, is well aware of how disruptive, expensive and time-consuming irrigation for date palms can be. Montazar has enabled growers like Keck to irrigate less without sacrificing yield or quality.

"Ali might save us a tiny percentage of the amount of water we're using. It might be a 5 or 10% savings. It doesn't seem like much, but it's an incremental improvement in efficiency," said Keck. "And if you add all of these improvements up, say, along the U.S. Southwest, then that has a pretty profound impact."

Montazar recommends that date growers in his region use a combination of drip and two to three flood irrigation events to manage salinity levels derived from the Colorado River. "We cannot maintain salinity issues over time if we're only relying on drip irrigation in date palms," explained Montazar.

Flood irrigation pushes the salts below the root zone, when they would otherwise build up within the root zone preventing efficient water uptake. It also aids in refilling soil profiles quickly and more effectively since drip has a lower capacity of delivering sufficient water.

"Growers know what they need to water their crop within a broader parameter. But Ali has narrowed that window and helped us become more precise with our irrigation," Keck said. "There's still room for improvement but we're spending less money, wasting less time and using less water now, and we're still getting the same positive results."

Currently, Montazar is collaborating with the California Date Commission on developing guidelines for best irrigation management practices in the desert for date palms, which should be available by the end of 2023. These guidelines are based on a four-year data set from six monitoring stations and extensive soil and plant samples from commercial fields located in the Coachella Valley, Imperial Valley and near Yuma, Arizona. Additionally, Montazar is working to quantify how water conservation impacts growers economically.

"Growers from United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Tunisia and Mexico have already reached out asking for this information," Montazar said, while reflecting on a presentation he made to a group of international date growers in Mexico late last year.

To read the paper on date palm irrigation, published in MDPI's Water journal, visit: <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4441/12/8/2253>.

UC Agriculture and Natural Resources brings the power of UC to all 58 California counties. Through research and Cooperative Extension in agriculture, natural resources, nutrition, economic and youth development, our mission is to improve the lives of all Californians. Learn more at ucanr.edu and support our work at donate.ucanr.edu.

Reimbursing Employees for Use of Personal Mobile Devices

Ag employers in California should be aware they must reimburse employees for necessary expenses they experience in the course of their employment per Labor Code section 2802:

An employer shall indemnify his or her employee for all necessary expenditures or losses incurred by the employee in direct consequence of the discharge of his or her duties, or of his or her obedience to the directions of the employer, even though unlawful, unless the employee, at the time of obeying the directions, believed them to be unlawful.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a high-profile shift from daily workplace attendance to working at home in certain fields, particularly journalism, which lends itself to working more at home than some other jobs—like agriculture, of course! That fact has drawn scrutiny to requirements to reimburse employees for fixed cost items like internet service plans, and to what extent employers must reimburse employees for some portion of the cost of a fixed-price internet plan.

The fact that agriculture largely continued to be performed onsite throughout the pandemic does not mean this heightened scrutiny will not impact ag employers, because the same principle applies to mobile phone usage and data plans.

In California, even when employees do not incur additional expenses associated with business use of a mobile phone or data on an employee's fixed-price plan, employers still must reimburse their employees for a reasonable percentage of that expense. The duty to reimburse employees for a portion of their personal data plan charges exists when the employees have no practical alternative to using their personal resources for business purposes, even if the employer does not maintain a policy specifically mandating the use of the personal resources or devices.

Although California courts have not defined “reasonable percentage,” employers must reimburse employees for all expenses incurred for business purposes. Where an employee is paying a fixed amount for mobile phone usage or data, the employer must reimburse the employee for the percentage of that cost that can be attributed to the employee's mandatory use of the Internet and/or a mobile phone for work-related purposes. Alternatively, employers may provide employees with company mobile phones and/or devices providing unlimited access.

To fulfill their duty to reimburse employees for mobile phone and/or internet expenses they incur in the course of performing their duties, employers can pay either the employee's actual costs as reflected on an invoice or a flat amount sufficient to cover the portion of the employee's costs attributable to business use. Employers electing to pay a flat reimbursement amount should confirm in writing that employees who believe their business use exceeds the default reimbursement amount may request payment in a higher amount to correspond to their actual business use.

