

Town Hall

2-3 pm, March 19, 2026

- Welcome
- Leadership Update
- Stories From the Field
- Strategic Focus
- New Hires
- Other Updates

Chat warmup
Learning about each other:

What movie from 2025 would you give the Oscar Award for Best Motion Picture to? Or what was your favorite movie you saw in the last year?



The cast and crew of "One Battle After Another" accepting the 2026 Best Picture Oscar

Leadership Updates

Vision & News - (10-15 mins)



Glenda Humiston

Vice President of UC Agriculture
and Natural Resources



Kathy Eftekhari

Interim AVP, Administrative Services
and Chief of Staff



Jennifer Bunge

Interim AVP, Finance & Capital
Planning



Darren Haver

Interim AVP, Research and
Cooperative Extension

Stories from the Field

Jackie Atim

 **UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**
Agriculture and Natural Resources



Abiotic Stress Program- Kearney REC

Jackie Atim- CE Specialist- Abiotic Stress
March 19th , 2026

University of California
Agriculture and Natural Resources

Background

- Sorghum is used as a model crop to study abiotic stresses such as drought and heat tolerance, salinity, and nitrogen deficiencies, as well as gene discoveries for various biofuel and bioproduct applications
- Sorghum was introduced as a forage crop in the USA in 1800s
- 90,000 acres compared to 400,000 in 1960s
- Concentrated mainly in **Kings and Stanislaus mostly for dairy.**



Program Aims

Situation

- Drought periods are increasingly becoming harder to adapt to due to dire water shortages. This is because many aquifers that some growers source water from are already overdrawn, and many surface water resources are becoming insufficient to meet demands during severe droughts.
- Groundwater pollution with nitrate leached from farms.
- Strict water legislation-Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)

