California Grains Conference

October 13, 2026

Walter A. Buehler Alumni Center at UC Davis

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The California Grains Conference would not be possible without the generous support of our sponsors and partners who are committed to advancing California grains through research, education, innovation, and collaboration.

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Overview

Conference goals or mission: The purpose of the California Grains Conference is to bring together stakeholders from across the food system to discuss and propel the future of grains in California. Growers, grain elevators, millers, bakers, researchers, industry professionals, government, and organizations will have a space to learn about the critical challenges and exciting pathways for California grains.

Registration

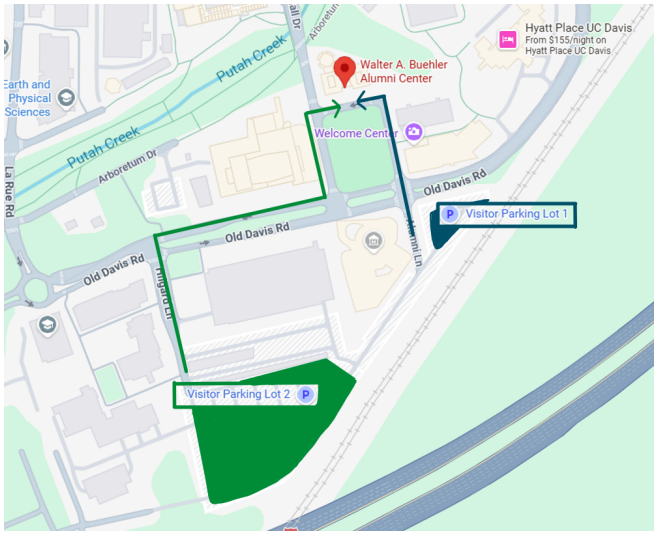
Registration for the California Grains Conference should be done online prior to the event to guarantee entrance and lunch.

Location

Walter A. Buehler Alumni Center, 530 Alumni Lane, Davis, CA 95616

Parking

Visitor parking can be found nearby. Visitors must pay for parking using the AggiePark app.



Where to Stay

For those attending from out of town, there are multiple hotels within walking distance to the UC Davis Campus:

Hyatt Place UC Davis
0.2 miles from the Alumni Center
173 Old Davis Road Extension, Davis, CA 95616
+1 (530) 756-9500

Aggie Inn, an Ascend Collection Hotel
0.6 miles from the Alumni Center
245 1st Street, Davis, CA 95616
+1 (530) 756-0352

Best Western Plus Palm Court Hotel
0.9 miles from the Alumni Center
234 D Street, Davis, CA 95616
+1 (530) 753-7100

Hilton Garden Inn Davis Downtown
0.9 miles from the Alumni Center
110 F Street, Davis, CA 95616
+1 (530) 753-3600

Home2 Suites by Hilton Woodland Sacramento
13.1 miles from the Alumni Center
441 Douglas Lane, Woodland, CA 95776
+1 (530) 269-4586

Courtyard by Marriott Woodland
13.2 miles from the Alumni Center
1986 E Main Street, Woodland, CA 95776
+1 (530) 836-8386

Hampton Inn & Suites Woodland-Sacramento Area
13.3 miles from the Alumni Center
2060 Freeway Drive, Woodland, CA 95776
+1 (530) 662-9100

Schedule at a Glance

7:30am – Registration & Coffee with CA Grains Pastries
8:00am – Welcome Remarks
8:30am – Opening Keynote: Secretary Karen Ross, CDFA
9:00am – Panel #1*: Regenerative Grains: Building Resilient Farms and Food Systems*
9:45am – Break
10:00am – Panel #2: *The Future of Alternative and Organic Grains in California*
11:00am – Research Session #1: *Agronomic & Production Systems Research*
12:00pm – Lunch & Demonstrations
1:30pm – Research Session #2: *Breeding & Genetics Research*
2:15pm – Panel #3: *Whole Grains, Healthy Schools, Strong Communities*
3:15pm – Break
3:30pm – Closing Keynote: Sean Finnie. Sif Grain, LLC
3:55pm – Closing Remarks
4:00pm – Happy Hour & Networking Session
5:00pm – Conference Concludes

Agenda

7:30am – 8:00am | Registration & Coffee

Arrive early to check in, connect with fellow attendees, and enjoy a light California-inspired breakfast featuring freshly baked pastries made with California grains, paired with California cheeses, seasonal fruit, and freshly brewed coffee.

