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Blue Diamond Growers Hosts Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, Robert Bonnie, for an Orchard Tour and Visit to the Almond Innovation Center®

Blue Diamond showcases their application of the \$45 million Climate-Smart Commodities Grant awarded by the USDA

Sacramento, CA, May 29, 2024 – *Blue Diamond Growers*, a farmer-owned cooperative and the world's largest almond marketer and processor, hosted the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, Robert Bonnie, last Tuesday for an orchard tour and discussion at their Almond Innovation Center® in Sacramento, California. Joining Under Secretary Bonnie were members of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Division: State Conservationist, Carlos Suarez, Deputy State Conservationist, RaeAnn Dubay, State Resource Conservationist, Jon Gustafson, and Public Affairs and Outreach Director, Jonathan Groveman.

Under Secretary Bonnie and the NRCS team toured Blue Diamond farmer Ben King's orchard along with *Blue Diamond's* Chief Government and Public Affairs Officer, Alicia Rockwell, Vice President of Member Relations, Mel Machado, Head of Sustainability, Dr. Dan Sonke, and Sr. Manager of Membership Development & Sustainable Agriculture, Kabir Tumber. Sonke provided insight into the engagement *Blue Diamond* participating farmers, like King, have made with the \$45 million USDA Partnerships for [Climate-Smart Commodities](#) grant awarded to the Cooperative.

The project is one of approximately 140 grant projects being funded by the [USDA's Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities](#). USDA is investing \$3 billion to build and expand markets for commodities made with climate-smart practices. The department hopes to increase the competitive advantage of U.S. agriculture both domestically and internationally, building wealth in rural communities. These climate-smart projects support a diverse range of producers and operations as they voluntarily adopt climate-smart agricultural practices and market their climate-smart commodities.

The *Blue Diamond* team shared their work with grant partners: [Project Apis m.](#) (PAm.) and [Pollinator Partnership](#) (P2). PAm. provides participating *Blue Diamond* farmers with funds and resources to plant temporary cover crops through the "Seeds for Bees" program and perennial conservation cover. Pollinator Partnership supports *Blue Diamond* farmers implementing permanent pollinator habitat with hedgerows. These practices are supported by the USDA's grant which was awarded to Blue Diamond Growers in 2023 and is being disbursed to support participating farmers' sustainability activities and the development of markets for those climate-smart commodities over five years.



Under Secretary Bonnie was shown that, like many *Blue Diamond* farmers, King's application of the USDA-awarded Climate-Smart Grant has enhanced his ability to implement conservation practices across his land, which is especially relevant in the current economically challenging environment. This year, cover crops were successfully established in all the King farm's orchards.

"Under Secretary Bonnie's and the local NRCS partnerships have made it possible for *Blue Diamond* farmers to install practices like cover crops, hedgerows and conservation cover, that are so beneficial to the wellbeing of pollinators and local wildlife," said Dr. Dan Sonke, Head of Sustainability, *Blue Diamond Growers*. "The Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodities funding has made a significant impact for many of our growers. We are grateful for this partnership and look forward to doing even more together and deepening our efforts with them in the coming years."

After the orchard tour, Under Secretary Bonnie joined *Blue Diamond* executives, Alicia Rockwell and Mel Machado at *Blue Diamond's* Almond Innovation Center® in Sacramento, the only facility of its kind in the world. Mr. Bonnie sampled several of *Blue Diamond's* latest innovations, including Thin Dipped almonds and Almond Breeze® Almond & Oat Blend, while hearing from *Blue Diamond's* Strategic Growth Accounts Lead, Bobby McCuan. McCuan shared about *Blue Diamond's* domestic and global reach.

Under Secretary Bonnie discussed the crucial partnership between the USDA and *Blue Diamond Growers* and wishes to keep an open discussion about how the USDA can further bolster *Blue Diamond's* efforts to continue advancing its farmers' sustainability practices and creating opportunities for new sources of revenue through the development of climate-smart markets. Under Secretary Bonnie closed by sharing that he is pleased with *Blue Diamond's* application of the funds by saying, "I appreciate what you [*Blue Diamond*] are doing with the grant to help position American agriculture as a leader in delivering climate solutions."



Blue Diamond almond farmer, Ben King, with Under Secretary Bonnie and the King Ranch Property Manager, Mike Powell



Blue Diamond Growers' Head of Sustainability, Dr. Dan Sonke, with Under Secretary Bonnie



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About Blue Diamond Growers®

Blue Diamond Growers, a farmer-owned cooperative representing approximately 3,000 of California's almond growers, is the world's leading almond marketer and processor. Established in 1910, it created the California almond industry and opened world markets for almonds. Blue Diamond is dedicated to delivering the benefits of almonds around the world and does so by providing high-quality almonds, almond ingredients and branded products. Headquartered in Sacramento, the company employs more than 1,800 people throughout its processing plants, receiving stations and gift shops. To learn more about Blue Diamond Growers, visit www.bluediamond.com and follow the company on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#).