Solution

Theme 1: Performance evaluation of sorghum hybrids in California

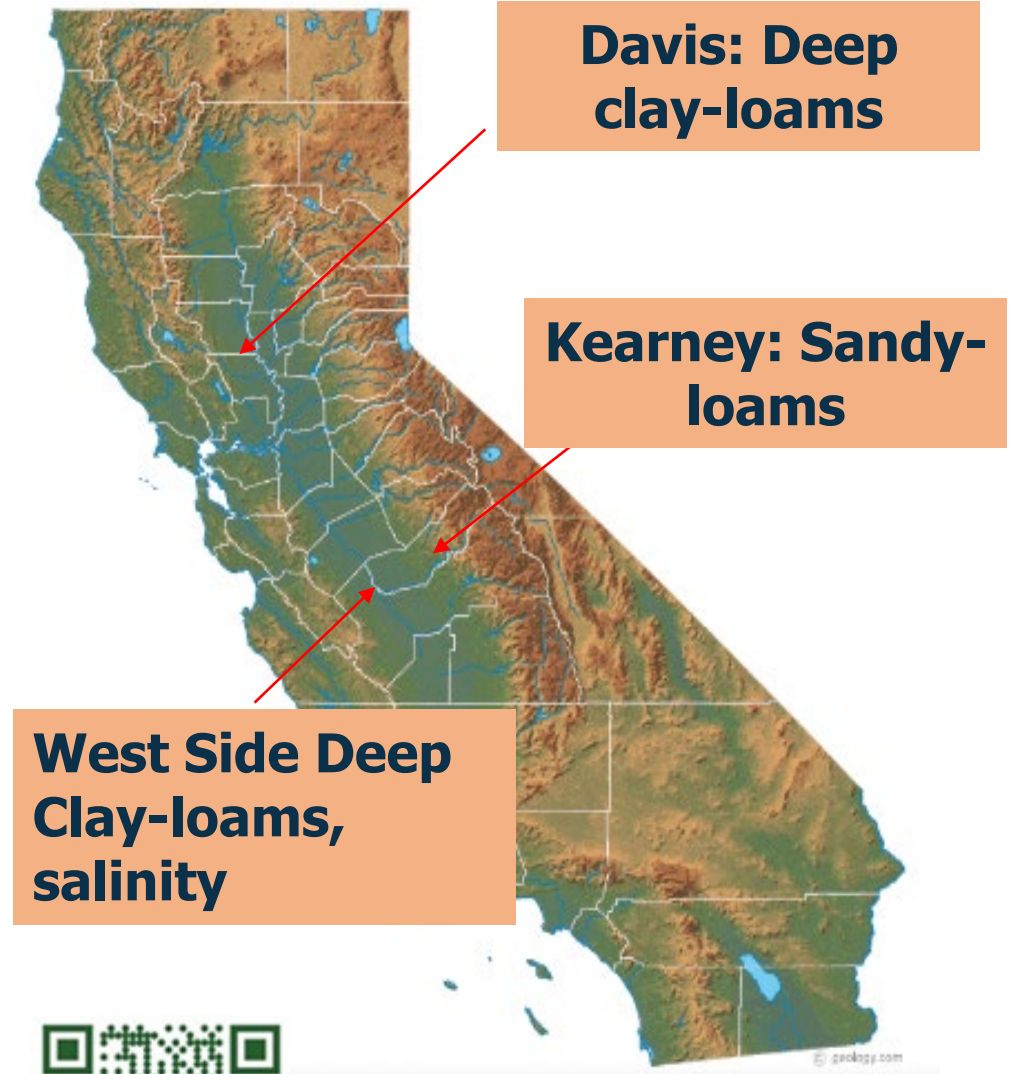
Theme 2: Resilience to Abiotic stress

Theme 3: Sorghum as a renewable feedstock

Theme 4: Promote sorghum as a drought resistant forage and grain crop in California

1. Performance evaluation of sorghum hybrids in California

- Annual demonstration variety evaluation trial in collaboration with seed companies, Texas A&M (Bill Rooney) and University of Nevada (Melinda Yerka).
- Annual Kearney Field Crops, Alfalfa and Forage Field Day in collaboration with Agronomy program Team (Nick Clark, Giuliano Galdi and Michelle Leinfelder-Miles).
- Annual sorghum forage and grain technical reports from the demonstration posted on Agronomy sorghum website- informed variety selection decision by farmers.
- Field tours by students and visitors (both national and international) to the Kearney REC and hosting interns from community colleges (Reedley and Porterville) and Fresno state



Scan for annual grain and forage sorghum reports

Field day and tours



2. Resilience to Abiotic stress

Grain inbred lines



Deficit Irrigation at WREC on Forage



Focus Area: identify drought tolerant forages and grains with different attributes for food, feed and forages

- **Selection of forage sorghum varieties adapted to limited irrigation**, with enhanced understanding of water use efficiency, yield variability across environments, and nutritional quality.
- **Identification of drought-tolerant grain parental inbred lines for hybrid production**, with enhanced understanding of performance in organic and conventional systems under limited water conditions.

Kearney (NIR band in greyscale)



- **Use of drones for drought studies-** Improving understanding of remote sensing to predict yield and identify drought-resistant varieties (UC Merced collaboration).
- **Sorghum Root Microbiome:** Evaluating a defined synthetic rhizosphere community (SRC2v4) for colonization of sorghum roots under drought conditions to improve understanding of its effects on biomass, root yield, colonization patterns, and plant-microbial interactions during development (UC Berkeley and PNNL Collaboration).

3. Sorghum as a renewable feedstock

Field Research: Sorghum for Biofuel

Focus Areas:

'Ground truth' biofuel yield, quality, agronomic performance of sorghum as biofuels:

- **Improve understanding of available 'natural variation'** in existing and improved sorghum as affected by water, soils/environment-location/year.
- **Translating JBEI genetic modification** to field conditions.
- **Understanding "Biofuel Quality and Yield"** – Understanding JBEI Feedstocks-to-Fuel lab process to predict and translate biofuel yield on a field and landscape basis. (starch, sugar, fiber)
- **Improving the biomass yields**-Crossing JBEI Genetic lines with conventional male sterile line.
- **Improving understanding of the effects of growing transgenic lines on soil microbiome communities**



4. Promote sorghum as a drought-resistant grain crop in California

- **Human Consumption:** In Africa, India, and parts of Asia, sorghum is a staple food, used for making porridge, flatbreads, couscous, and traditional alcoholic beverages.
- **Flour Production:** Sorghum flour is gluten-free and widely used in baking, especially in North America and Europe, for products like bread, pasta, and snacks. High in fiber, zinc, rich in antioxidants (May lower risks of cancer, diabetes, heart disease and some neurological diseases) and good source of protein and micronutrients (iron, magnesium, phosphorus, and B vitamins).
- **Syrup and Sweeteners:** Some varieties are used to produce sorghum syrup, a natural sweetener popular in the U.S.



Sorghum Bake-off at Kearney REC

Promoted sorghum as a nutritious grain to the Kearney community, engaging over 46 attendees with 26 recipes submitted.

