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WEEKLY DIGEST
APRIL 19, 2019

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HARRIS FARMS' ENORMOUS VALLEY CATTLE-RAISING OPERATION TO BE SOLD

April 16, 2019 | AP News

COALINGA — Harris Ranch Beef Holding Co., California's largest cattle-raising operation, is being sold.

The company's 800-acre Central Valley feedlot, which can hold up to 250,000 cattle, and its slaughterhouse and processing facilities are being sold to Hanford-based Central Valley Meat Co. but will operate independently under the combined ownership of Central Valley Meat Holding Co., according to an announcement made last week and reported Monday by [The Fresno Bee](#).

The price and other details weren't released.

The beef operations are part of Harris Farms, Inc.

The company's 800-acre Central Valley feedlot, which can hold up to 250,000 cattle, and its slaughterhouse and processing facilities are being sold to Hanford-based Central Valley Meat Co.

Founded in 1937, the family-owned agribusiness also has a thriving farming operation that produces more than 30 crops ranging from lettuce and garlic to pistachios and wine grapes; breeds thoroughbred horses and runs a popular inn and restaurant, according to the company website. The business has more than \$400 million a year in sales.

Difficulties in Recent Years

Only its cattle operations are being sold.

"The Central Valley has long served as the home of some of the finest beef sold around the world. Today's announcement cements a future for two family-owned beef operations to continue to thrive," Harris Farms owner John Harris said in the April 9 sale announcement.

Central Valley Meat Co. was founded in 1993 and markets beef to retailers and to food-service companies. The company has faced some difficulties recent years, including a 2013 recall of more than 29 tons of ground beef destined for school lunches because of concerns that it might contain plastic pieces, the Fresno Bee reported. The processing plant also was briefly closed by federal regulators in 2014 for unsanitary conditions, the paper said.

"The Central Valley has long served as the home of some of the finest beef sold around the world. Today's announcement cements a future for two family-owned beef operations to continue to thrive."
— Harris Farms owner John Harris



WEST-SIDE WATER TICKS UP TO 65% OF ALLOCATION. IS IT TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE?

April 17, 2019 | GV Wire

The heavy rains and snow falling on California this year are enabling the Bureau of Reclamation to boost water deliveries to growers on the west side of Fresno County. The Bureau of Reclamation announced Wednesday that it will supply South-of-Delta growers with 65% of their contracted water total. “This has been a great year for California’s water supply,” said Mid-Pacific regional Director Ernest Conant. “The increased precipitation has allowed us to increase the amount of water we allocate to our South-of-Delta contractors.” The allocation amount, however, left Westlands Water District General Manager Thomas Birmingham wondering how deep the Sierra snowpack would have to be for west-growers to receive a full allocation.

“This announcement begs the question, what has to happen before south-of-Delta farmers served by the Central Valley Project can get a full supply?” Birmingham said. “Notwithstanding the restrictions imposed by the biological opinions, Westlands firmly believes that there is sufficient water to allocate to south-of-Delta agricultural water services contractors

100%. Today’s announcement by Reclamation is disappointing for every south-of-Delta farmer served by the CVP, and we hope Reclamation will increase the allocation quickly to enable farmers to quit pumping groundwater.”

Costa: Allocation Could Hit 100%, But It Will Be Too Late
Rep. Jim Costa (D-Fresno), who is a grower and one of the top water policy experts in Congress, said that he expected the initial west-side allocation in February to be 50%, followed by a 75% revise. “I am frustrated, to say the least,” he said. “We’ve done some (water) modeling on our own, which showed, at a minimum a 75% allocation (right now). They still may get to 100% by June, but that won’t be in time for this crop year.”

A Farmer’s View: Late Allocations Don’t Help Aquifer
Mark Borba, president of Riverdale-based Borba Farms, said that the Bureau’s late allocations hurt farmers and create more aquifer overdraft. “We are told repeatedly farmers should cease groundwater pumping when surface water is plentiful,” Borba said. “The concept of conjunctive use...

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DELAYS OVER FIRST-RESPONDER FACILITY IRRITATE LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

April 16, 2019 | Myles Barker

The patience of local law enforcement officials is wearing thin as they continue to wait for a new first-responder training facility to be built. Fresno City College’s fire and police academies have served as the primary training facilities for Central Valley public safety agencies for years. Both have outgrown their existing facilities.