8:00am – 8:30am | Welcome & Opening Remarks | Claudia Carter, PhD

Claudia Carter, Executive Director of the California Wheat Commission and California Grain Foundation, will open the inaugural California Grains Conference by sharing the vision and goals of the conference and highlighting the importance of connecting agriculture, research, industry, and education to strengthen the future of California grains.

8:30am – 9:00am | Opening Keynote | Secretary Karen Ross

Secretary Karen Ross of the California Department of Food and Agriculture has been a leading voice in advancing a resilient and sustainable food system while strengthening connections between agriculture, nutrition, education, and public health. Secretary Ross will open the conference by sharing her vision for the future of California agriculture and the opportunities to build stronger food systems through innovation, school nutrition, and collaboration across the food value chain.

9:00am – 9:45am | Regenerative Grains: Building Resilient Farms and Food Systems

What does a sustainable grain economy look like in California? From soil health and on-farm management to food production and consumer demand, grains have the potential to support more resilient agricultural and food systems. This panel will explore the role of grains in regenerative agriculture and the opportunities they create across the value chain. Featuring perspectives from growers, millers, bakers, and other food system partners, panelists will discuss how environmental stewardship, economic viability, and market development can work together to support a thriving grain sector.

Moderator

Erin O'Donnell | Sustainable Ag Advisors
Founder and CEO of Sustainable Ag Advisors, Erin brings more than 15 years of experience helping California growers and agricultural businesses connect sustainability with profitability, resilience, and market opportunity.

Panelists

Shrene White | Adams Group — *Sourcing & Buyer Perspective*
Chief Sourcing Officer with more than 34 years of experience in grain sourcing, milling, grower relations, risk management, and sustainable agriculture, bringing insight into how regenerative practices connect with buyers, supply chains, and market demand.

Fritz Durst | Tule Farms — *Grower & Production Systems*
Sixth-generation Sacramento Valley grain farmer and conservation agriculture leader bringing decades of experience in no-till farming, soil health, water stewardship, and productive California farming systems.

Dr. Cynthia Daley | California State University, Chico — *Research & Regenerative Systems*
Director and Co-founder of the Center for Regenerative Agriculture & Resilient Systems, bringing decades of experience connecting research, farmer education, and industry collaboration around soil health, water conservation, carbon management, and resilient farming systems.

Mathieu Choux | Gaston's Bakery & Mill — *Miller, Baker & End-User Perspective*
Artisan baker and miller who sources wheat directly from local farmers, bringing the farmer → miller → baker connection and insight into how local grains, whole grains, quality, and consumer preferences can create stronger markets.

09:45am – 10:00am | Break

Network with fellow attendees while enjoying a selection of freshly baked sweet and savory treats prepared by Beck's Bakery using UC Davis' newest organic Blue wheat. Developed through the Student Collaborative Organic Plant Breeding Education (SCOPE) program, this unique grain highlights the innovation and future of California specialty grains.

10:00am – 11:00am | *The Future of Alternative and Organic Grains in California*

As consumers seek greater diversity and sustainability in their food choices, interest in organic and alternative grains has expanded beyond niche markets. This panel will bring together researchers, growers, bakers, and food system partners to discuss the opportunities and challenges shaping these grain sectors in California. From field production to processing, marketing, and consumer adoption, panelists will explore pathways for building robust markets and supply chains while balancing agronomic, economic, and environmental considerations.

Moderators

George Fohner | California Grain Foundation
Grain industry leader with more than 30 years of experience in cereal grain research, variety commercialization, and market development, bringing a broad perspective on moving grain innovation from the field into viable markets.

Laura Roser | UC Davis SCOPE
Co-coordinator of UC Davis SCOPE, where she works with students, plant breeders, and organic growers to develop crop varieties adapted to California organic farming systems.

Panelists

Ed Sills | Pleasant Grove Farms — *Organic Grower & Grain Infrastructure*
Third-generation farmer and longtime organic grain producer whose experience spans organic production, soil health, seed cleaning, milling, and developing markets for California-grown organic grains.