Take home message

- Great model crop for abiotic stress studies (drought, heat, salinity and nitrogen use).
- Could provide an alternative source of sustainable forages for California. Contribute to the realization of the state's goal of conserving its currently stressed water resources, especially groundwater.
- Identified hybrids that maximize yield per unit water, improving farm profitability under limited irrigation.
- **Conditional changes**
 - ✓ Increased community preparedness and resilience to extreme weather (drought).
 - ✓ Improved food and nutrition security (Cereal that is nutrient dense and requires less input to grow).
 - ✓ Improved soil health and productivity.
 - ✓ Improved water quality (Sorghum grows in saline soils and deep roots uses nitrogen efficiency and act as a natural inhibitor of soil nitrification)
 - ✓ Improved water use efficiency and water supply security
 - ✓ Increased agriculture and food system resilience to extreme weather and change in climate

Acknowledgment

UCANR Sorghum Program : Jackie Atim, Tari Lee Schamm, Kross Savas, Sarah Delgado and Valeria Cisneros

Collaborators: Dan Putnam, Christopher DeBen, Robert Hutmacher, Erin Hestir, Corinne Scown, Henrik Scheller, Aymerick Eudes, Jutta Dalton, Tobias Oker and Nicholas Clark

Funding sources: USDA-NIFA Programs, new faculty start-up funds at UCANR and UC Merced, California water Resources Institute, Joint BioEnergy Institute, US Department of Energy, and Unified sorghum Checkoff



Strategic Focus

Elizabeth Moon and Jaki Hsieh Wojan

 **UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**
Agriculture and Natural Resources

Fall Focus Groups Report

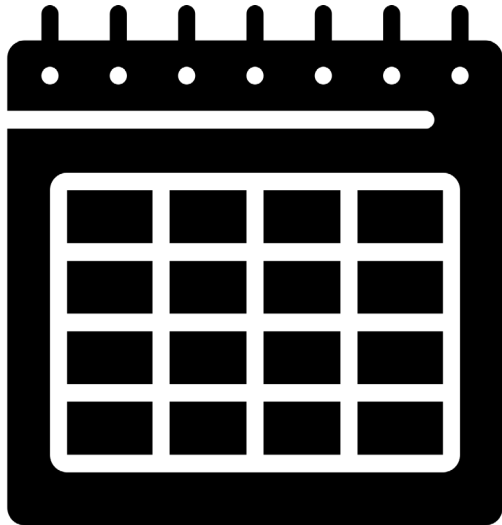


Presented by: Inclusive
Community Advisory Council & T

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Agriculture and Natural Resources

