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Top administrators from UC ANR visit Imperial Valley

By Trish Burich-McNeece Special to This Newspaper 12 hrs ago



Dr. Wendy Powers, associate vice president of the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, speaks with staff from both UC Cooperative Extension and the Desert Research & Extension Center during a recent visit to Imperial Valley. COURTESY PHOTO

Two top administrators with the University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources met with staff, stakeholders and county officials during a two-day visit to Imperial County recently.

Dr. Wendy Powers, associate vice president of the University of California ANR, and Dr. Mark Lagrimini, vice provost of Research and Extension, talked with staff from both UC Cooperative Extension and the Desert Research & Extension Center on a number of important issues.

Powers spoke about budget cuts and a delay in hiring advisors. She said there is a need to collaborate with both public and private sector entities to increase funding for research and the hiring of new advisors.

They were also briefed about UCCE and DREC projects, accomplishments and barriers by the directors, county advisors and CES representatives.

Following that meeting, Powers and Lagrimini were given a tour of the campus and research fields, the Farm Smart gardens, water plant, feedlot, organic field, various research plots, water reservoir, laboratory and the olive field.

Powers and Lagrimini then met with the county Board of Supervisors, the county ag commissioner, and UCCE and DREC directors, and briefly talked about position partnerships. They also met with farmers, ranchers, educators, county officials, and other county dignitaries and stakeholders over lunch.

Lagrimini gave a short presentation on "UCCE & the REC Systems: Looking Forward." He talked about the intense interest in growing industrial hemp and told the crowd that county director Oli Bachie could be the first person in the low desert to conduct research on it.

Supervisor Ray Castillo discussed the ongoing partnership the county already has with UC Cooperative Extension. Castillo said, "It is important to note that the state Legislature and the University of California recognized the important role the Imperial Valley would play in the agricultural economy of California back in 1912, when this facility was established. They must have thought that the unique climate, soil and water resources of this region might be worthy of some future study — and it turns out they were onto something."

He added, "Two advisors at the University of California Cooperative Extension-Imperial County have applied for and received research grant funding totaling almost \$400,000 to date, and we will continue to explore new ways to strengthen our partnership in the future."

After lunch, Irrigation and Water Management advisor Ali Montazar led neighborhood and growers' field tours. They visited Vessey & Co. farms, Scott Howington's organic farms, and Ronnie Leimgruber's vegetable and alfalfa farms. Leimgruber is a Climate Smart farm awardee.

They also went to see some drainage canals and the Alamo River.

Powers and Lagrimini were able to talk with the growers about the benefits of research and their challenges in irrigation and Climate Smart farming. The growers provided detailed information on organic farming and harvest issues as well. They also remarked that UCCE and local growers work closely together to enhance productivity.

Livestock advisor Brooke Latack led the second day's tour. Powers and Lagrimini toured a feedlot, El Toro's hay press, saw sheep grazing on local fields and a solar field in Calexico. They drove by the border, several canals and adjacent farms. They also saw the hydro turbine at drop 4, the All-American Canal along with Imperial Irrigation District infrastructures.

At the end of the tour, they met back at DREC for an informal lunch and the opportunity for staff to voice their concerns and suggestions.

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