Curtis Davenport | Admiral Maltings — *Processing & Market Development*
Co-founder and Head Maltster at Admiral Maltings, connecting California growers with brewers, distillers, and emerging flour markets through locally sourced and value-added grains.

Roxana Jullapat | Friends & Family — *Baker & Consumer Market*
Los Angeles baker and author of *Mother Grains*, bringing the end-user perspective on regional and whole grains, flavor, functionality, consumer interest, and creating demand through food.

Sam Lucy | Bluebird Grain Farms — *Specialty Grain Market Perspective*
Organic grain grower and co-founder of Bluebird Grain Farms in Washington, bringing

nearly 30 years of experience building a vertically integrated market for organic and specialty grains from farm to milling to consumer.

11:00am – 12:00pm | *Agronomic & Production Systems Research*

How can California grain production remain productive and profitable with increasing pressure on water, nitrogen, and agricultural land? This session brings together agronomic research and water-policy perspectives to examine crop management, resource-use efficiency, soil health, SGMA adaptation, and the role grains can play in resilient California farming systems.

Speakers

Dr. Mark Lundy | UC Davis — *Grain Cropping Systems & Resource-Use Efficiency*
UC Cooperative Extension Grain Cropping Systems Specialist whose statewide research program focuses on variety performance, nitrogen and water management, precision agriculture, and genotype × environment × management interactions. Mark brings research directly connected to the production and environmental challenges facing California grain growers.

Dr. Caity Peterson | PPIC Water Policy Center — *Water Policy & Agricultural Adaptation*
Associate Director and Research Fellow at the PPIC Water Policy Center whose work spans groundwater sustainability, soil health, diversified cropping systems, and agricultural resilience. Caity brings a broader policy perspective on how SGMA, groundwater constraints, and changing land-use decisions are shaping the future of California agriculture.

Dr. Cameron M. Pittelkow | UC Davis — S*ustainable Cropping Systems & Resource Efficiency*
Agronomist whose research focuses on balancing crop productivity with environmental sustainability. Cameron brings expertise in cropping systems, nitrogen and water use efficiency, nutrient management, and reducing agriculture's carbon footprint while maintaining productive and resilient agricultural systems.

Maya Shydlowski | UC Davis — *Water, Nitrogen & Soil Health*
Ph.D. student whose research has examined nitrogen-use efficiency and water productivity in winter cereals and now focuses on soil health in water-limited Central Valley environments. Her work explores the potential for winter cereals to provide a productive alternative to fallow as California agriculture adapts to SGMA.

Morgan Wlaschin | UC Davis Grain Cropping Systems Lab — *Water Availability & Grain Quality*
Junior Specialist studying California grain cropping systems with research examining how water availability influences wheat performance, nutritional characteristics, and baking quality. Morgan brings an important connection between field management decisions and the quality of the grain ultimately delivered to end users.

12:00pm – 1:30pm | Lunch & Milling and Baking Demonstrations

Enjoy lunch while exploring interactive demonstrations that showcase the journey from grain to food. **Laila O'Boyle of The Early Riser Baker** will present a live artisan sourdough bread demonstration featuring experimental California wheat and triticale varieties developed by UC Davis, highlighting their unique flavors, functionality, and baking potential through a tasting experience. Attendees will also experience a live stone-milling demonstration by **Marc Benoit from Red Bread**, showcasing how fresh milling influences flour quality, flavor, and whole grain performance.

1:30pm – 2:15pm | *Breeding & Genetics Research*

What will the next generation of California grains look like? This session highlights advances in small-grain breeding and genetics, from developing varieties adapted to California's diverse environments to improving disease resistance, grain quality, nutrition, and end-use potential. Researchers will also explore how breeding programs are responding to changing production conditions and emerging market opportunities.

Speakers

Maria Rottersman | UC Davis, Dubcovsky Lab
Ph.D. student in Plant Biology studying the genetics of wheat gluten proteins and their relationship to processing quality and celiac disease. Maria brings a genetics and grain-quality perspective while helping connect fundamental wheat research with implications for food quality and human health.

