Leadership Farm Bureau 2015

Together we Grow
Together we Grow
“If we’re growing, we’re always going to be out of our comfort zone.”

–John C. Maxwell
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LFB: The power of growth

By Lindsey Liebig, LFB Program Director

California’s agricultural industry is dependent on growth—whether that is the growth of individual crops, the growth of planted acreage or herd size, or the growth of its political relevancy. Farm Bureau is no different, as we depend on the growth of our membership, county Farm Bureaus and volunteer leaders to propel us forward.

The California Farm Bureau Leadership Farm Bureau program provides the ideal environment for selected participants to grow in both personal and professional capacities. LFB offers the opportunity for emerging leaders to experience all facets of the organization—from membership to advocacy—and encourages their personal growth in communication and outreach efforts, among others. LFB produces leaders who are well-rounded in all phases of leadership and able to effectively communicate with those who may not understand the significance of agriculture in our daily lives.

LFB is a constantly evolving program that began in 2000 as a way to develop leaders from within our own Farm Bureau family. Since then, more than 160 LFB graduates have taken time from their individual agendas, jobs and families to work as a group on media training, team building, public speaking and business etiquette. They have lobbied for agriculture at the state and national levels and toured California, other states and Mexico, learning about agricultural issues and practices. The personal sacrifices they have made to be away from farm and family are far outweighed by the lifetime of friendships and personal growth they have gained. In short, they have been provided an opportunity to grow and they took it upon themselves to cultivate an abundance of new skills.

LFB alumni have gone on to become outstanding presidents and executive board members of state and county Farm Bureaus, commodity and industry associations, and local school and irrigation districts. If you are fortunate enough to have one of these graduates in your community, you’ve seen the many benefits of the LFB program.

Are you willing to take the challenge and see how you can grow? Fill out an application today (www.cfbf.com/lfb) or ask an LFB member about signing up.

Congratulations to the class of 2015!
Heidi Braziel
SACRAMENTO COUNTY
Heidi Braziel is an insurance agent for SSR Insurance Services. Previously, she served as the program coordinator for the Sacramento County Farm Bureau, where her role comprised membership coordination, planning programs including farm safety seminars and working with the Young Farmers and Ranchers program. She also manages a small hay operation with her husband. Prior to her employment with the Farm Bureau, Heidi worked as a Sacramento County deputy sheriff.

Adam Boles
GLENN COUNTY
Adam Boles has built a career in agriculture producing rice and row crops in the Northern Sacramento Valley. After obtaining a degree in agriculture business from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, he earned his way into the family business. Along with his family, Adam operates a small trucking fleet that serves agricultural clients throughout Northern California. He currently is the 2nd vice president of the Glenn County Farm Bureau.

Natalie Collins
SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY
Natalie Collins is a program director for the San Joaquin Farm Bureau Federation, focusing her efforts on agricultural education. She received her bachelor’s degree in agricultural business from California State University, Chico, as well as a double minor in organizational communications and business administration. Natalie is an active member of San Joaquin County Young Farmers and Ranchers and Young Professionals of Lodi.

Mary Lou Coffelt
SAN BENITO COUNTY
Mary Lou Coffelt is co-owner/operator of Rafter Cross Cattle Co., a family-owned commercial cow/calf and stocker operation in San Benito and Santa Clara counties. She attended California State University, Fresno, earning her degree in animal science. Mary Lou is the program director for San Benito County Farm Bureau’s Ag in the Classroom, working to educate children and adult community members about agriculture.
John Guthrie

TULARE COUNTY

John Guthrie is a sixth-generation farmer and rancher from Tulare County. He is a managing partner in Guthrie Ranches, growing almonds, citrus, walnuts and row crops. With his family, John also operates a cattle ranch consisting of cow/calf and stocker cattle. John currently serves on the board of directors of the Tulare County Farm Bureau and has served on the board of the Porterville Historical Museum.

Ritta Martin

GLENN COUNTY

Ritta Martin works for the Glenn County Resource Conservation District, assisting farmers and ranchers in meeting water quality requirements. Additionally, as a sixth-generation rancher, Ritta and her husband own and manage a herd of Boer goats and assist with the daily operations of her family’s commercial beef and sheep ranch. Ritta is a director of the Glenn County Farm Bureau and active member of its Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee.

Nick Ferrari

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY

Nick Ferrari was raised on his family's walnut farm in Linden. After graduating with his bachelor’s degree in finance from Santa Clara University, he returned to join the family business. Nick, his father and his brother grow, harvest, hull and dehydrate walnuts, as well as grow their own trees in a nursery. Nick has been an active member of San Joaquin County Young Farmers and Ranchers and is the current treasurer. He also serves on the board of directors of the San Joaquin Farm Bureau Federation.

