

Manuel Cunha of Nisei Farmers League named 2016 Agriculturist of the Year

By Robert Rodriguez
Fresno Bee, Friday, Oct. 14, 2016

Longtime farming advocate Manuel Cunha was named the 2016 Agriculturist of the Year by the Fresno Chamber of Commerce.

The award was announced Thursday at The Big Fresno Fair.

Cunha, president of the Fresno-based Nisei Farmers League, has a long history of lobbying for farmers. In his 20 years with the organization, Cunha has been at the forefront of several issues, including air quality, immigration reform and government regulation.

He has served on many state, local and federal committees, giving regulators and government officials agriculture's point of view.

In announcing the award, Nathan Ahle, chamber president, said Cunha's commitment to agriculture cannot be overstated.

"In a time when Valley farms are besieged on all fronts, from a continuing drought to new state and federal regulations making it difficult for farmers to operate, Manuel Cunha is a steadfast, driven advocate who leads the charge for our agriculture community," Ahle said.

Cunha said he was humbled to receive the award.

"This is a real honor, and I want to thank my staff for all the work they do," he said.

Cunha said 2016 has been a trying year for farmers as they continued to battle for more water, a shrinking pool of labor and increased regulation.

"But we will continue to fight for water and immigration," he said. "We are not going to give up."

Also, Booth Ranches LLC received the Baker Peterson Franklin's Ag Business Award.

The awards recognize leadership, integrity, service and entrepreneurship in the region's agriculture business community.

Founded in 1957 by Otis Booth Jr., Booth Ranches has grown from a 40-acre citrus grove to nearly 9,000 acres with farms stretching from Orange Cove to Maricopa in Kern County.

Operated by Loren Booth, the daughter of Otis Booth, the company is one of the leading citrus producers in the nation. It is the fifth-largest U.S. grower by volume.

The company is also focused on its employees and their families. Booth Ranches provides scholarships to 60 employees' children enrolled in college full time. Twice a year, it hosts a group of children from Los Angeles to Camp Booth for a first-time outdoor experience.

Last year's winners were Joe Del Bosque, a diversified west-side farmer, as Agriculturist of the Year, and Hall Management Corp. of Kerman was named recipient of Baker Peterson Franklin's Ag Business Award.

This year's award winner will be honored at the Fresno Chamber of Commerce's Ag Awards Luncheon at 11 a.m. on Nov. 9 at Valdez Hall at the Fresno Convention Center, 702 M St. Tickets for the event are available by visiting the chamber website at www.FresnoChamber.com or emailing info@fresnochamber.com.

A blaze burning north of Pine Flat Lake east of Fresno has caused smoky skies throughout the Mountain Area, and was 35% containment at 1,700 acres Friday morning.

Sierra Star, Friday, October 14, 2014

The Sacata Fire was sparked around 1 p.m. Tuesday in grassland near the reservoir, U.S. Forest Service officials said, and grew to 1,700 acres in the latest reports Friday morning available by [clicking here](#).

Some 450 firefighters are at work on the inferno, which is burning primarily in tall, dry grass.

Mark Smith, deputy fire chief at the U.S. Forest Service's office in Tollhouse, said multiple air attack and hand crews, alongside numerous engines and other equipment are at work on the blaze.

A no-fly zone was instituted over the area, meaning if people from the public fly drones over the flames, all air crafts assisting with the fire will be grounded.

Smith said North Fork, Oakhurst, and other Mountain Area locations were in the path of smoke being carried from the fire by normal area wind patterns. A health caution was issued by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District late Wednesday, advising people to remain cautious due to hazy outdoor conditions.

An incoming storm system, predicted to drop up to a half inch of rain in Oakhurst and surrounding areas starting Friday afternoon, may not reach the Sacata Fire, forestry officials said.

A prescribed burn was also underway in Mariposa Grove inside Yosemite National Park Wednesday, with ignitions taking place over approximately three days on 62 acres, park officials said. That may lead to smoky skies in the Mountain Area as well.

Smoke thick in Clovis as fire near Pine Flat Lake grows to 1,500 acres

The Fresno Bee, Thursday, Oct. 13, 2016

Winds Thursday morning blew smoke from the Sacata Fire west toward Clovis. Residents awoke to the smell of smoke, and a thick line of hazy smoke hung along the foothills. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District sent out an alert about potentially unhealthy air quality in some areas affected by the smoke.

The wildfire east of Fresno near Pine Flat Lake had grown to 1,502 acres of brush, according to the U.S. Forest Service.

The fire started about 1 p.m. Tuesday near Haslett Basin. As of midday Thursday, fire crews who worked overnight had containment lines around 5 percent of the fire, the Forest Service said.

More than 250 firefighters have been assigned to the wildfire, and more were expected by Thursday.

No structures have been damaged.