

BizFed Bounce Back



BizFed members share stories of resilience.

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In the face of COVID19, BizFed members bounce back with perseverance, creativity and resourcefulness.

FRESNO FARMERS & RANCHERS: UNCERTAIN PRESENT, BRIGHT FUTURE

Fresno County is an incredibly active food-producing area. The Fresno County Farm Bureau has around 2,100 members that vary in size and the vast majority were about as busy as always during the COVID-19 shutdown.

And that's what made the grocery store food shortages in the early weeks of the shutdown so maddening.

"It's the greatest of ironies that there were significant shortages of food on grocery shelves, but we were growing plenty of food," said Ryan Jacobsen, CEO of the Fresno County Farm Bureau. "In most cases, it was supply chain issues."

The shutdowns didn't affect the day-to-day operations of farms too much—most employees already spent much of the day distant from each other. Some changes, like new safety protocols during breaks and employee training, were needed, but most were implemented with relatively minor disruption.

But the packing and processing side was severely disrupted, as was the demand side. Many of the Fresno County Farm Bureau's members grew crops solely for industrial clients, like schools and restaurants, and they saw their demand dry up overnight.

"The market dried up and many of our

members suffered a loss," Jacobsen said. "Growers had to figure out new ways to get their produce to a market."

State Stands in the Way

Back in January, it appeared 2020 would be like so many other years before it, with local farmers struggling due to the competitive limitations placed upon them by the State of California, like a lack of a reliable water supply, general overregulation as compared to other states and the continuously-increasing cost of labor.

And of course, trade was an issue, though revised trade deals were beginning to show signs of promise.

"We had some short-term pain," Jacobsen said about adjusting to the trade wars and subsequent agreements. "But we were very optimistic with USMCA and China Phase 1 trade deals."

Bright Future

Going forward, Fresno County farmers will have to contend with both: The state's insistence upon putting farmers at a competitive disadvantage and the ever-changing ways to ensure employee safety as we continue to learn more about the spread of COVID-19. But the resiliency of the Fresno County farm industry suggests the future is bright.

"There's a lot of uncertainty," Jacobsen



Ryan Jacobsen - CEO, FCFB

said. "There are a lot of changes happening daily now, but we're continuing to find the best way to get our products to consumers."



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