Kingsburg Police Chief Neil Dadian said he’s been waiting decades for State Center Community College District to deliver on its promise of a new training center. The facilities cadets train in now are shameful, he said. “You would never allow for conditions where a student-athlete was to change in a parking lot after practice and then attend class for the remainder of the day without the opportunity to shower,” said Dadian, who has taught at the police academy for over 20 years. “Our police cadets endure this humiliation every day.” However, FCC President Carole Goldsmith said Dadian’s depiction of the...

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Fresno City College Twitter

MADERA PHARMACIST ARRESTED ON OPIOID TRAFFICKING CHARGES

April 16, 2019 | Bill McEwen

A Madera pharmacist and two Fresno men were arrested Tuesday for allegedly engaging in a conspiracy to distribute the opioids oxycodone and hydrocodone, according to federal officials. The arrests followed a 42-count federal grand jury indictment on April 11. The three men arrested and charged with possession and conspiracy to distribute controlled substances are: Ifeanyi Vincent Ntukogu, 44, a Fresno resident and owner/operator of New Life Pharmacy in Madera; Kelo White, 38, of Fresno; and Donald Ray Pierre, 50, of Fresno.

Ray also was charged with identity theft. Ntukogu was arrested at New Life Pharmacy. White and Pierre were arrested at their Fresno homes. According to court documents, Ntukogu filled fraudulent prescriptions for oxycodone and hydrocodone, both Schedule II controlled substances, and then dispensed the controlled substances to White and Pierre from late 2014 through November 2018. A news release from the office of U.S...

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AP File Photo

STATE

NEWSOM WON'T BLOCK BUILDING IN HIGH-FIRE AREAS

April 16, 2019 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — A desire to live near nature is embedded in California's ethos, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Monday as he explained why he doesn't want to block home building near forested areas at high risk for wildfires.

"There's something that is truly Californian about the wilderness and the wild and pioneering spirit," Newsom said in an interview with The Associated Press. "I'm not advocating for or no (building)." Newsom on Friday released a report outlining the challenges of California's growing wildfire threat that suggested local government "de-emphasize" building in high-risk areas around forests. But he told the AP it was a loose suggestion aimed at starting a debate about how Californians can build smarter and closer to urban centers and economic

"I've never seen a deep analysis. And I think one has to be cautious about that." — Gov. Gavin Newsom

hubs. More than 2.7 million Californians live in areas state fire officials say are at a very high hazard for wildfires, according to an AP analysis of census data and state fire maps. Nearly 180 cities and towns are in those very high hazard areas. The recently retired head of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Ken Pimlott, said last year that government should consider blocking construction in high-risk areas, given the devastating loss of property and lives. But Newsom said he's never seen a realistic proposal for how to do it. "I've never seen a deep analysis," he said. "And I think one has to be cautious about that."

The Town's History Dating to the 1800s Is Too Deep to Walk Away

A wildfire that ripped through the Northern California town of Paradise last November, destroying 19,000 buildings and killing 85 people, served as a wake-up call on the need for immediate action as the climate warms and fires worsen. The town was considered at

severe risk for wildfire. Newsom suggested the town's history dating to the 1800s is too deep to simply walk away. Instead he said Paradise should be rebuilt under more modern building codes and with a greater focus on sufficient evacuation routes and shelter-in-place plans. California has the nation's most robust building requirement programs for new homes in fire-prone areas, and a recent analysis by McClatchy showed that a higher percentage of homes built after new building codes took effect in 2008 survived the fire than those built before. Newsom's father, a former state appeals court judge, lived in Dutch Flat, a community on the edge of the Sierra Nevada range. "There's a frontier aspect, a historic component," Newsom said, referencing the phrase "Go West, young man" that is often attributed to author Horace Greeley, an advocate of westward expansion.

"When I say de-emphasizing, it's loose. It's about considering your environment literally and not just figuratively, and beginning to be more strategic about the planning." — Gov. Gavin Newsom

Related Story: Millions Live in Parts of California Threatened by Wildfires

The concept of local control is also deeply embedded in California's ethos and Newsom, a former mayor of San Francisco, said he doesn't want to take away land-use planning power from local governments. He also suggests expanding housing in urban areas that have better access to transportation and jobs. California faces a crisis over housing affordability that has pushed more people beyond urban areas. "When I say de-emphasizing, it's loose," he said. "It's about considering your environment literally and not just figuratively, and beginning to be more strategic about the planning." Whether any of Newsom's ideas, such as encouraging local planners to include fire safety concerns in their...

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VANISHING BOARD AND CARE HOMES LEAVE RESIDENTS FEW OPTIONS

April 17, 2019 | CALmatters

This summer, Tom Gray will lose his home.

