

2026 UC ANR Cooperative Extension Position

Nut Crops Advisor, Kings County

Developed and proposed by: This position was co-developed and co-written by the Fruit & Nut Tree Crop Program Team co-chairs and the Tulare, Kings and Kern County Area Director, with input on responsibilities, justification, and research and extension topics from Orchard Advisors in neighboring counties. The Almond Board of California, Pistachio Research Board and California Walnut Board were involved identifying research and extension priorities for their crops in this area.

Position title: Nut Crops Advisor (Almond, Pistachio, Walnut)

Headquarter location and coverage area: The position will be located in the Kings County UCCE office, covering 107,000 acres of nut crops in Kings County. There are **currently no advisors in the Kings County office**. This **position is critical to demonstrating the value of UC ANR to Kings County**, which has historically been very supportive of Cooperative Extension. With the departure of Advisor Doug Amaral in 2025, there has been a void in research and extension coverage of these industries in Kings County. Almond, pistachio and walnut advisors in neighboring counties are already covering more than 200,000 acres each, making it unsustainable for them to attempt to cover Kings County as well.

Position overview, briefly describe: This position will focus on nut crop production in Kings County (almonds, pistachios, walnuts). The position is expected to develop a strong and balanced research and extension program focused on themes challenging the economic and environmental sustainability of nut crop production, prioritized based on needs assessments and discussions with industry and governmental agency partners. The position is expected to develop a strong understanding of field-based horticultural and physiological considerations in nut crop production to ensure innovative research is applicable to real-world management settings. A Master's degree or higher in pomology, horticulture, agroecology, plant science or other closely related field is required. Demonstrated experience in extending research to agricultural practitioners and/or translating scientific findings into actionable lessons in layman's terms is desired. The position will report to the Kings, Tulare & Kern County Area Director, working in coordination with orchard advisors and regional irrigation and integrate pest management advisors in neighboring counties, as well as campus and REC-based faculty and specialists.

Justification: With support from previous advisors Beede and Amaral, nut crop acreage in Kings County doubled in the last ten years to 107,000 acres, driven largely by the growth of the pistachio industry, which has tripled in acreage since 2015. Farm gate value has almost doubled in that time, reaching \$473 million in 2024, second in value only to dairy in Kings County. The economic impact of these crops goes well beyond their farm gate value. For example, representing 12% of the statewide pistachio acreage, the Kings County pistachio industry has a [total annual economic impact of \\$780 million, creating the equivalent of 6,700 FTE jobs](#) in agriculture and related industries in California. However, industry stakeholders have identified numerous challenges threatening the sustainability of these nut crop industries, and the economic vitality and jobs they contribute to local economies. These threats include rising costs of inputs, a rapidly changing climate, increased labor costs and decreased availability, and increased regulations limiting nutrient, water and pesticide use. These threats overlap strongly with ANR's Strategic Vision Challenge Areas of Agriculture & Food Systems, Climate Change, Innovation, and Regulations, Policy, & Compliance. While these are challenges faced by

orchard crops throughout the state, many, such as [climate change](#) and [nutrient](#) and [water](#) regulation, are felt most acutely in Kings and neighboring Kern and Tulare Counties. As such, this position is a top priority for the Fruit & Nut Tree Crop Program Team, both for the sake of Kings County, and because solutions generated in Kings County will be valuable for orchard growers throughout the state. This position also advances ANR's public value by developing and extending science-based solutions that support the local agricultural productivity, environmental sustainability and economic prosperity in one of California's most important orchard production regions.

Successfully responding to these challenges requires field-based expertise with a strong horticultural understanding to partner with UC experts to customize innovations to the needs and limitations of almond, pistachio and walnut cropping systems. Success will contribute to ANR's condition changes of increased ecological sustainability of agriculture and increased agriculture resilience to extreme weather and change in climate. Twenty years from now, success for this position will look like increased economic and ecological vitality of orchard systems in Kings County. This may include increased adoption of innovative solutions to climate stressors (e.g. new varieties, plant growth regulators, cooling photovoltaic netting), increased adoption of automated technologies (e.g. automated sprayers, pest sensors, harvesters), and sustained yields and incomes under increased regulatory pressure.