Survey Logistics

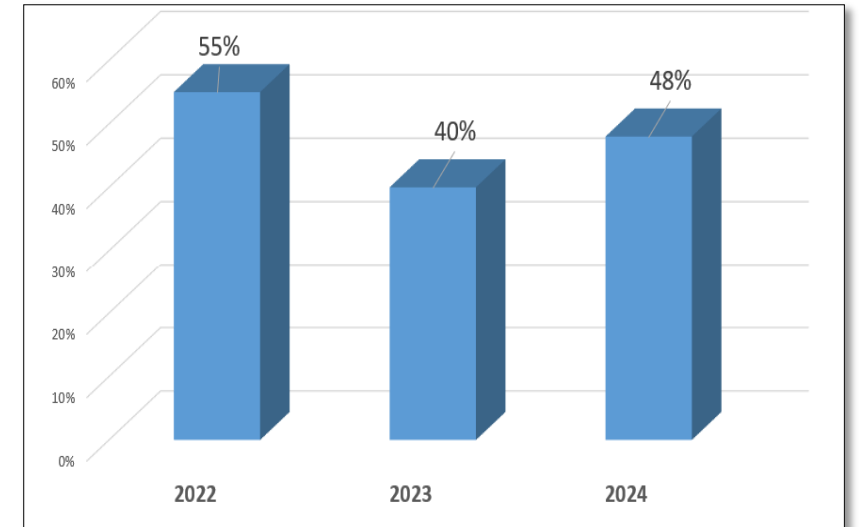
2024 Staff@Work



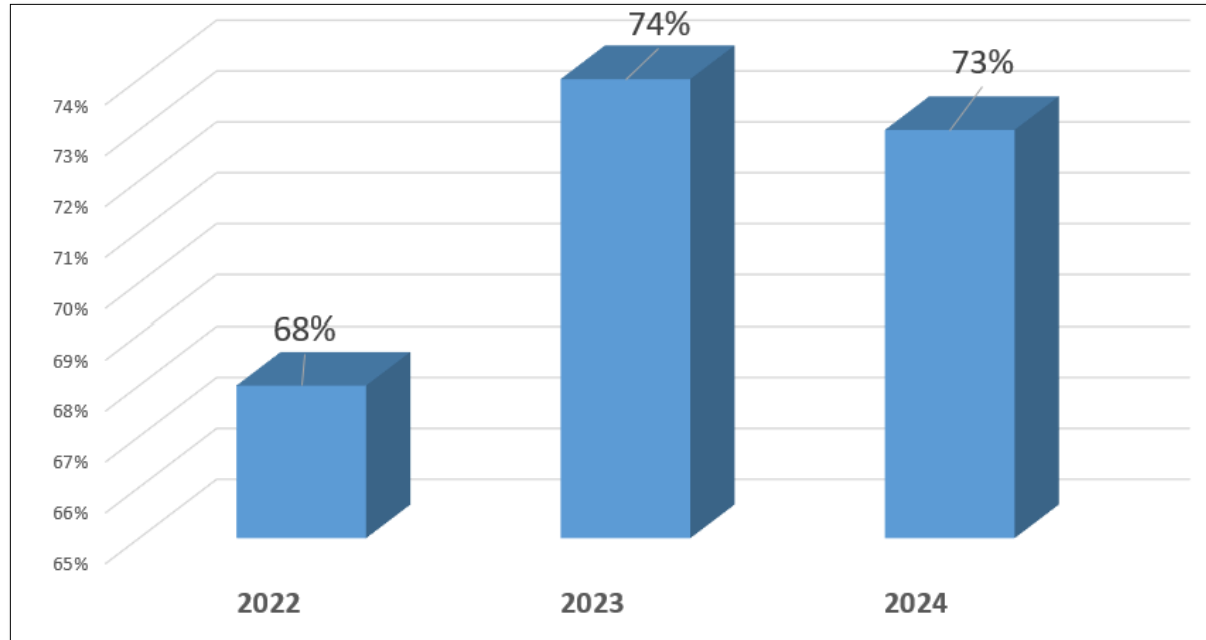
Distributed
Oct 23 – Dec 6, 2024

593
respondents

48% response rate



The response rate increased
compared to 2023



73%

of employees were “satisfied” or “extremely satisfied” –
Remaining high and consistent compared to the 2023 survey

Conduct & Behavioral Items by Gender & Sexual Orientation

1 to 5 Frequency scale (Never to Very Often)

Interpersonal Behaviors Mean Scores by Gender

Below 2 - Excellent | 2.0 to 2.3 - Good | 2.4 to 2.6 - Moderate | 2.7 & above - Low
Mean scores are not displayed for groups that have fewer than 5 respondents

During the past year, how often have you experienced the following conduct where someone:	Diff Gender Identity			Man			Woman		
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024
	1 Was condescending to you	2.80	2.80	1.80	1.73	1.83	1.67	1.93	1.88
2 Paid little attention to your statement or showed little interest in your opinion	2.50	3.00	2.00	1.92	1.97	1.86	1.94	1.90	1.97
3 Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you	2.00	2.00	1.50	1.23	1.30	1.26	1.26	1.26	1.41
4 Made jokes at your expense	1.75	2.20	1.10	1.20	1.29	1.16	1.19	1.18	1.23
5 Interrupted or spoke over you	2.50	3.00	2.40	1.82	1.85	1.83	1.95	1.93	2.04
6 Talked about you behind your back	3.33		1.38	1.52	1.56	1.55	1.49	1.50	1.64
7 Excluded you	2.67	2.60	1.60	1.75	1.71	1.56	1.66	1.54	1.66
8 Kept you out-of-the-loop on information that is important	2.67	2.80	1.80	1.89	1.68	1.76	1.88	1.76	1.89
9 Treated you as if you are invisible	2.00	2.60	1.50	1.41	1.32	1.33	1.42	1.34	1.44
10 Ignored you during conversation	1.50	2.20	1.20	1.38	1.34	1.34	1.40	1.39	1.45
11 Treated you differently because of your gender	2.50	3.00	1.80	1.15	1.33	1.16	1.33	1.22	1.31
12 Made derogatory comments about your gender	1.25	2.00	1.20	1.07	1.17	1.08	1.09	1.05	1.10
13 Made you feel as if you have to give up your gender identity to get along at work	2.60	1.50	1.80	1.04	1.09	1.03	1.06	1.03	1.07
14 Treated you differently because of your race/ethnicity	2.25	2.40	1.00	1.17	1.39	1.24	1.17	1.14	1.19
15 Made derogatory comments about your race/ethnicity	2.00	1.40	1.00	1.06	1.20	1.09	1.06	1.07	1.11
16 Made you feel as if you have to give up your race/ethnicity to get along at work	2.40	1.50	1.00	1.10	1.20	1.11	1.09	1.09	1.11
17 At UC ANR, you feel the need to minimize various characteristics of your culture (e.g., language, dress) to fit in.	3.20	2.40	1.60	1.20	1.36	1.36	1.32	1.27	1.34

