

FOREWORD

This is the fourth annual report of applied research and education activities being conducted at the Leslie J. Nickels Soil Laboratory, located in Arbuckle (Colusa County). The sixteen projects reported are on the “cutting-edge” of almond production research and are being conducted by University of California academic staff. The report provides a summary of the projects being conducted and identifies those researchers who are conducting the work. It is not intended to provide detailed information, so the interested reader is encouraged to contact the researchers directly for further clarifications or explanations.

The Nickels Estate is a unique research facility that brings together growers, industry and University researchers to collaborate toward the singular mission of developing information that allows the California almond industry to remain competitive in a world market. It was established in 1968 through a bequest by the late Leslie J. Nickels. Mr. Nickels vision for the facility was described in his Will. He envisioned the Estate as “a soil laboratory to make studies, conduct research, compile and publish data and statistics, and make recommendations to farmers, agriculturalists, horticulturists, orchardists, agronomists, and other interested persons, of soil conditions, methods of soil improvement and betterment, water conditions, irrigation improvements and allied subjects, in northern California in general, and in the Arbuckle area of Colusa County in particular”. The original bequest of over 200 acres of land is managed by court-appointed Trustees. The primary purpose of the Estate is to conduct research, as outlined above.

A memorandum of understanding was signed in 1983. In this MOU, the University of California was named as the entity to conduct and coordinate the research. Former Colusa County Farm Advisor Tom Aldrich was instrumental in developing the MOU and developing the research facility into a reality. That was no easy task, with an aging orchard, minimal equipment and no operating budget. The Estate was then, and remains today, self-sufficient. There is no external support, other than limited industry contributions to support labor. The returns from the crops grown there are the primary resources used to operate the facility. In the early days, the Trustees had to sell small parcels of the Estate to generate capital for orchard establishment, operating costs, etc. It had a rocky start, but through the determination and vision of Aldrich and other individuals, the Estate flourished and began generating information that today forms the basis for efficient almond production. The production techniques developed there continues to have statewide and international impacts.

Today, the Estate is slightly over 200 acres. About 90 acres of that are planted to almonds, with minor plantings of walnuts, prunes and olives. The remainder of the Estate is fallow and available for future development. The Estate is managed by three Trustees that are appointed by the Colusa County Superior Court. The Trustees provide an annual accounting to the Court and are responsible for fiscal oversight and further development of the facility. One of the Trustees is a Director for the Colusa County Water District, which was named as a primary governing

body in the original Will, a second is an almond producer, and the third is the County Director for the Colusa UC Cooperative Extension program. The Colusa County Pomology Farm Advisor, John Edstrom, coordinates the applied research and field activities occurring at the Estate and communicates closely with the Trustees. A ten-person Research Advisory Committee, composed of University academic staff, meets annually to evaluate new research proposals and to review the progress of ongoing projects at the facility. There are currently in-excess of 20 projects being conducted at Nickels. A part-time Farm Manager (Stan Cutter) and full time assistant (Ubaldo Salud) provide the labor to facilitate the ongoing research. Additional labor is hired at key times, such as harvest and pruning seasons.

As noted, the primary source of revenue to operate the facility is derived from sales of the almonds produced there. The Estate is a member of the Blue Diamond cooperative and sells the nuts through this venue. The California Almond Board provides a \$12,000 annual grant to the Nickels Estate to help defray labor costs. The salaries of the researchers conducting work at Nickels are paid by the University of California. The structure and support of Nickels is a collaborative effort bringing together the University, the Colusa County Water District and the almond industry. It is an arrangement that has worked well and which has allowed many almond production technology breakthroughs to occur.

An annual field day is held in May to showcase the research being conducted. The researchers are present to explain their projects and extend the information to the end-users. This event is well-attended and attracts growers from throughout the state, as well as internationally. The Estate also serves additional educational needs, including on-site sprayer calibration and worker safety seminars, tours for visiting scientists and students, educating non-farm groups such as Ag In The Classroom and as a demonstration site for tree crop farmers.

We hope that you find value in this annual report. We are proud of the past and current accomplishments that have evolved from Nickels and anticipate equally exciting things in store in the future. If you have suggestions for improving the value of the Estate and making it more responsive to industry needs, please take the time to contact us at the address listed.

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