An employer failing to reimburse its employees for the necessary business expenses that employees incur in connection with the discharge of their job duties can face a lawsuit. If successful, the plaintiff employee can recover all reasonable costs, including attorney's fees, incurred by the employee in enforcing the employee's rights, which can be significant. In addition, an employer failing to pay its employees for necessary business expenses on a company-wide basis could face a class action or a claim under the Private Attorneys General Act (PAGA), or both.

What Should Employers Do Now?

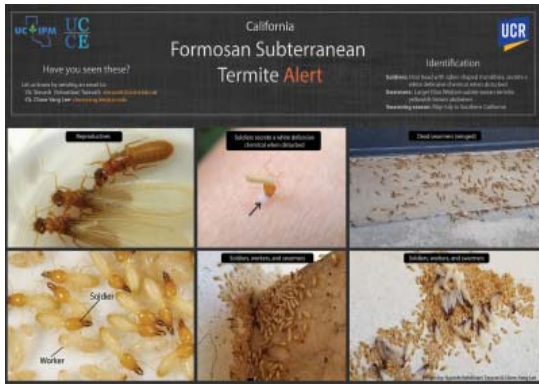
- Employers in California should review their expense reimbursement practices and update them as necessary. Given the reality that many employees must use their personal mobile phone and data connections to perform their jobs, employers in California should review their expense reimbursement practices to ensure they are reimbursing employees for all expenses they incur in connection with the discharge of their duties.

- They should also review the job functions of remote employees. In addition to mobile phone and data usage, employers should review the job duties of all employees to ensure no additional necessary business expenses are being incurred that are not being reimbursed.

Remember, FELS is here to help! Please call us at 800-753-9073 or info@fels.net.

Cooperative Extension advisor, UC experts tackle 'nightmare' termite

During summer swarming season, homeowners in southern and central California urged to check for signs of Formosan subterranean termite



In the lottery of troublesome termite infestations, "Roger," a Rancho Santa Fe homeowner, hit the jackpot (a pseudonym is used to protect his privacy). In 2021, his house in San Diego County was identified as home to only the fourth documented colony of the Formosan subterranean termite (*Coptotermes formosanus*) in California.

"FST is one of the most destructive urban pests in the world," said University of California, Riverside entomologist Chow-Yang Lee, affiliated with UC Agriculture and Natural Resources through the campus' Agricultural Experiment Station. "It's also the only termite species listed in the '100 of the World's Worst Invasive Alien Species.'"

Endemic to East Asia, this termite is now established in many tropical and subtropical regions, including across the American South. Annually, its infestation costs more than \$4 billion in control measures and damage repairs of structures in the U.S.

FST was first discovered in California in La Mesa (San Diego County) in 1992, and it was rediscovered in that city in 2018. Another infestation was reported in Canyon Lake (Riverside County) in 2020. And then, the following year, Roger received his surprise.

"Imagine being in your kitchen looking at your drywall and it's totally normal and then the next day there's a four-inch hole there and you're like 'What the heck is that? Who put their elbow into the drywall?'" he recalled.

FST colonies can reach millions of individuals

Roger hired a pest control company, Green Flash Pest Control, which sprayed a powerful liquid termiticide in the soil around the house. But the termites – workers, soldiers and winged "alates" – continued to appear. The company tried a second application of soil treatment. But, again, the termites kept popping up.

"We were deeply concerned about the potential damage these termites could cause to the home since these invasive termites are extremely destructive," said Eric Veronick, director of operations at Green Flash. "Unfortunately, there isn't a whole lot of information available on the behavior and management of this termite in California."

The company called upon Siavash Taravati, a UC Cooperative Extension urban Integrated Pest Management (IPM) advisor based in Riverside.

"Some colonies are aerial, meaning that they are formed above the ground with limited or no connection to the soil – in such cases, soil treatment using contact insecticides may not be very effective in managing these termites," Taravati said. "Furthermore, contact insecticides usually kill a much smaller portion of the colony when compared to termite baits."