Important: Lower scores represent more favorable outcomes

Interpersonal Behaviors Mean Scores by Sexual Orientation

Below 2 - Excellent | 2.0 to 2.3 - Good | 2.4 to 2.6 - Moderate | 2.7 & above - Low
Mean scores are not displayed for groups that have fewer than 5 respondents

During the past year, how often have you experienced the following conduct where someone:	Heterosexual			LGBQ+		
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024
1 Was condescending to you	1.87	1.83	1.84	1.93	2.21	1.92
2 Paid little attention to your statement or showed little interest in your opinion	1.95	1.92	1.97	1.88	2.05	1.84
3 Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you	1.26	1.28	1.37	1.23	1.38	1.35
4 Made jokes at your expense	1.20	1.20	1.21	1.09	1.33	1.12
5 Interrupted or spoke over you	1.89	1.92	1.98	2.05	2.17	2.00
6 Talked about you behind your back	1.49	1.49	1.60	1.49	1.77	1.66
7 Excluded you	1.66	1.62	1.66	1.78	1.69	1.46
8 Kept you out-of-the-loop on information that is important	1.86	1.77	1.87	1.95	1.90	1.66
9 Treated you as if you are invisible	1.38	1.32	1.41	1.51	1.55	1.46
10 Ignored you during conversation	1.36	1.37	1.41	1.40	1.60	1.42
11 Treated you differently because of your gender	1.26	1.25	1.26	1.33	1.46	1.26
12 Made derogatory comments about your gender	1.07	1.08	1.09	1.09	1.20	1.05
13 Made you feel as if you have to give up your gender identity to get along at work	1.05	1.03	1.06	1.25	1.20	1.20
14 Treated you differently because of your race/ethnicity	1.17	1.22	1.21	1.24	1.28	1.15
15 Made derogatory comments about your race/ethnicity	1.05	1.09	1.10	1.05	1.26	1.09
16 Made you feel as if you have to give up your race/ethnicity to get along at work	1.10	1.12	1.12	1.16	1.23	1.08
17 At UC ANR, you feel the need to minimize various characteristics of your culture (e.g., language, dress) to fit in.	1.27	1.29	1.33	1.67	1.50	1.45

Conduct & Behavioral Items by Ethnicity

1 to 5 Frequency scale (Never to Very Often)

Important: Lower scores represent more favorable outcomes

Interpersonal Behaviors Mean Scores by Race/Ethnicity

Below 2 - Excellent | 2.0 to 2.3 - Good | 2.4 to 2.6 - Moderate | 2.7 & above - Low

