

ENVIRONMENT

Temperance Flat ceremony today

At a public ceremony to take place today, officials representing the San Joaquin Valley Water Infrastructure Authority and the Bureau of Reclamation will sign a Memorandum of Understanding to coordinate and complete feasibility studies of the proposed Temperance Flat Dam and Reservoir project.

The feasibility studies and MOU are part of a process to develop the necessary information to apply for the State of California's Proposition 1 funding for water storage projects.

Officials of the recently formed San Joaquin Valley Water Infrastructure Authority and Reclamation took part in the signing ceremony.

This new partnership will allow communities and organizations throughout the San Joaquin Valley to participate in completing the studies of a new dam and reservoir on the San Joaquin River upstream of Friant Dam.

This effort will assist in determining the financial feasibility of the proposed project consistent with federal requirements and meet the requirements of the California Water Commission to successfully compete for an equitable share of the \$2.7 billion state water bond funds.

The new authority was formed by supervisors in Fresno, Tulare, Madera, Kings and Merced counties, as well as leaders of cities, Native American tribes and other agencies, to support the proposed project and to encourage planning and development of other new valley water infrastructure.

If authorized by Congress and jointly funded, the proposed Temperance Flat Dam and Reservoir would be a part of the Federal Central Valley Project.

It would create 1,260,000 acre-feet of new water storage, more than twice the capacity of Millerton Lake.

AGRICULTURE

Kings County crop receipts fall

Kings County's crop values fell by more than \$400 million in 2015, hurt by low milk prices.

Tim Niswander, Kings County agricultural commissioner, told the county's board of supervisors today that the gross value for all of the crops and products produced during 2015 in Kings County was \$2.02 billion, a decrease of 18.2 percent from 2014's record-breaking crop value of \$2.45 billion.

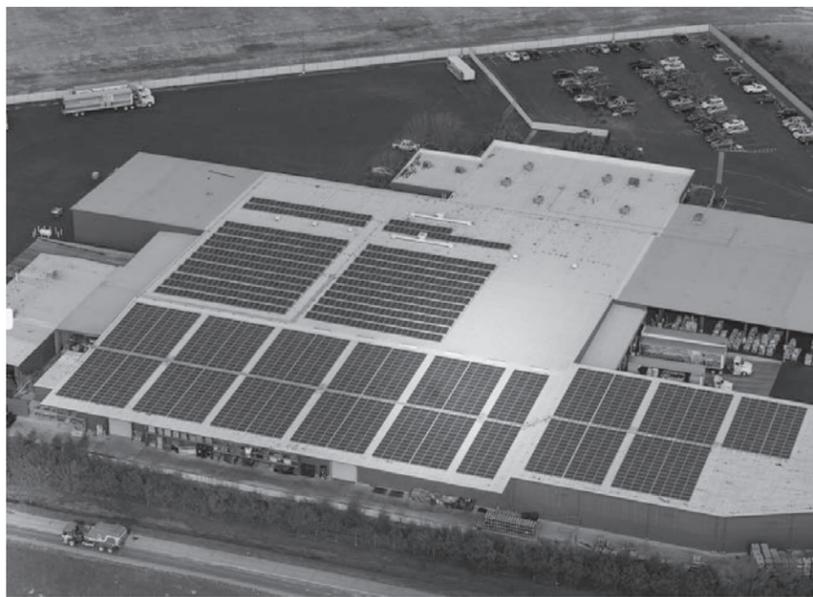
While milk continued to be the county's top commodity, with a value of \$651 million in 2015, lower milk prices paid to the county's dairymen took a toll on the crop's overall value, Niswander said.

Cattle and calves (\$226 million), cotton (\$177 million), almonds (\$173 million) and tomatoes (\$132 million) rounded out the county's top five ag commodities followed by pistachios (\$86 million), corn and silage (\$58 million), alfalfa (\$57 million), walnuts (\$55 million) and grapes (\$43 million).

Livestock and poultry posted the largest increase in value, up 23 percent from 2014, due primarily to increases in beef prices.

ENERGY

Report: Fresno a leader in solar



FILE PHOTO | Barrier Solar completed this installation at Valley Wide Beverage Co. in Fresno, representing a part of 11,132 kilowatts of industrial capacity installed in Fresno.

According to a new report, Fresno has emerged as the state's top region for industrial solar power.

Fresno is No. 1 in the state for industrial solar power, with 11,132 kW installed, which is larger than the amount of installed industrial solar power in the San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara and Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim regions combined.

The ranking comes from Next 10, an independent, nonpartisan organization founded by Golden State businessman and philanthropist F. Noel Perry.

Next 10's California Green In-

novation Index, released today, highlights how the San Joaquin Valley and Inland Empire are driving California's explosive solar growth, which has increased 1,378 percent between 2009 and 2014 overall.

Widespread embrace of clean technology is one reason the eighth edition of the Next 10's Index, which ranks 26 metro areas across a range of indicators, finds the state growing in its role as a clean energy leader.

Look for more highlights from the report in next week's paper.

Apiary products, which increased 43 percent to \$893,000, was the only other category to see a boost in value in 2015, due primarily to higher pollination prices.

Meanwhile, livestock and poultry products showed the steepest decline, dropping in value 32 percent from the previous year because of lower milk prices.

Westlands separates GM, general counsel duties

The Westlands Water District board announced last week the decision to separate the role of general manager and general counsel, both

new General Counsel will have the responsibility of providing legal advice on proposed changes to existing policies, new policies, personnel matters, and any other matters requested by the Board," Peracchi said.

The new structure is meant to "promote more transparency and good government practices."

Birmingham served as the district's general counsel from 1995 to 2000, when he was appointed general manager.

Westlands operations have come under scrutiny of late. In March the Securities and Exchange Commission levied \$125,000 in fines on the water district over accusations it misled bond investors about its financial circumstances.

Birmingham reportedly joked about employing "a little Enron accounting" to overstate the public agency's revenue for the sake of a \$77 million bond issue in 2012, reported the Associated Press.

As part of a settlement, Westlands, Birmingham and another district official neither admitted or denied the allegations. Birmingham faced a \$50,000 penalty as part of that settlement.

And earlier this month, the Associated Press reported that Westland loaned \$1.4 million to a former deputy general manager to buy a riverfront home, and nine years later the loan remains unpaid.

LEGAL

Woman pleads guilty in 'spice' case

Natalie Middleton, 30, of Clovis, pleaded guilty to money laundering proceeds related to the sale of synthetic drugs, commonly known as "spice."

Spice is the street name for smokable organic plant leaf laced with synthetic cannabinoid.

Middleton purchased a time-share in Lake Tahoe with proceeds obtained from the sale of spice, according to federal court documents. According to her plea deal, from January through March 2013, Middleton was employed as a national sales representative for ZenBio LLC, a spice manufacturing and distribution business that started in Florida.

The company distributed these drugs during a five-month span, generating more than \$33 million in sales of at least 24 tons of spice.

During the investigation of this case, law enforcement officers seized more than \$6 million in cash and assets derived from drug proceeds.

Middleton is scheduled for sentencing on Oct. 11. She faces a maximum statutory penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, or twice the gross gain from the crime.

Last month, a co-conspirator, Timothy New, 33, of Pensacola, Florida pleaded guilty to the fraudulent interstate shipments of misbranded drugs. Co-defendants, Douglas Jason Way, 41, of Evanston, Illinois, and Timothy Ortiz, aka Michael Fitton, 45, of Waukegan, Illinois, have pleaded not guilty to various drug charges and are scheduled for a status conference on Sept. 12. They face a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$10 million.

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