John Moore III

KERN COUNTY

John Moore III is a fourth-generation farmer in Bakersfield with a deep passion for agricultural production, policy and philanthropy. After graduating from Texas Christian University, he came back to work in his family's farming business. He also began his own operation of J3 Agriculture, growing potatoes for Frito-Lay. John currently serves as 2nd vice president of the Kern County Farm Bureau.

Breanne Ramos

MERCED COUNTY

Breanne Ramos is a graduate of California State University, Chico, with a degree in agriculture business. A native of Turlock, Breanne moved back to the Central Valley to work on behalf of agricultural commodities including processing tomatoes, vegetable seeds and winegrapes. She now works for the Merced County Farm Bureau as a project specialist and is contracted by the East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition.
The introductory session of the 2015 Leadership Farm Bureau class convened on Feb. 18, as 10 excited faces greeted each other for the first time and bonded instantly. But one very important person was missing: our leader, Program Director Lindsey Liebig, who was stranded in the Southeast by a harsh winter storm. Albert Einstein once stated, “The measure of intelligence is the ability to change,” which proved to be the overriding theme for the first session, as the agenda continually shifted and we learned the value of adapting to changing conditions.

The LFB program was introduced to our class as a reinvestment in Farm Bureau talent. The class of 2015 will have the opportunity to grow and make friends on both a personal and professional level. To get the most out of this experience, we must be vulnerable (think of a snail without its shell) and accountable to ourselves, our classmates and the Farm Bureau organization. We also must have each other’s backs.

Brian Watson and Kate Tscharner, of California Farm Bureau Federation’s
Marketing and Member Relations Division, led us through a “Dimensions of Farm Bureau” presentation, furthering our understanding of the inner workings of the organization. One area that we will continue to focus on and address throughout the year is Farm Bureau’s membership challenges. To continue as a successful and powerful grassroots organization, we must not only maintain but grow those essential agricultural members.

To begin our journey through leadership development, we embraced the strengths-based leadership model by addressing individual leadership strengths and highlighting achievers, learners, positives, creatives and includers. We all have strengths and we all have pet peeves that we were dying to express on notecards. This exercise allowed our group to vent frustrations and realize weaknesses within ourselves.

Day Two was led by Tiffany Nielsen of Premier Etiquette, steering us through “From Farm to Capitol Hill: How to Stand Out, Not Stick Out.” We discussed all aspects of professional business protocol, from first impressions and roadblocks to successful networking, appropriate clothing and good table manners. The afternoon was spent working with professional shoppers to broaden our clothing horizons and ensure everyone would be presentable for our spring trip to Washington, D.C.

By the end of Day Two, our group was clearly trending upward. What better way to increase valuation than to have what some feared would be a cheesy team-building exercise? Lo and behold, the exercise worked! Day Three, led by Leo van Warmerdam, continued to push us out of our shells. Our class learned more interesting tidbits about each other, such as train-jumping class members, long-toed cowgirls, football-betting mentors and infant survivalists. We learned how each member receives feedback in discussion and put it into practice in our session with games and what had to be the longest amount of time we have ever been blindfolded.

We bonded in a way most groups do not after spending only 72 hours together. The class was now more than just a reinvestment: We were becoming a team of 10, willing to prop each other up for the good of the group and ourselves. Even with a curveball on the first day with the absence of Lindsey’s leadership, the group was able to stabilize and adapt to change. Our first session led to a consensus of 100 percent buy-in. You can’t find a more secure investment than that.
The second session of the 2015 Leadership Farm Bureau class brought us together March 9-11 and gave us the opportunity to see what makes the organization—as a whole—so valuable. Discussions centered around policy and politics and gave us a glimpse at ways to reach our government representatives. The session also highlighted ways that Farm Bureau’s membership needs to grow to stay effective.

We gathered on Day One to learn what makes Farm Bureau tick. The organization has a broad range of responsibilities to its membership: Not only does it reach out on local levels about specific issues and crops, but it also maintains a key presence on state and federal levels. Staying vigilant on what affects membership and agriculture’s future is not an easy task. Josh Rolph from CFBF’s Federal Policy Division provided insight into what that process is like in Washington, D.C., and explained what our group would see on future trips.