Mean scores are not displayed for groups that have fewer than 5 respondents

During the past year, how often have you experienced the following conduct where someone:	Am In/AN			Asian/PI			Black			Latinx			White		
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024
1 Was condescending to you		1.62	2.13	1.66	1.66	1.76	2.17	1.56	1.80	1.88	1.81	1.84	1.91	1.93	1.86
2 Paid little attention to your statement or showed little interest in your opinion		1.77	2.27	1.83	1.69	1.79	1.73	1.44	2.00	1.82	1.88	1.98	2.01	1.99	1.92
3 Made demeaning or derogatory remarks about you		1.31	1.53	1.14	1.28	1.29	1.20	1.22	1.53	1.25	1.21	1.43	1.28	1.27	1.34
4 Made jokes at your expense		1.38	1.27	1.17	1.20	1.18	1.00	1.22	1.27	1.21	1.21	1.23	1.21	1.18	1.21
5 Interrupted or spoke over you		1.92	2.00	1.97	1.72	1.99	1.70	1.56	2.07	1.77	1.77	1.76	2.02	2.00	2.06
6 Talked about you behind your back		1.75	1.77	1.25	1.35	1.49	1.44	1.50	1.83	1.49	1.45	1.68	1.56	1.54	1.58
7 Excluded you		1.85	2.13	1.52	1.48	1.58	1.56	1.33	1.69	1.56	1.53	1.72	1.76	1.63	1.59
8 Kept you out-of-the-loop on information that is important		1.58	2.27	1.66	1.60	1.76	1.82	1.44	1.69	1.74	1.78	1.94	1.96	1.78	1.82
9 Treated you as if you are invisible		1.31	1.87	1.34	1.24	1.40	1.18	1.22	1.67	1.39	1.32	1.47	1.47	1.35	1.38
10 Ignored you during conversation		1.38	1.87	1.31	1.39	1.39	1.27	1.22	1.43	1.38	1.27	1.42	1.43	1.40	1.41
11 Treated you differently because of your gender		1.00	1.67	1.10	1.18	1.24	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.26	1.17	1.24	1.36	1.31	1.32
12 Made derogatory comments about your gender		1.00	1.27	1.03	1.10	1.12	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.09	1.03	1.07	1.11	1.09	1.10
13 Made you feel as if you have to give up your gender identity to get along at work		1.00	1.13	1.10	1.06	1.08	1.17	1.00	1.00	1.07	1.03	1.07	1.06	1.05	1.10
14 Treated you differently because of your race/ethnicity		1.15	1.79	1.21	1.39	1.33	1.55	1.33	1.36	1.23	1.27	1.27	1.11	1.13	1.11
15 Made derogatory comments about your race/ethnicity		1.08	1.47	1.10	1.18	1.15	1.09	1.33	1.20	1.10	1.13	1.13	1.04	1.06	1.06
16 Made you feel as if you have to give up your race/ethnicity to get along at work		1.23	1.36	1.24	1.33	1.30	1.17	1.11	1.13	1.09	1.12	1.16	1.06	1.06	1.05
17 At UC ANR, you feel the need to minimize various characteristics of your culture (e.g., language, dress) t..		1.23	2.07	1.69	1.51	1.39	1.77	1.56	1.80	1.30	1.28	1.34	1.24	1.23	1.29

2024 ANR@Work Scores

Diversity and Climate Mean Scores by Gender Identity

1 to 5 Likert scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly agree)

Below 3.00 - Low | 3.00 to 3.59 - Moderate | 3.60 to 4.29 - Good | 4.30 & above – Excellent

	Diff Gender Identity	Man	Woman
	2024	2024	2024
Overall, I am a satisfied UC ANR employee.	3.70	3.99	3.83
I feel valued by my department.	4.10	4.20	4.15
Overall, I am satisfied with the diversity related programs and services available at UC ANR.	3.40	4.09	3.90
UC ANR promotes a work environment where all people are welcomed.	3.70	4.26 ★	4.05
Top leaders at UC ANR are committed to diversity.	3.44	4.11 ★	3.93
People of all ethnic groups, cultures, and backgrounds are treated fairly in my department.	4.00	4.35 ★	4.22
People of all sexual orientations are treated fairly in my department.	4.00	4.38	4.26
My department actively supports a diverse work environment.	4.20	4.34	4.23
My department practices UC ANR's Principles of Community.	4.40	4.34	4.24

★ Statistically significant differences between demographic groups (p's <.01).

Diversity and Climate Items by Sexual Orientation

1 to 5 Likert scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly agree)

Below 3.00 - Low 3.00 to 3.59 - Moderate 3.60 to 4.29 - Good 4.30 & above – Excellent	Heterosexual 2024	LGBTQ+ 2024
Overall, I am a satisfied UC ANR employee.	3.88	3.89
I feel valued by my department.	4.16	4.24
Overall, I am satisfied with the diversity related programs and services available at UC ANR.	3.94	3.69
UC ANR promotes a work environment where all people are welcomed.	4.10	3.95
Top leaders at UC ANR are committed to diversity.	3.98	3.69 
People of all ethnic groups, cultures, and backgrounds are treated fairly in my department.	4.25	4.33
People of all sexual orientations are treated fairly in my department.	4.28	4.29
My department actively supports a diverse work environment.	4.24	4.30
My department practices UC ANR's Principles of Community.	4.26	4.35

★ Statistically significant differences between demographic groups (p's <.01).