A slim man with hunched shoulders and a halting voice, Gray, 72, has schizophrenia. Before he landed in Carmen Palarca's board-and-care home 11 years ago, he spent 20 years living on the streets, many of them huddled in a doorway across from a San Francisco Whole Foods.

"I feel kind of sad and worried a little bit" Gray said quietly, sitting in the home's small kitchen one recent afternoon. He hadn't yet received official notice from Palarca of her plans to close, but knew it was likely. She had, in fact, sent a letter

to the city a few days earlier outlining her intent to shutter the home. The planned closure of yet another board-and-care home—this one nestled near Golden Gate Park—reflects a broader trend affecting thousands of low-income Californians with serious mental illness. While housing values soar and minimum-wage increases drive up staffing costs, state reimbursement rates to board-and-cares have remained stagnant.

The result: more facilities are shutting their doors. There are no reliable statewide data on the decrease of homes serving this specific population. But since 2012, San Francisco has...

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BIZFED'S WISH LIST FOR NEWSOM: HELP ON WATER, TAXES, IMMIGRATION

April 16, 2019 | GV Wire

Gov. Gavin Newsom should focus on water access and reliability, taxes, and immigration, according to a poll of BizFed Central Valley members. The other two areas of critical concern were government regulations and compliance, along with taxes and fees, the organization said in a news release Monday.

This was the first poll BizFed Central Valley has conducted of its members — Valley business associations and businesses between Madera and Kern counties. BizFed CV plans to poll its members annually to gather real-time data on the issues that are most pressing for area businesses. "Understanding how policies actually affect businesses on a day-to-day basis is crucial for policymakers in order to promote a thriving economy. BizFed CV's annual poll is a handy way for elected officials to keep tabs on what's happening in the business...

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CALIFORNIA ISSUED 23,500 TAX RETURNS WITHOUT VERIFICATION

April 18, 2019 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — The agency that processes California tax returns says it issued 23,500 refunds without verifying whether people had entered accurate wage information.

The Franchise Tax Board plans to start sending letters next week notifying anyone who's received an improper refund because of the error. Spokeswoman Denise Azimi says most of the people affected will see no change in their returns. The board is still evaluating those returns and Azimi could not provide a number of how many people received a smaller or larger return than they should have.

She says the error announced Tuesday happened over three days in March and was due to a technology glitch. Azimi says the error doesn't reveal other vulnerabilities in the state's...

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AP/Patrick Semansky

BARR'S FULL STATEMENT ON MUELLER REPORT

April 18, 2019 | GV Wire

Despite President Donald Trump's efforts to derail Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian interference with the 2016 election, Mueller could not conclusively determine that Trump had committed criminal obstruction of justice.

The Justice Department posted a redacted version of the report online Thursday morning, 90 minutes after Attorney General William Barr offered his own final assessment of the report's findings. The two-volume, 448-page report recounts how Trump repeatedly sought to take control of the Russia probe.

Explored 10 Possible Obstruction Episodes

Mueller evaluated 10 episodes for possible obstruction of justice, including Trump's firing of FBI Director James Comey, the president's directive to subordinates to have Mueller fired and efforts to encourage witnesses not to cooperate. The president's lawyers have said Trump's conduct fell within his constitutional powers, but Mueller's team deemed the episodes deserving of criminal scrutiny. Mueller reported that Trump had been agitated at the special counsel probe from its earliest days, reacting to Mueller's appointment by saying it was the "end of his presidency."

As for the question of whether the Trump campaign had colluded with Russia during the 2016 presidential campaign, Mueller wrote, "While the investigation identified numerous links between individuals with ties to the Russian government and individuals associated with the Trump Campaign, the evidence was not sufficient to support criminal charges." Mueller also said there wasn't sufficient evidence to charge any campaign official with working as an unregistered foreign agent of Russia.

Barr's Statement

Here is the Justice Department's transcript of Barr's public statement on Thursday.

Trump's Written Responses

The report included an appendix that contained 12 pages of Trump's written responses to the special counsel. They included no question about obstruction of justice, as was part of an agreement with Trump's legal team. Trump told Mueller he had "no recollection" of learning in advance about the much-scrutinized Trump Tower meeting between campaign officials and Russian lawyer. He also said he had no recollection of knowledge about emails setting up the meeting that promised dirt on Hillary Clinton's campaign. He broadly denied knowing of any foreign government trying to help his campaign, including the Russian government. He said he was aware of some reports that Russian President Vladimir Putin had made "complimentary statements" about him.