To make matters worse, once FST is established in an area, there have been no records of successful eradication anywhere in the world, according to Taravati. He added that a major reason why the Formosan subterranean termite is so destructive is the enormous size of their colonies.

"Their colonies can reach millions of individuals, versus most native subterranean species that reach a few hundred thousand individual termites per colony," Taravati explained.

This termite, through its sheer numbers, can turn the wood in a structure into a "spongy kind of cake," **CONT. ON PAGE 6.....**



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....**CONT. FROM PAGE 5.** in Taravati's words. More than 10 pounds of wood in a house can be eaten by a mature colony each month. The financial hit for a homeowner can be substantial, up to tens of thousands of dollars – not to mention the increased risks to safety.

"Anything from studs to rafters to door frames and window frames – everything is going to be compromised, if the termites are left unchecked. And then, as soon as we have a major stress on the building, let's say there's a big storm or an earthquake – there's a high risk of at least part of the building collapsing," said Taravati, who also noted that, unlike California native subterranean termite species, FST can attack and kill live trees and plants. "These termites can be a nightmare," he said.

Summer is 'swarming season' for FST

Since the Rancho Santa Fe case in 2021, four more colonies have been documented, in La Mesa again and also in Highland Park, Hollywood Hills and La Verne (the latter three in Los Angeles County). Taravati said it's possible that FST has been spreading via structural lumber or potted plants and soil.

And even if a colony appears to be eliminated at a certain locale, Taravati noted, there is always the chance that part of the colony survives or more colonies of termites already have been established in nearby locations, as a result of swarming termites from the originally infested property.

Although nominally "subterranean," certain members of an FST colony grow wings and fly to nearby locations to establish new colonies. These winged alates are also called swarmers because of their behavior during the "swarming" season, when termites mate and reproduce.

For the Formosan subterranean termite, that swarming season in California is late May through early August, so now is the time for homeowners and building managers in southern and central California to keep an eye out for those winged termites.

"If you experience a termite swarm in your house, contact a pest management professional and keep some termite samples in a Ziploc bag in the event you need to send the samples to UC Riverside for morphological and DNA-based identifications," said Lee, who added that it's a good idea to periodically check your structure for signs of infestation, such as wood damage or shelter tubes (mud tubes).

Lee said FST swarmers have a lighter colored body compared to the dark color of native subterranean termites and the orange-brown body of drywood termite swarmers.

Following an especially wet winter, there's a chance California could see more FST infestations, as this termite generally requires moist environments to thrive, Lee added. He recommends that concerned community members seek professional advice.

"Do not attempt to control an FST infestation by yourself," Lee said. "This is not your typical native Californian subterranean termite species; they are highly destructive, and you want to intercept the problem with the right strategy before it's too late."

Homeowner: 'I owe them my house'

In Roger's case, Taravati enlisted the help of Lee and his UC colleague, Greg Kund. They made multiple visits to inspect the home and analyze the situation – going "above and beyond," according to Roger.

At Lee's suggestion, they used a caulk gun to insert a gel-like experimental bait into the wall where the termites were coming out. Once spread and passed on to the other nestmates, the product – which contains a chitin synthesis inhibitor (a type of insect growth regulator) – interrupts the termites' development so they are unable to properly molt and replace the short-lived "workforce" of foragers and soldiers. The colony eventually collapses and is eliminated.

"Generally speaking, IGRs are much more effective, but they require more patience," Taravati explained. "You're not going to see the results the next day, or two-three days. You're going to see the results in a few weeks – but when you see the results, it's massive."

And that's exactly what Roger and Green Flash Pest Control saw.

"Soon after their bait application, the termites stopped emerging from the walls and that gave us and the homeowner a big sigh of relief," Veronick said. "I appreciate their expertise and dedication in helping us get rid of this destructive pest."

Roger said he is immensely grateful to the UC team.