Diversity and Climate Items by Race/Ethnicity

1 to 5 Likert scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly agree)

Below 3.00 - Low 3.00 to 3.59 - Moderate 3.60 to 4.29 - Good 4.30 & above – Excellent	Am In/AN	Asian/PI	Black	Latinx	White
	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024
Overall, I am a satisfied UC ANR employee.	4.07	3.83	4.00	3.83	3.92
I feel valued by my department.	4.21	4.28	3.94	4.07	4.22
Overall, I am satisfied with the diversity related programs and services available at UC ANR.	3.93	3.92	3.63	3.99	3.95
UC ANR promotes a work environment where all people are welcomed.	4.07	4.06	3.93	4.17	4.10
Top leaders at UC ANR are committed to diversity.	3.62	3.89	3.88	4.02	4.01
People of all ethnic groups, cultures, and backgrounds are treated fairly in my department.	4.14	4.23	3.81	4.20	4.33
People of all sexual orientations are treated fairly in my department.	4.14	4.23	4.13	4.21	4.36
My department actively supports a diverse work environment.	4.36	4.19	4.13	4.22	4.29
My department practices UC ANR's Principles of Community.	4.21	4.30	4.21	4.17	4.31

★ Statistically significant differences between demographic groups (p 's <.01).

Focus Group Overview

- ❑ **October – December**
- ❑ **1 Hour Sessions**
- ❑ **84 colleagues participated**
- ❑ **11 Focus Groups**
 - Latinx Employees (2)
 - LGBTQ+ Employees
 - Black Employees
 - Asian/Pacific Islander Employees
 - Supervisors/Managers
 - Global/International Employees
 - Early Career Employees
 - Admin Employees
 - General Mixed Employees (2)

Questions

1. What helps you feel well and supported in your day-to-day work at UC ANR?
2. At this point in your career, what helps you feel a sense of connection and belonging?
3. Have there been times when you felt less comfortable, supported, or safe in your work environment?
4. Are there any formal or informal ways of doing things that might make it harder for some employees to succeed?
5. If so, what changes or additions would make things better?
6. When it comes to speaking up or reporting concerns, what helps or makes it harder?
7. What factors influence your decision to report or not report concerns?
8. If you had a magic wand and could make one change that would make UC ANR an even more inclusive and welcoming place to work, what would that be?

Highlights from the Focus Groups



What is going well:

- Strong peer-to-peer relationships
- Commitment to the mission and vision
- Supportive Supervisors
- Timely responses and clarity
- Opportunities to connect across locations

What could be better yet:

- Transparency on processes and policies
- Accountability
- Workload balance
- Emotional and / or psychological safety
- Consistent respect in words and actions

Collaborative Steps Forward

- Sharing more information about our budget process, priorities and funding sources
- Restructuring the *Open Conversations with UC ANR Senior Leadership*
- Researching an internal communications path for employee access only (intranet)
- ERG Management Moving to Workplace Inclusion & Belonging Unit – Supporting the establishment of a Neurodiverse/Disability ERG

ICAC Areas of Focus (Subcommittees)

- Working with HR to understand and enhance standardized exit interview process
- Working with HR to expand and encourage participation in the UC ANR or UC Mentorship Programs
- Building knowledge of career opportunities in UC ANR and the UC System
 - Having leaders share their own career journeys
- Community engagement and accountability: working towards values alignment in processes

COMING SOON

**2026
ANR@WORK
Survey**

April 16 – May 1

Principles of Community

 **UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**
Agriculture and Natural Resources

Principles of Community Highlight: Integrity

We establish and implement ethical Principles while acting with honesty, consistency and equity to create a supportive, trusting environment for all.

