

BREAKING NEWS

Winters walnut farmer honored by State Fair

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A longtime Winters walnut farmer has been named Agriculturalist of the Year for the California State Fair.

The California Exposition and State Fair Board of Directors unanimously approved the nomination of Craig McNamara as the 2014 Agriculturalist of the Year on Tuesday.

For over 160 years, the California State Fair has showcased the progress and advancements of the State's agricultural industry.

McNamara is president of the California State Board of Food and Agriculture, a position to which he was named by Gov. Jerry Brown in 2011.

McNamara is the president and owner of Sierra Orchards, a diversified farming operation in Winters that includes field, processing, and marketing operations, producing primarily organic walnuts. He also serves as the founder and president of the Center for Land-Based Learning. The goal of this innovative program is to assist high school students in becoming lifelong learners, overcoming barriers to change, and building greater social and human capital in their communities.

McNamara is a graduate of the California Agricultural Leadership Program and a Senior Fellow of the American Leadership Forum. His professional activities include being a member of the American Farmland Trust, Roots of Change, past member of the Foundation Board of Trustees University of California Merced, University of California Davis Dean's Advisory Council and Agricultural Sustainability Institute advisory board member, and the Public Policy Institute of California.

He is the recipient of several awards including the Leopold Conservation Award, the California Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award, the UC Davis Award of Distinction and Outstanding Alumnus Award, and the Profile in Leadership Award.

Locally, McNamara is the founder of the FARMS Leadership program, which brings inner-city youth to rural farms to teach them the business of agriculture. Since its inception in 1993, FARMS Leadership has graduated over 5,000 youth, many of whom have gone on to pursue careers in agriculture or environmental science.

The Center for Land-Based Learning itself was founded in 2001 and is dedicated to creating the next generation of farmers and to teaching California's youth about the importance of agriculture and watershed conservation.

"The State Fair has been recognizing California's best for over 160 years, and honoring Craig is in keeping with this tradition of excellence," said Rick K. Pickering, chief executive officer of the California State Fair. "His leadership on critical policy issues facing California's farmers, his passion to inspire the next generation of farmers, and his tireless dedication to responsible land stewardship, are samples of how he has positively impacted our great State for generations to come. California is a better place because of leaders like Craig McNamara."

The Agriculturalist of the Year award is presented to an individual who has contributed extensively, in a professional capacity, to California's agricultural industry. Award criteria stipulates this individual must have demonstrated leadership and clearly represented the industry over a number of years in one or more of the following areas: finance, government, production agriculture, education, labor, research, communications, trade and public service.

"I am honored and humbled to receive this recognition," said McNamara. "Today's farmers face daunting challenges but the opportunities available to us have never been more robust or promising. Our state is fortunate to have visionary leaders and informed citizens who care deeply about the future of our farms and our food."

The California State Fair first presented this award in 1980. Most recent awardees include Edward H. Nishio (2013), A.G. Kawamura (2012), Robert "Bob" Gilbert (2011), Bill Lyons, Jr. (2010), Ron Schuler (2009), Bill Pauli (2008), Len Richardson (2007), John Harris (2006), and George Gomes (2005).

The Agriculturalist of the Year Award will be presented to McNamara at the annual State Fair Gala held on Friday, June 27.