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Monday, June 12, 2006

AG MONDAY

ASSISTANT CITY EDITOR: Katharine Ball PHONE: 754-4282 FAX: 754-4293 E-MAIL: kball@thecalifornian.com
www.thecalifornian.com

Almanac

Compiled from staff reports

Crop spotlight



Year	Acreage	Tons	Total \$
2005	12,160	12,600	\$1.14M
2005 Monterey County rank: 44			

Ag event

The Central Coast Vineyard Team will hold a site visit to its Proposition 50 research project from 9 to 11 a.m. Thursday at Halter Ranch Vineyards, 8910 Adelaida Road, Paso Robles. Offered in English and Spanish, the event qualifies participants for two ag waiver hours (approved) and two PA/PCA hours applied for. Register by noon Tuesday. (805) 369-2268.

Jobs in ag



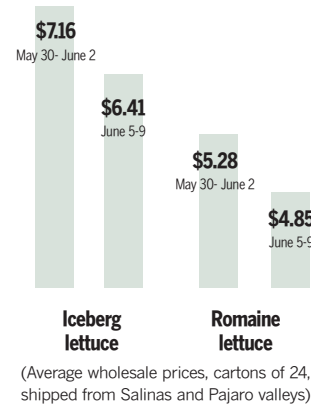
- n **POSITION:** Agricultural book-keeper
- n **EMPLOYER:** Nunes Vegetables Inc.
- n **DUTIES:** A/R, A/P, payroll, lot accounting, financial statements and miscellaneous accounting duties.
- n **QUALIFICATIONS:** Five years of progressive experience in bookkeeping. Proficiency in Famous and Excel, 10-key by touch.
- n **CONTACT:** Send resume and salary requirements to Nunes Vegetables Inc. — HR, P.O. box 673, Salinas, CA 93902; fax to 424-4190; or e-mail employment@foxyproduce.com.

Facts and figures

A program that helps farmers overcome physical obstacles has earned renewed support from the federal government. Called the "AgrAbility" project, the program provides practical advice to farmers who face loss of hearing, loss of vision, arthritis or other disabilities. The University of California is one of 21 universities to earn the federal grants. California's AgrAbility program resides at U.C. Davis.

—"Food and Farm News"
A publication of the California
Farm Bureau Federation

Price report



Ag site



- n **WHAT:** Star Sanitation Services
- n **WHERE:** www.starsanitation.com
- n **WHY:** To promote company services and products.
- n **HIGHLIGHTS:** Online portable toilet reservation service.

PROFILE

Robin Cohen educates field-working youth

She's inspired by the students with whom she works

By JOLI SPENCIER
For The Salinas Californian

Robin Cohen, migrant program specialist at the Monterey County Office of Education in Salinas, said she's inspired by the students she serves.

"They are an amazing group of young people who have faced challenges and risks that I never had to face," Cohen said.

Many of the young people, who are often found by recruitment teams working in strawberry or lettuce fields, stopped their education in fifth or sixth grade.

"I think of what I'm asking my students to do, who come home tired from the fields," she said. "They constantly inspire me to reflect on my reality."

Many of these students have little or no support system of family or friends.

"The young people we serve are some of the most marginalized in the community," Cohen said. "Many of them are here without their families."

Through the classes, Cohen focuses on community-building to help her students create a network of support.

Cohen oversees seven youth advocates in the out-of-school youth component, which serves students 14 to 21 years old. She also develops procedures and services for the program.

When migrant students follow the fields, Cohen helps them continue their education in other counties and states.

JOLI SPENCIER is a Salinas-based freelance writer who specializes in agriculture. Her profiles appear weekly in Ag Monday. To suggest a profile subject, contact her at agwriter@redshift.com.

ROBIN COHEN

n **AGE:** 47

n **OCCUPATION:** Migrant program specialist at Monterey County Office of Education Migrant Education Region 16 in Salinas

n **BACKGROUND:** Bilingual teacher in Chicago public schools, 1986-1991; Bilingual teacher in Milwaukee public schools, 1991-1992; Soquel High School in Soquel, 1992-1993; Monterey County Office of Education Migrant Education Region 16 in Salinas, 1994-present.



RICHARD GREEN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Robin Cohen is a migrant program specialist at the Monterey County Office of Education.

n **EDUCATION:** Bachelors of Arts, 1982; master's degree and teaching credential, 1986, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana

n **COMMUNITY:** Salinas Action League,

LandWatch Monterey County, California Teachers Association.

n **PERSONAL:** Originally from Chicago, Cohen lives with her husband, Peter Kwiek, in Salinas

Misfortune stalks celery crop

Growers have begun harvesting celery, which was transplanted in early spring.

Small and lightweight aluminum carts, called "humps," have traditionally been used for the harvest, because the three-wheeled carts can easily maneuver in a saturated field — a particular advantage during winter months, when celery demand peaks.

Some of the larger companies have begun using machines to harvest the crop. But the heavy, cumbersome machines become unwieldy in muddy fields.

A seven-member crew works around the hump. Using a double-edged lettuce knife, four cutters cut and trim the celery. They hand it to one of the two members of the crew who packs the product in boxes on the hump. One person is the closer, with the job of stapling the box shut.

An entire field of celery is harvested at once, although there may be many different sizes of plant in



the field. The crew separates plants according to size.

Celery hearts, now favored by consumers, were once left behind in the fields. In the 1940s, there was no market for them. Now specialized crews harvest the hearts by hand.

But the heavy rains in March have taken their toll on the celery crop, which brought in a healthy increase in revenues for Monterey County in 2005, according to the Agricultural Commissioner's office, earning more than \$104 million. But every season is different, and this one has been problematic from the start.

First the rain overstressed and

weakened the newly transplanted celery plants. It also delayed much transplanting that normally would occur in March. Now, unseasonably warm temperatures encourage seeders to sprout, reducing yields and crop value.

Seeder damage is not obvious to the casual observer driving by a celery field. But once you get into the field and take a close look, you'll notice large stalks bolting up in the middle of the plant. Every day that is warmer than normal increases the damage.

Harvesting isn't the only celery-related activity you'll see in the fields this week. Crews are busy transplanting the crop for the fall harvest in 90 days. Celery must be transplanted from greenhouse-grown seedlings because it takes a full year to mature. With land as valuable as it is, growers can't afford to devote their fields for a whole year to a single crop.

Growers will continue transplanting through August in prepa-

ration for the Thanksgiving and Christmas pull, as they call it. The holiday season is the time of highest demand for the crop.

Once that season ends Dec. 31, all celery is removed from Monterey County fields to leave nothing for the celery mosaic virus to feed on. Referred to as the "host-free period," no celery may be in the ground from Dec. 31 to Jan. 31. By using this common-sense, chemical-free approach, growers protect their product from a virus that once threatened to decimate the crop.

But this restriction does not apply to greenhouses, which grow the seedlings to transplant. Since plants are not grown directly in the ground, the virus may be prevented from establishing itself in the controlled environment of a greenhouse.

JOLI SPENCIER is a Salinas-based freelance writer who specializes in agriculture. Contact her at agwriter@redshift.com.