

Agriculture briefs

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Giacomini and his four daughters are finalists for the 2013 California Leopold Conservation Award. The family operates Robert Giacomini Dairy and Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Company.

The two other finalist groups named last week are Lodi winegrowers John and Gail Kautz and Watsonville organic farmers Steve Pedersen and Jeanne Byrne.

The award, which includes a \$10,000 prize, is sponsored by the California Farm Bureau Federation, the Sand County Foundation and Sustainable Conservation.

The winner will be announced Dec. 9 at the federation's annual meeting in Monterey.

Spurred by complaints from farmers, Sen. Dianne Feinstein last week publicly urged the Department of Homeland Security to redirect immigration enforcement efforts toward “serious violent crimes” instead of “legitimate agricultural employers and their workers.”

“The reality is that the majority of farmworkers in the U.S. are foreign-born and unauthorized, which is well-known,” wrote Feinstein, adding that she's “afraid that this aggressive worksite enforcement strategy will deprive the agricultural sector of most of its workforce.”

Worksite monitoring has definitely heated up.

In 2008, the last year of the George W. Bush administration, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents audited 503 companies nationwide for employee eligibility. Last year, ICE agents conducted more than 3,000 such audits.

California's agricultural production has reached another record high.

Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture shows the state's 80,500 farms and ranches had revenues in 2012 of \$44.7 billion, a 3 percent increase from the previous year and a new record.

The highest revenue gain was seen in pistachios, which increased in value by 27 percent.

California remains the nation's largest agricultural state in terms of revenues, representing 11.3 percent of the U.S. total. It's followed by Iowa and Nebraska.

California is also the number one dairy state in the nation. It produced a fifth of the country's milk supply last year, though revenues slipped due to a drop in the number of herds and sliding milk prices.

— Staff and wire reports. Submit items to robert.digitale@pressdemocrat.com.

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