Later that morning, we shared a session with President Paul Wenger, who welcomed us to the team and highlighted some of Farm Bureau’s advocacy efforts. We then met with Casey Gudel, Political Affairs Division manager, to learn about the changing political makeup of California, its effects on Farm Bureau and what members can do to promote themselves. She strongly encouraged participation in FARM PAC, which supports candidates committed to working for the best interests of California agriculture. We concluded the day by developing our class theme, “Together We Grow,” which personified what the class wants to accomplish and also captured the quick camaraderie of the group.

On Day Two, we focused on communicating the obstacles agriculture is facing by sharing our personal story with our elected officials in the state Capitol. The opportunity to converse with our representatives is a crucial way in which Farm Bureau can present its message: directly from members—
those often more comfortable in dirty boots than polished shoes—to outline the impacts of legislative challenges and discuss policy changes that are needed. If this session taught us anything, it was to challenge ourselves in ways that can open new doors and leave us feeling more empowered.

Day Three was a little more relaxed, but informative nonetheless. The morning provided us a chance to see the inner workings of Farm Bureau. We were each assigned to a Commodity Advisory Committee and asked to observe the groups’ meetings. These discussions form the policies that govern Farm Bureau and those who investigate and protect agriculture’s relevance. It is yet another way to gain involvement in Farm Bureau and seek opportunity for change. We were then visited by 1st Vice President Kenny Watkins, who answered questions and provided sound advice for our upcoming trip to Washington, D.C.

Later in the day, we discussed the future of Farm Bureau, with Brian Watson and Kate Tscharner briefing us on the challenges and successes of our membership, including the need for all members to be active. New ideas are necessary to reach out to the agriculture community, and Farm Bureau strives to remain relevant and attract potential members. Changes in policy, membership offerings and societal demographics pose challenges. However, the discussion needs to take place if we are to swell our membership rosters and continue to carry an effective message that protects and represents the industry that feeds the world.
Communicating our message

The 2015 Leadership Farm Bureau class gathered in Sacramento April 15-17 to begin our third session of leadership training. The objective was to improve our public speaking and media skills. The goals were to help us develop confidence and competency, and enhance our ability to articulate our thoughts and tell our story more effectively.

We convened at the CFBF building and met Kyle Perry and Johnna Miller from the American Farm Bureau Federation Training and Development Department. Kyle was there to work with us to develop and deliver good presentations and Johnna to help us learn how to talk to the media and deliver our message in a manner that gets the desired reaction.

A few weeks before, we were asked to have a speech ready to deliver to the group. Even those accustomed to giving speeches were self-conscious knowing that we were being evaluated. Kyle provided input and useful tools to help us talk more effectively to groups, particularly people unfamiliar with agriculture. He taught us presentation skills and offered effective and practical advice such as: "Tell your story and be authentic." Johnna then began her media-training presentation. She offered useful information, including
a list of questions to ask the person conducting the interview and also questions to ask oneself to prepare for an interview. Johnna helped us learn to keep focused on our message and provided helpful suggestions for controlling the direction of the dialog.

The second day challenged our limits even more than the day before. We broke into two groups: One delivered the speeches again, but this time with consideration to Kyle’s input. This allowed us to practice and implement the tools we had learned. The second group was interviewed by Johnna, acting in a reporter’s role, relating to a topic of our choosing. Her challenging questions helped us work on our media skills and find opportunities for improvement.

Next was Noelle Cremers, CFBF director of natural resources and commodities, who covered the topic of communicating policy. It was actually relaxing to review Assembly bills and decipher the different interpretations of policies!

As we concluded, we realized it had been a stressful but extremely productive couple of days. We had stepped out of our comfort zone, and had grown and learned from it. We unwound at a Sacramento River Cats baseball game that evening.

Our final day began with CFBF General Counsel Nancy McDonough going over Farm Bureau policies and board member duties. She helped us better understand the legal obligations of our board of directors and CFBF. Stephanie Etcheverria and Liz Baskins from the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom then tested our “ag IQ” and described the incredible work being done to share the story of agriculture with the next generation.

After lunch, we presented our family projects and enjoyed the opportunity to share pictures and stories about ourselves and our families. The goal was to get to know each other more intimately by learning about the most important people in our lives: our families. Although our group already had a strong and comfortable connection, this further strengthened our bond.

The day was brought to a close with Josh Rolph, CFBF manager of federal policy, who covered some of the issues of concern at present and gave us an overview of what to expect on the Washington, D.C., trip in May.
Opened doors and shared solutions

President Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, “Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil, and you’re a thousand miles from the corn field.” So how do you educate those dictating the future of agriculture? You meet them where they are and open the door into what agriculture really is by sharing your story.