Trump said that his comment during a 2016 political rally asking Russian hackers to help find emails scrubbed from Clinton's private server was made "in jest and sarcastically" and that he did not recall being told during the campaign of any Russian effort to infiltrate or hack computer systems. Trump's legal team called the results "a total victory for the president."

The two-volume, 448-page report recounts how Trump repeatedly sought to take control of the Russia probe.

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CALIFORNIA DISPUTE THREATENS PLAN TO PROTECT COLORADO RIVER

AP File Photo

April 18, 2019 | AP News

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — A dispute between two major California water agencies is threatening to derail a hard-won agreement designed to protect a river that serves 40 million people in the U.S. West.

The Imperial Irrigation District, the largest single recipient of Colorado River water, on Tuesday sued a Los Angeles water utility that agreed to contribute most of California's share of water to a key reservoir under a multistate drought contingency plan. The action came the same day President Donald Trump approved federal legislation to implement the plan,

which Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming spent years negotiating. The agreement is meant to keep the country's two largest reservoirs on the Colorado River from dropping so low they cannot deliver water or produce hydropower amid prolonged drought and climate change.

The Imperial Irrigation District said it wouldn't join the drought plan unless it secured \$200 million in federal funding to address health and environmental hazards at the Salton Sea, a massive, briny lake southeast of Los Angeles...

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AP/Charles Krupa

MARINE RUNNING MARATHON FOR FALLEN FRIENDS CRAWLS TO FINISH

April 16, 2019 | AP News

A Marine veteran said all he was thinking about as he crawled to the finish of the Boston Marathon was the men who died after an attack on their convoy in Afghanistan nine years ago. Their names were written on his hand, his shoes and his race bib. They were the inspiration, Michael Herndon said, when he first started running to escape the horrors of war.

Herndon said he never considered giving up even when his legs started giving out about 4 miles (6 kilometers) from the end of the race Monday. "That was the longest 4.2 miles I've ever run in my life," said Herndon, who's from Tallmadge, Ohio. He said his military training kicked in when he dropped to his hands and knees and crawled, at times putting himself on his stomach, for the final 100 yards (91 meters). "It was kind of second nature," he said Tuesday, a day after...

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HARRIS, BOOKER MISS MOST VOTES OF SENATORS RUNNING IN 2020

April 17, 2019 | AP News

WASHINGTON — Kamala Harris and Cory Booker have each missed more than one-fifth of the Senate's votes so far this year as they campaign for president, according to an Associated Press analysis of congressional data. With 16 missed votes of the 77 that the Republican-controlled Senate has held in 2019, Harris and Booker far outpace the number missed by their fellow senators also vying for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Sen. Bernie Sanders has missed seven votes so far this year, while Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand and Amy Klobuchar have each missed three and Sen. Elizabeth Warren has missed one vote, AP found. Seeking the presidency as a sitting member of Congress requires a logistical juggling act that often results in candidates taking hits for missed votes as the pace of campaign season picks up to a whirlwind. Perhaps the most notable recent example is Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, who...

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WORLD

OFFICIAL: NOTRE DAME FACED 'CHAIN-REACTION COLLAPSE' IN FIRE

April 17, 2019 | AP News

PARIS — Notre Dame Cathedral would have burned to the ground in a “chain-reaction collapse” had firefighters not moved as rapidly as they did to battle the blaze racing through the beloved landmark building, a French government official said Wednesday. The firefighters acted aggressively to protect wooden supports in the twin medieval bell towers from the flames, averting a bigger catastrophe, said José Vaz de Matos, a firefighter expert with France’s Culture Ministry.

“If the fire reached this wooden structure, the bell tower would have been lost,” de Matos said at a news conference.

“If the fire reached this wooden structure, the bell tower would have been lost. From the moment we lose the war of the bell towers, we lose the cathedral, because it’s a chain-reaction collapse.”

— José Vaz de Matos, firefighter expert with France’s Culture Ministry

“From the moment we lose the war of the bell towers, we lose the cathedral, because it’s a chain-reaction collapse.” Monday’s fire destroyed most of the lead roof of the 950-year-old architectural treasure and caused its spire, which was added in the 19th century, to

collapse. An initial fire alert was sounded at 6:20 p.m., as a Mass was underway in the cathedral, but no fire was found. The second alert was sounded at 6:43 p.m., and the blaze was discovered on the roof. No one was killed in the fire, and firefighters and church officials speedily evacuated those inside.

Firefighters acted bravely and as fast as they could to save the cathedral, said senior fire official Philippe Demay, denying that there was any delay in their response.