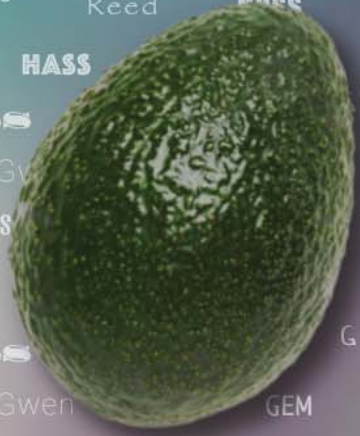
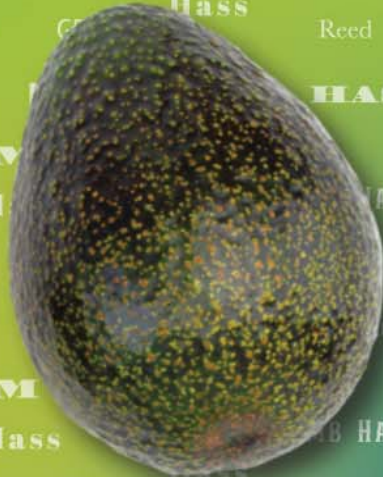
"They were fantastic; I owe them my house," he said. "They were super gracious and helpful and responsive and – ultimately, the thing I care most about – they were effective; they fixed the problem. Here we are two years later and – knock on wood, or maybe I should knock on something else! – everything is good."

Lee also credited Taravati for bringing his knowledge and "can-do" attitude to communities across Southern California.

"He is highly knowledgeable and always able to come up with feasible solutions," Lee said. "We need good Cooperative Extension urban IPM advisors like Siavash who could provide good advice and bring solutions to the stakeholders, be they homeowners or pest management professionals."

Taravati said community members need to maintain their vigilance and urges them to download and share the FST flyer that includes identification tips and contact information. He said they are always free to e-mail him with their concerns and photos of suspected FST – not only to help stop the spread of the pest but to expand scientific understanding.

"This termite is so new to California – even for us, as researchers. Despite being in La Mesa since the 1990s, it wasn't until 2020 when these termites were detected in other places, including Riverside and Los Angeles counties," Taravati explained. "All of us need to learn more about this pest and closely monitor the behavior of this pest."



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS



There will be no Board of Directors meeting in July and August 2023. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 13, 2023.

Food and Farm News

Courtesy of CFBF

California avocado growers grapple with increasing competition

A cold spring coupled with increased imports and a persistent labor shortage has challenged California avocado growers, as many have kept fruit hanging on trees for months in search of a market opportunity. Terry Splane, vice president of marketing for the California Avocado Commission, said an oversupply drove down the prices offered by retailers and packinghouses. As a result, he said, “growers have been hanging on, trying to keep the fruit on the trees until prices rebound.” Pricing has dipped as a result of increased global production.

Phase out of diesel trucks worries compost dealers

New trucking rules may make deliveries of compost harder in the future, with major impacts for agriculture, particularly small organic farms. Compost is essential to organic farming. As California moves towards emission-free trucking, with bans on sales of new diesel trucks by 2036 and requirements for mostly zero-emission fleets by 2042, that will drive up costs of heavy cargos such as compost, operators say. Truck batteries, weighing up to 16,000 pounds, will significantly reduce shipping capacity. That will add to the primary cost of compost—transportation.

State agrees to extension for sale of pork that fails to comply with Proposition 12

The California Department of Food and Agriculture has agreed to a six-month extension to allow retailers to continue selling pork products that don't comply with animal housing rules of California's Proposition 12. The extension resulted from a lawsuit from grocery and restaurant owners that sought postponement of some provisions of the initiative passed by voters in 2018. On June 16, the Sacramento County Superior Court approved a stipulated agreement to allow noncompliant whole pork meat that is already in the commercial supply chain to be sold through Dec. 31.

We're hitting the Farm to Fork Capital! Join us in Sacramento for the California Agriculture in the Classroom Conference.

Our conference is designed for K-12 educators, administrators, and volunteers to come together to learn and exchange ideas on effectively integrating food and fiber into every facet of the curriculum.

Don't miss this opportunity to collaborate with educators who share your passion for agriculture. Join us for the Farm-to-Fork Festival, a Western BBQ, speakers, hands-on activities and more!

We have opportunities for Workshop and Make 'N' Take presenters, see registration link below for more information.

<https://learnaboutag.org/programs/conference/>

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