Extension: The advisor will work with local nut crop growers, pest control advisors, support industries and public agencies to conduct an applied extension outreach program that uses both formal and informal educational approaches. Traditional and contemporary modalities will be used, both to disseminate their own information and that of UC colleagues, including individual contact farm calls, field days, in-person and online meetings and workshops, electronic newsletters and blog posts, podcasts, videos and social media. In addition to their own initiatives, the advisor is expected to contribute to the planning and execution of regional UC extension efforts, including UC Pistachio Day, Kern County Almond Day, Tri-County Walnut Day, and UCCE's [San Joaquin Valley Trees & Vines](#), and to speak at regional and statewide industry meetings. The advisor is expected to rapidly become a recognized expert and resource for both horticultural issues and practices.

Research: Multiple research needs exist in the almond, pistachio and walnut industries, including approaches to sustain or increase yield while decreasing inputs and costs, climate adaptation, mechanization and automation, and reducing and adapting inputs to changing nutrient, water and pesticide regulations. Topics could include variety evaluation, cropping efficiency, use of plant growth regulators and bio-stimulants, adapting automation technology to tree physiology and orchard management, and increased efficiency in use of nutrients, water and pesticides. A successful research program will collaborate with topical experts at UC campuses, RECs and other county offices, as well as other academic institutions. There are numerous publication opportunities across these crops and disciplines including trade publications (e.g. Pacific Nut Producer, West Coast Nut), commodity board technical reports, and scientific journals that range from general agriculture and plant journals (e.g. Scientia Horticulturae, Frontiers in Plant Science) to those more focused on specific production concerns (e.g. Agricultural and Forest Meteorology, Biosystems Engineering).

UC ANR network: The advisor will collaborate with orchard, irrigation and IPM advisors in the southern San Joaquin Valley to develop an integrated and complementary research and extension program that address vital local needs. The advisor will also work with AES faculty and CE Specialists with expertise in tree physiology, plant stress, climate modeling, automation, agricultural engineering, spray technology, plant nutrition, entomology and plant pathology at UC Merced, UC Davis, UC Berkeley, and the Kearney,

Lindcove and West Side Research and Extension Centers to solve local challenges, with the nearby UC Merced Smart Farm and Kearney REC serving as particularly valuable resources. This position fits into the Fruit & Nut Tree Crop Program Team's priority of increasing the ecological and economic sustainability of orchard crops. Orchard crops throughout California are challenged by input costs, climate change, labor restrictions, and regulations, but many of these challenges are felt most acutely in Kings and neighboring Kern and Tulare Counties. Kings County's front-line status also makes the position important for AES faculty and CE Specialists working on topics such as climate adaptation, and compliant nutrient, water and pest strategies. Kings County is two hours from Merced and four hours from Davis. **Without an advisor in Kings County, AES faculty and CE Specialists will be constrained in their ability to test, refine and implement innovative research on the front lines of production challenges.**

Network external to UC ANR: The advisor is expected to develop strong connections with agencies at the state (California Depts of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), Water Resources, Pesticide Regulation), regional (e.g. Regional Water Coalitions, Resource Conservation Districts), and county (Agricultural Commissioners, Farm Bureaus) levels based on prioritized clientele needs, as well as research groups outside of UC (e.g. USDA, CSUs and community colleges) and industry groups (e.g. California Assoc. of Pest Control Advisers, American Pistachio Growers, Boswell Farms, etc.). Collaboration will be fostered by involvement in national and international research networks such as the American Society for Horticultural Science, the International Society for Horticultural Science, and multiple workgroups therein.

Support: The Kings County office in Hanford will serve as the home office for this area advisor position, providing office and dry lab space, a vehicle, secretarial support, telephone, internet, and pesticide storage.

Other support: The advisor will be able to leverage research and extension funds from traditional funding agencies including USDA, CDFA, the Almond Board of California, the Pistachio Research Board, and the California Walnut Board. State and federal granting programs including Dept. of Pesticide Regulation, USDA Sustainable Ag. Research and Education, and CDFA's Specialty Crop Block, Healthy Soils, and Fertilizer Research and Extension programs providing grant funding support as well.