With that in mind, the 2015 Leadership Farm Bureau class joined members of the CFBF Board of Directors and board members of county Farm Bureaus throughout California for the Federal Policy lobbying trip, May 11-14. Our goal was to focus primarily on drought and water-supply issues, including Waters of the United States (WOTUS), as well as immigration policy, international trade and tax reform.

Our delegation was able to meet with a multitude of lawmakers in the nation’s capital. During a breakfast meeting with Sen. Dianne Feinstein, we gained her insight into the challenges Californians are facing and how they will affect agriculture. The senator told the group that drought is the No. 1 issue in the Golden State and explained that legislation is needed to
create and fund storage projects so that water can be saved during wet years.

We also had the opportunity to meet with Phil Houlding and Janine Collier at the New Zealand Embassy. Farmers in that country, who frequently struggle with drought, have worked hard to adapt their farming practices and have enhanced efficiencies by storing water during periods of rain.

Water storage is a key issue in California and one finally being weighed seriously on both the state and federal levels. Learning how drought impacts another part of the world and seeing that the need for water storage is essential demonstrates why we need lawmakers to understand the severity and act on it. California can’t rely on a snowpack that isn’t always there to provide water for an ever-increasing population, agriculture and the environment. To continue leading the nation in agricultural production, we must have the ability to store water for future dry years.

It was a great experience to meet with our legislative leaders in Washington, D.C., as it enabled us to talk to them in small groups and personalize the impacts agriculture is facing at home. The California Farm Bureau delegation divided and conquered Capitol Hill by visiting as many Senate and Congressional offices as possible. California farmers and ranchers provide a diverse array of commodities, but the themes of what we all face are truly similar.

They say closed mouths don’t get fed, but unwatered fields don’t feed you either. We need to do a better job of raising our voices together to educate our communities and government about the issues we face. With the current drought affecting everyone in California—from those living in town who can’t water their lawn, to the family farms forced to fallow fields—now is the time to gain support. Being united in sharing our message while in D.C. and offering insight into our individual struggles helps paint a picture of the need for change.

“When we go to Washington, D.C., it’s always an excellent opportunity to put a face to the issues,” said CFBF Federal Policy Manager Josh Rolph. “Farm Bureau members can make a real difference.”
Many issues, one voice

The fifth session began Aug. 12 at CFBF with a briefing by Danny Merkley, director of water resources. He provided a snapshot of water usage in California and updated us on current legislation. Once confident with our knowledge, we hopped on a bus and headed to Camp Sylvester in Pinecrest.

Several members of the Tuolumne County Farm Bureau were on hand to greet us at the camp and then accompanied us to Pinecrest Lake, where Eric Hall of the Tuolumne Utilities District, CFBF District Director Sasha Farkas and TCFB President Shaun Crook described the different water districts in the county and summarized the challenges timber and other agricultural sectors are facing due to drought. We ended our day back at Camp Sylvester with a delicious dinner prepared by the Tuolumne County Farm Bureau.

Our first stop the next morning was at an open pasture in the Stanislaus National Forest. There, ranchers Bob and Sherri Brennan discussed their cattle operation and the challenges of federal regulations for forest preservation and management. After that, we visited a nearby logging site, where we saw machinery strip, cut, sort and load logs.
The sheer size of the equipment was impressive, but the technology was even more remarkable.

Next, we were off to explore Lyons Dam, which is operated by Pacific Gas & Electric. The class had the opportunity to walk on and below the dam, and saw the 2-mile raised wooded flume system that transports water from the dam to customers. Eric Hall told us about the 150-year-old wooden system and how PG&E manages upkeep and fire risk.

The Sierra Pacific Industries milling facility in Sonora was our next stop. Family-owned Sierra Pacific—among the largest lumber producers in the U.S.—fabricates everything from timbers and framing lumber to fencing and specialty products from their 14 sawmills in California and Washington. Our tour highlighted state-of-the-art computer technology in action. We watched as lasers measured lumber, checked for imperfections and chose the best cut for each piece.

That evening, we had the opportunity to tour Indigeny Reserve in Sonora and have dinner in their barrel room. The Watson family opened Indigeny in 2012 and this year harvested 300,000 pounds of apples to use for their hard apple cider, brandy and vodka. We were treated to a step-by-step look at brandy production, which included a distilling room with a double-pot copper still and the barrel room, where the brandy ages in 55-gallon American oak barrels. We also had the pleasure of sampling different ciders with our dinner.

