

spotlight

FALL 2019

INNOVATING to Add Value

California Vegetable Growers and Packers Look for New Ways to Grow, Process and Market Their Crops

PAGE 6

Navigate to page 6

Capitalizing on Value-Added and Niche Markets

PAGE 14

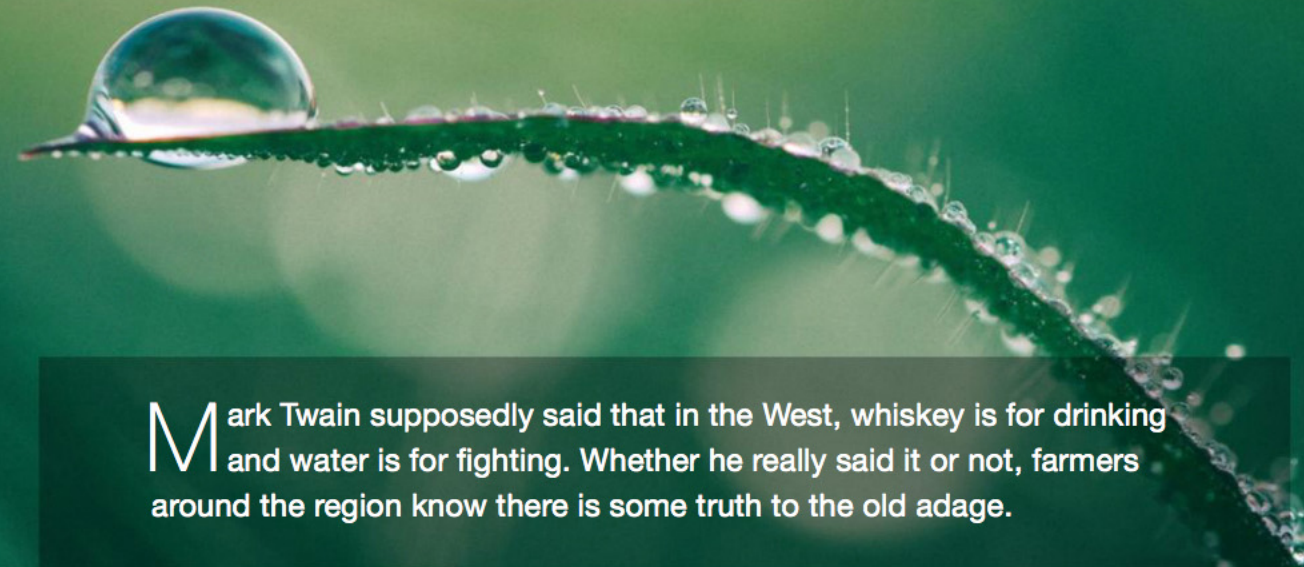
Cauliflower's Rise to Fame

PAGE 16



Ventura Farmers Take Charge, Designing First-of-Its-Kind Water Market

By Matthew Fienup and Edgar Terry



Mark Twain supposedly said that in the West, whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting. Whether he really said it or not, farmers around the region know there is some truth to the old adage.

Growers in Ventura County, California have broken that mold, however. They are working closely with groundwater managers, California Lutheran University and the Nature Conservancy to develop the state's first formal and centralized groundwater market implemented in response to stringent new regulations. The goal is to develop a workable system that allows farmers to buy and sell portions of their water allocations to other growers, providing flexibility as they reduce pumping in critically overdrafted aquifers.

Providing a sense of urgency to the development of a market-based system is the knowledge that the amount of water each grower can pump may eventually be slashed by as much as 40-50%.

While water issues are different in every part of the West, one thing is constant: many growers are going to have less water in the future. As decisions are made about how to manage water supplies, farmers must be engaged in the process from the beginning and help to craft solutions. If they don't, state and local regulators will develop plans to enforce new regulations, such as California's landmark Sustainable

Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). Those plans may not adequately consider the needs of farmers and ranchers.

Ventura County is one of the richest agricultural regions in the nation. In fact, in 2017, agriculture revenues totaled \$2.1 billion. Area growers have heavily relied on groundwater since farming began in the region as very little surface water is available.



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