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Common Threads Honors 13 Women in Agriculture for Their Service

Farm Credit again serves as a top-level sponsor of awards to recognize women's contributions to agriculture and their communities

Anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

That is the core of Common Threads, an awards program that recognizes women in agriculture in the San Joaquin Valley and Northern California for their service to agriculture and to their communities. As the Common Threads North awards program put it:

"Agriculture is the common thread of all honorees. Their contributions are symbolic of the rich, colorful threads used to fashion a multifaceted tapestry, not unlike the agricultural diversity of our region. The common threads of our tapestry display an array of cultures, ages, and regions. Some threads are vivid and bright, like the colorful bounty of our land's harvest. Some are as soft as well-used denim and a little faded with age. Some have the tensile strength of iron; others the complexity and richness of fine lace."

Colleen Cecil, executive director of the Butte County Farm Bureau and a member of the Common Threads North committee, which recognizes women from Stanislaus County north to the Oregon border, said it was important to honor the contributions of women to agriculture.

"Women are often overlooked because they're busy working bees in the background and they don't get the spotlight," Cecil said.

"Other programs recognize outstanding people, but this is the only one I know of about women in ag. It's special to get this award because you've been nominated by others who hold you in high regard. I've had the opportunity to read the applications and letters of recommendation, and I just want to give everyone an award. We're grateful to be able to bring attention to these women."

Rebecca Quist, the chair of the Common Threads Fresno committee, which recognizes women in Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced and Tulare counties, noted that the committee's honorees represent a wide variety in ages.

"Ag has no age limit. The women we recognize are legacy women – whether they've done things quietly behind the scenes or they're part of a newer generation where they're out-front advocating in a public forum," she said.



North: Left to right: Bobbin Mulvaney (Sacramento), Audrey Z. Tennis (Chico), Sharron Zoller (Kelseyville), Linda Walker (Los Molinos), Geri Byrne (Tulelake), Bonnie Fernandez-Fenaroli (Woodland).

sponsors since 2015. The organizations are part of the provider of credit to U.S. agriculture.



Central Valley: Left to right: Tricia Stever Blattler (Exeter), Aubrey Bettencourt (Hanford), Nanette Simonian (Fowler), Lucy Areias (Fresno), Holly Rosa (Hanford), Sheri Kanagawa (Hanford) and Juanita Calzadillas-Pedrozo (Merced).

Keith Hesterberg, President and CEO of Fresno Madera Farm Credit, added that the philanthropic efforts of women in agriculture are a cornerstone of the health of farming communities around the state.

“Since the founding of our nation, rural America has evolved through a unique commitment to volunteerism that has strengthened and improved our communities,” Hesterberg said. “The Common Threads winners truly exemplify this trait as all have given generously of their time over the years to work on projects that have made a real difference.”

In the Fresno area, seven honorees were honored on March 1 at a luncheon in Clovis: Lucy Areias, Fresno; Aubrey Bettencourt, Hanford; Juanita Calzadillas-Pedrozo, Merced; Holly Rosa, Hanford; Nanette Simonian, Fowler; Sheri Kanagawa, Hanford; and Tricia Stever Blattler, Honorary Recipient, Tulare.

And in the north, six women were recognized at a dinner in Winters on April 5: Geri Byrne, Tulelake; Bonnie Fernandez-Fenaroli, Woodland; Bobbin Mulvaney, Sacramento; Audrey Z. Tennis, Chico; Linda Walker, Los Molinos; and Sharron Zoller, Kelseyville.

AgWest Farm Credit, American AgCredit, CoBank and Fresno Madera Farm Credit have collectively contributed more than \$35,000 to support Common Threads as top-level nationwide Farm Credit System – the largest

Mark Littlefield, President and CEO of AgWest Farm Credit, said Farm Credit supports Common Threads because of the importance of women in agriculture.

“Each of the women honored this year has made outstanding contributions to California agriculture, whether managing operations of their family farming business, through work in organizations supporting agriculture or both,” Littlefield said. “And since so many younger women are taking on even more important roles in farming and ranching, they will help ensure a strong future for agriculture in the state.”

The Common Threads program also benefits the recipients' communities, Holman noted, as some of the proceeds from the awards events benefit a charity designated by each of the honorees.

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About Farm Credit:

AgWest Farm Credit, American AgCredit, CoBank and Fresno Madera Farm Credit are cooperatively owned lending institutions providing agriculture and rural communities with a dependable source of credit. We specialize in financing farmers, ranchers, farmer-owned cooperatives, rural utilities and agribusinesses. Farm Credit offers a broad range of loan products and financial services, including long-term real estate loans, operating lines of credit, equipment and facility loans, cash management and appraisal and leasing services...everything a "growing" business needs. For more information, visit www.farmcreditalliance.com

About Common Threads:

The Common Threads program was launched in 1997 by the California Agricultural Leadership Foundation and the College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology and the Ag One Foundation at California State University, Fresno. The Agricultural Leadership Foundation launched Common Threads North in 2003 in conjunction with the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at the University of California, Davis, California Women in Agriculture and nine county Farm Bureaus. For information about Common Threads North, visit <https://www.commonthreadsnorth.com> and for more information about the Central Valley program, visit <https://www.agleaders.org/alumni/common-threads-central-valley/>.