Cathedral Is Being Monitored Closely by Firefighters

Despite extensive damage, many of the cathedral’s treasures were saved, including Notre Dame’s famous rose windows, although they are not out of danger. Paris Firefighters’ spokesman Lt.-Col. Gabriel Plus said that even though they are “in good condition ... the fire is a

risk for the gables that are no longer supported by the frame.” Firefighters removed statues inside the gables, or support walls, above the rose windows to protect them, and took care not to spray water too hard on the delicate stained glass, Plus said. Scaffolding erected for a renovation of the spire and roof that was already underway must be properly removed because of its weight and because it is now “crucially deformed,” he added.

The cathedral is still being monitored closely by firefighters and experts to determine how much damage the structure suffered and what needs to be dismantled to avoid collapse. “The experts are scrutinizing the whole of the cathedral, part by part, to identify what is weakened, what will need to be dismantled or consolidated,” Plus said.

Nearly \$1 billion has pledged for the restoration, while a vow by French President Emmanuel Macron to finish it in five years has been challenged as being wildly off track. He said the renovations would be completed in time for the 2024 Olympics in Paris.

Macron’s Ambitious Goal Appears Insufficient

“We will rebuild the cathedral to be even more beautiful, and I want it to be finished within five years,” Macron said. Experts have said, however, that Macron’s ambitious goal appears insufficient for such a massive operation. Even Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, while supporting the government timeline, acknowledged Wednesday that it would be difficult. “This is obviously an immense challenge, a historic responsibility,” Philippe said in an address. Prominent French conservation architect Pierluigi Pericolo told Inrocks magazine it...

“The end of the fire doesn’t mean the edifice is totally saved. The stone can deteriorate when it is exposed to high temperatures and change its mineral composition and fracture inside.”
— French conservation architect Pierluigi Pericolo

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TRUMP VETOES MEASURE TO END US INVOLVEMENT IN YEMEN WAR

April 16, 2019 | AP News

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Tuesday vetoed a bill passed by Congress to end U.S. military assistance in Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen. In a break with the president, Congress voted for the first time earlier this month to invoke the War Powers Resolution to try to stop U.S. involvement in a foreign conflict. The veto — the second in Trump's presidency — was expected.

Congress lacks the votes to override him. "This resolution is an unnecessary, dangerous attempt to weaken my constitutional authorities, endangering the lives of American citizens and brave service members, both today and in the future,"

Trump wrote in explaining his veto.

Congress Uneasy With Saudi Arabia Relationship
Congress has grown uneasy with Trump's close relationship with Saudi Arabia as he tries to further isolate Iran, a regional rival.

Many lawmakers also criticized the president for not condemning Saudi Arabia for the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi who lived in the United States and had written critically about the kingdom. Khashoggi went into the Saudi consulate in Istanbul last October and never came out...

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AP File Photo

N. KOREA TESTED NEW WEAPON, WANTS POMPEO OUT OF TALKS

April 18, 2019 | AP News

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Thursday that it had test-fired a new type of "tactical guided weapon," its first such test in nearly half a year, and demanded that Washington remove Secretary of State Mike Pompeo from nuclear negotiations. The test, which didn't appear to be of a banned mid- or long-range ballistic missile that could scuttle negotiations, allows North Korea to show its people it is pushing ahead with weapons development while also reassuring domestic military officials worried that diplomacy with Washington signals weakness.

Separately, the North Korean Foreign Ministry accused Pompeo of playing down the significance of comments by leader Kim Jong Un, who said last week that Washington has until the end of the year to offer mutually acceptable terms for an agreement to salvage the high-stakes nuclear diplomacy. Both the demand for Pompeo's removal from the talks and the weapon test point to North Korea's displeasure...

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PRO-EQUALITY GROUP: ISRAEL QUESTIONS US ACTIVIST AT AIRPORT

April 16, 2019 | AP News

JERUSALEM — Israeli authorities extensively interrogated a Jewish American activist leaving the country about her work with a non-profit organization, the group said Tuesday. Israel has come under scrutiny in the past for detaining and interrogating pro-Palestinian activists and prominent critics at its borders, but the Abraham Initiative called this the first time an advocate of "shared society" between Arabs and Jews inside Israel had been targeted.

The Abraham Initiative activist Laura Mandel was flying home to San Francisco after attending a conference for the group when security officers at Israel's Ben Gurion Airport pulled her aside for questioning about her involvement with the organization, which aims to advance the rights of Israel's Arab citizens. The group is widely considered mainstream, working closely with state agencies and government ministries. Mandel was, by her account, asked about her...

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