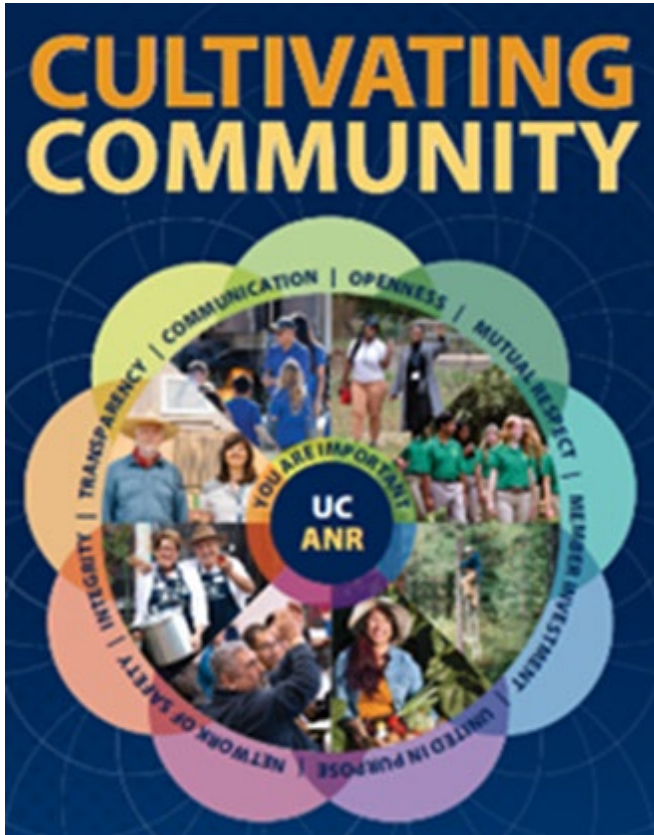


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“Integrity is crucial... You must do what you say you will do, stay true to your values, and always strive to do what is right, not what is easy.”

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director General of the World Trade Organization 2021

Actions to Support



- Define how the UC ANR core values are exemplified within your own teams
- Taking accountability and ownership of all outcomes
- Be candid and thoughtful in communication about difficult issues
- Being actively consistent with procedures by including each other by chat communication
- Honest communication & inclusion of all people in dispersing info
- Understanding and acting on how words and interactions between colleagues require respect for how the other person wants to be addressed and treated.

2026 Workplace Inclusion and Belonging Award



2025 Award Winner **Eliot Freutel**

Nominations Open March 17 – April 15

[NOMINATION FORM](#)

Open to ALL UC ANR Employees

This award reflects UC ANR's deepened intentional commitment to the Principles of Community and to cultivating a culture where all people feel valued and supported to thrive.

Team & Individual Awards

Check out the website for more information [Workplace Inclusion & Belonging Annual Award](#)

In the News

- **Lucy Diekmann** told [Grist](#) water expenses can be a barrier for “agrihoods”
- [Marin Independent Journal](#) consulted **Randi Black** about a bill to improve manure handling
- **Lindsey Pedroncelli** told [LA Times](#) there’s a lot of interest in composting
- When asked about new dietary guidelines, **Wendi Gosliner** told [FactCheck.org](#) most Americans consume adequate amounts of protein
- **Yu-Chen Wang, Mark Bolda, Paramveer Singh** and **Steve Fennimore** were all mentioned by [Santa Cruz Sentinel](#) article about a strawberry research meeting
- **Julie Clark** gave [Ventura County Star](#) & other news outlets tips for controlling goldspotted oak borer
- [Comstock's](#) magazine talked to **Atef Swelam** about “Tea Day” at Kearney REC
- **Daniel Swain** talked to [KQED](#) about warm winter storms, to [Scientific American](#) about avalanche conditions, to [Mercury News](#) and [The Guardian](#) about snowpack, and to numerous reporters about the March heatwave



Kathleen Carter told [Fox 40](#) the Amador County School farm will encourage students to eat more fruits & vegetables

New Hires: Welcome to UC ANR

February 18- March 16, 2026

Ben Baldi, UCCE NEVADA_PLACER COUNTY

Sujan Barama, RESOURCE PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

Yaritza Castrejon, UCCE STANISLAUS COUNTY

Summer Cortez, SAREP

Lauren Hale, ANR CE SPECIALISTS UCM

Michelle F Lee, IMM OFFICE OF HR

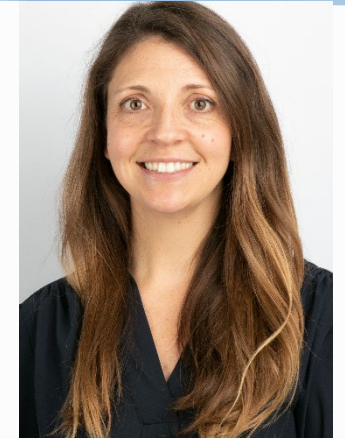
Kristen Mussack, HANSEN REC

Maria Guadalupe Perez, UCCE SUTTER/YUBA COUNTIES

Aset Isabelle Sanchez, UCCE SAN DIEGO COUNTY



Ben Baldi



Lauren Hale



Summer Cortez

THANK YOU!

Next town hall is April 16

To see previous town hall presentations, visit [Link to previous Town Halls](#)

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Agriculture and Natural Resources