Dr. Xiaofei Zhang | UC Davis Small Grains Breeding Program — *Variety Development & Genetics*
Assistant Professor and leader of the UC Davis Small Grains Breeding Program, developing wheat, durum, barley, oat, and triticale varieties for California. His work focuses on reliable yield and quality, disease resistance, nutritional improvement, genetic diversity, and performance under drought and limited-input conditions.

Dr. Joshua Hegarty | UC Davis Small Grains Breeding Program — *Grain Quality, Disease Resistance & Triticale*
Project Scientist and small-grains breeder whose research connects field-based breeding with grain quality and end-use applications. His work includes developing durable stripe rust resistance and exploring the potential of triticale and other alternative grains for human food markets.

Laura Roser | UC Davis SCOPE — *Organic & Participatory Plant Breeding*
Co-coordinator of the Student Collaborative Organic Plant Breeding Education (SCOPE) program, where students, faculty, and local organic growers work together to develop varieties adapted to organic production. Laura brings the participatory breeding perspective and insight into developing wheat for California's organic and alternative grain systems.

2:15pm – 3:15pm | *Whole Grains, Healthy Schools, Strong Communities*

How do we connect California agriculture, whole grains, nutrition, and the next generation? This session will highlight successful grain-to-school partnerships and explore how local procurement, milling, scratch cooking, nutrition education, and Farm to School programs can grow across California.

Moderators

Nan Schaefer | Grist & Toll / True Grist Corp
Founder and miller of Grist & Toll and President of True Grist Corp, Nan brings a unique perspective connecting California farmers and grains with milling, whole-grain quality, education, equity, and expanding access to nutritious whole-grain foods.

Chelsey Slattery, MS | Yuba City Unified School District — *Scaling Farm to School Moderator and Panelist:* Director of Student Nutrition, Purchasing, and Warehouse Services bringing the perspective of a larger school district and practical insight into scaling local procurement and Farm to School partnerships.

Part 1 — Bringing California Grains into Schools: Success Stories

Lauren Childers, RDN, SNS | San Miguel Joint Union School District — *Farm to School & Student Engagement*
Food and Nutrition Services Director bringing hands-on experience integrating local

procurement, scratch cooking, school gardens, and Wheat2School into the school environment.

Gelene Coelho | Shandon Joint Unified School District — *Whole Grains in School Meals*
Food Service Manager helping demonstrate what grain-to-school can look like in practice, including operating a school-based stone mill and transforming California wheat into fresh whole-grain foods for students.

Jessica Oviedo | Gold Star Foods — *Distribution & Procurement*
Program Coordinator bringing the distribution perspective on how growers, food companies, and school nutrition programs can work together to get California-grown products into schools.

Part 2 — Growing the Movement: Opportunities & What's Next

Shannan Young, MS, RDN, CAE, SNS | Dairy Council of California — *Nutrition & Food Systems*
Nutrition and education leader with more than 25 years of experience connecting agriculture, schools, health professionals, and policymakers, bringing a broader perspective on nutrition education, school food environments, and cross-commodity collaboration.

Kristin Zellhart | Eat Real *(if confirmed) — Nutrition Standards & Certification*
Director of K–12 Nutrition Standards at Eat Real, bringing insight into school nutrition standards, certification, procurement, and the systems needed to expand healthier and more sustainable school meal programs.

3:15pm – 3:30pm | Break

Enjoy a networking break with fellow attendees while sampling artisan sourdough breads and specialty baked goods featuring California-grown grains, including breads prepared by **Laila O'Boyle of The Early Riser Baker** showcasing innovative UC Davis grain varieties.

3:30pm – 3:55pm | Closing Keynote | Sean Finnie

Recognizing wheat as one of the world's most affordable and important sources of nutrition, Dr. Sean Finnie will share how innovation in grain science, quality, and

processing can help shape the future of wheat and expand its impact from farm to table.

3:55pm – 4:00pm | Closing Remarks | Claudia Carter

4:00pm – 5:00pm | Happy Hour & Networking Session

Wrap up the day with brews crafted by Admiral Malting of Alameda, California, using locally malted grains that support California farmers. Network with colleagues, speakers, and industry partners as we celebrate new ideas, partnerships, and the future of California grains.