The following day we headed west to Tracy to Jones Pumping Plant. These pumps take water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and propel it up nearly 200 feet into the Delta-Mendota Canal. Due to our operations back home, we were all familiar with how pumps operate, but none of us had seen such large and impressive pumps as these. They move about 8,500 acre-feet of water each day into the canal, providing water for the San Joaquin Valley and beyond.

Throughout our three days of tours, we met many great people who welcomed us with open arms and shared their stories. We learned about some of the struggles other regions and industries are facing and how they affect the entire state. This session reaffirmed that all facets of agriculture need to come together, stand strong and speak with one voice.
November brought our class to Southern California and Mexico for face-to-face conversations with people operating in a wide range of commodities.

The session began at Go Green Agriculture, an Encinitas-based hydroponics operation started by Pierre Sleiman in a college dorm room. That “idea” now yields lettuce, kale and watercress through innovative design and technology. We then traveled to Mellano and Co. in Oceanside, where Mike Mellano showed us dozens of flower varieties, including those being grown on a trial basis. The family-owned flower company, in business since 1925, has recently shifted its focus from annual to perennial crops due to labor and water issues.

Day Two started at Stehly Farms Organics in Valley Center, where LFB was treated to a tractor tour of the expansive ranch. Blackberries, dragon fruit, passion fruit, eggs, strawberries and countless vegetables were just a part of what they shared with us.

Heading east to Imperial Valley, we met with the staff of the Imperial Irrigation District to learn how irrigation water is received through the Colorado River and about research regarding the imperiled Salton Sea.

We then visited the hay operation of Tom Brundy and Jack Cato in Calexico. They shared some of the challenges of the recent growing season, including weather, seed germination and market pricing. After a short visit in Tom’s hay store, we traveled down the road to get our first glimpse of the U.S.-Mexico border and the All-American Canal.

Our last stop of the day was at Ametza Pellet Mill in El Centro, which produces livestock pelletized hay. We learned that Imperial Valley is unique in that farmers have come to an agreement not to use Round-Up Ready alfalfa. This prevents their alfalfa products from testing positive for genetic modifications, which are not favored in their foreign export markets.

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The ‘Southern exposure’ experience

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as acreage planted in green onions, cabbage and Brussels sprouts. Larry explained that Rancho El Gulfo practices the same quality standards in Mexico as they do in their U.S. operations.

Back on U.S. soil, we met with Bud Ashurst of American Honey in El Centro to talk about bee and honey production. A family-run operation with third-generation beekeeper Bud at the helm, American Honey imports and distributes honey to a variety of commercial and industrial customers.

In focusing on exports, we ended our day at El Toro Exports in El Centro. Jeff and Bill Plourd explained that El Toro is one of 10 exporters in the Imperial Valley. With markets primarily in China, Japan and South Korea, the operation keeps dozens of containers loaded with pressed hay en route to the ports. The recent shipping disturbances complicated efficiency, and the company is only now seeing containers move at a normal rate.

Day Four started in Holtville with Jack Vessey of Vessey and Co. The family operation began producing lettuce in the 1920s and has expanded to more than 25 products. We viewed fields of cabbage, napa cabbage and spring mix. There, we also met two Imperial Irrigation District zanjeros—known in other areas as ditch tenders or ditch riders—who demonstrated how they measure flow and manage water delivery.

We finished our tour at the Port of San Diego, with Lt. Robert Cole discussing the U.S. Coast Guard’s responsibility of the waterways, including port entry and waterway safety. We were allowed entry into Sector San Diego’s Joint Headquarters of Operational Control Room, where personnel monitor more than 200 cameras throughout the local port and surrounding jurisdictional borders.

Our November trip was incredibly informational, and we gained tremendous knowledge of and experiences with this diverse region. We thank everyone involved for this wonderful opportunity to explore and understand the area.
Take our challenge
and join the class of 2016
Leadership Farm Bureau is a one-of-a-kind experience and the only program in Farm Bureau that invests in key individuals instead of a demographic. Through LFB, participants receive nearly 300 hours of hands-on advocacy in the halls of our state’s and nation’s capitols, exposure to dozens of different farming and ranching operations across California, and instruction on key elements of leadership and the inner workings of Farm Bureau at all levels. Leadership Farm Bureau is the one-year experience in California agriculture you’ve been looking for. Visit us online and apply today.

The deadline to apply is December 18, 2015. www.cfbf.com/lfb
Together we Grow

LFB Class of 2015

CONGRATULATIONS
Leadership Farm Bureau 2015

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