

Spotlight on Fowler Ranch

Reliable water nurtures a family legacy through the generations

If you decide to plant a tree in your yard, where does it come from? Sure, you'll probably buy it from a local plant nursery or home improvement store. But it was probably grown at a place like Fowler Nurseries in Newcastle, one of many thriving farms served by Placer County Water Agency.

PCWA recently visited Fowler Nurseries and Fowler Ranch, where agriculture and water have created a thriving, multi-generational success story.

At any given time, Fowler Nurseries grows about 750,000 trees for commercial orchardists, retail nurseries, and homeowners. The water that's essential to raise those trees comes from PCWA's Caperton Canal, part of a vast raw-water distribution system that has served Placer County since the Gold Rush.

Fowler Ranch has a rich family history that dates to the 1860s. The tree nursery began 112 years ago, when patriarch Eugene Fowler began growing 20,000 pear trees. Today, three generations of Fowlers are actively involved.

Nancy Fowler-Johnson, Eugene's granddaughter, co-owns and operates the business today.

Eugene, Nancy said, foresaw the importance of a consistent water supply, and impressed upon his family that water must never be taken for granted. Many decades ago, he ingeniously installed a pipe that connects to what is now PCWA's Caperton Canal. Now made of PVC, the pipe begins a mile away and offers 80 pounds of water pressure for gravity-fed irrigation.

This raw water system requires meticulous management to ensure reliable flow. It

remains essential to the various crops and livestock grown by the Fowlers and other farms. Nancy said the family is "blessed for my grandfather's foresight and blessed to have PCWA."

The family-owned business has 70 employees, which grows to 100 during harvest season. As Fowler Nurseries Inc., it grows a variety of almond and pear trees, as well as a wide range of stone fruit trees including cherry, apricot, nectarine, plum, and peach. It caters to large commercial customers in California, Oregon, Washington, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and even international markets. It also supplies local retail nurseries, such as Green Acres Nursery and Supply.

The ranch raises a variety of other farm commodities, including pumpkins, gourds, cattle, llamas, chicken eggs, hops, citrus, and various stone fruits.

Fowler Ranch regards itself as "the gateway to Placer County agriculture," hosting a year-round farmer's market every Sunday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., rain or shine, at the intersection of Highway 193 and Sierra College Blvd. The market offers farm products not just from Fowler Ranch, but many other farms in the region. It is a unique endeavor as the only Certified Farmers Market in the state hosted directly on a farm. The market, initiated by Nancy's daughter, Denise Moore, a Placer Agricultural Commission advisory board member, helps connect people with the sources of their food and educate the community about agriculture, especially younger generations.



Nancy Fowler-Johnson shares her passion for farming with her granddaughter, Flora Moore. Flora's organic eggs are for sale at the Fowler Ranch farmer's market in Lincoln.

In addition to farming, the Fowler family is on the cusp of opening a brewery, which will expand their contributions to Placer County's culinary scene. Dubbed the Fowler Ranch Farm Brewery, it's expected to open by the end of 2023.

The star of the visit was Nancy's granddaughter, Flora, a fifth-generation farmer affectionately known as an "eggtrepreneur." At just 10 years old, Flora showcased her remarkable knowledge of chicken farming. She displayed her signature pink egg cartons from Chicken Waddle, a business idea she started at the age of six, and led the way to her brood of 500 chickens protected by her loyal dog, a few cats, and three llamas.

When asked her favorite part about chicken raising, Flora replied confidently: "Knowing that I'm giving people good food."

The visit highlighted the enduring impact of thoughtful decisions made by past generations, the indispensable role of water in agriculture, and the family's commitment to educating and inspiring future generations about the vital role of agriculture in our community.



In the fall, Fowler Ranch hosts a pumpkin patch, offering a variety of pumpkins, decorative gourds, and family-friendly games and activities.



General Manager's Report

By Andrew Fecko

Recent polling of Placer County residents revealed something that surprised me: A majority of the county's residents think we don't have enough water to meet future needs. So, I want to set the record straight.

We have plenty of water to serve both existing customers and future planned growth — there's enough water to meet all the general needs of the residents and businesses we serve. This is thanks to PCWA's high-priority water rights on the American River and our careful stewardship of that precious resource.

What we do need more of, however, is more treatment capacity and the pipelines to deliver water where it's needed by the homes and businesses under construction in our communities.

Thankfully, there are vital, new water infrastructure projects already in the works. Our planning experts at PCWA are constantly assessing expected growth in the county and adjusting our infrastructure plan to ensure we have the budget, materials, and people to get them done. I'll tell you more about a few big projects.

First, it's important to make two things clear. PCWA is not a land-management agency. We don't have any role in approving or denying new development in the county. Our only role is to ensure there's enough water to serve planned growth, and then to deliver that water where it's needed.

Second, our existing customers pay nothing for the new water infrastructure that serves new residents. Instead, those new residents pay one-time connection charges to fund the new facilities that serve future water needs. This connection charge varies according to many factors, including lot size, location, and necessary infrastructure.

Monthly water rates paid by our customers are strictly to fund ongoing operations and maintenance for existing customers, plus the amount of water delivered through their connections.

The communities of West Placer County are growing rapidly, including Roseville, Rocklin, Loomis, and Lincoln. This presents challenges, of course, but also opportunities. It feeds the demand for housing, creates jobs, and inspires opportunity among people young and old who see Placer County as we do—a great place to live and work. PCWA has a vital role to play in supporting those dreams.

One of the big projects we're working on to serve that growth is a new water treatment plant. This plant, part of a larger program we're calling the Ophir Project, will be located on the western flank of the city of Auburn, close to our existing American River canyon raw-water pump and pipeline infrastructure. The Ophir Project has been in the works for decades, and the Ophir Water Treatment Plant is the final step to bringing our American River water to customers' homes.

The Ophir plant is in its planning phase and construction is expected to start in 2025. Initially, the plant will have a capacity to treat 10 million gallons of water per day (MGD) and is designed to be enlarged in two steps, eventually reaching full capacity at 30 MGD.

But a new plant like this can't contribute to the system without pipelines to deliver its water where it's needed. So those projects are in the works, too. We've completed a cornerstone pipeline, which will link the new Ophir plant with our existing Foothill plant, and the plumbing network it serves.

Additional new pipelines are planned to deliver Ophir's treated water to the developing Bickford Ranch community near Lincoln, the Placer One community near Roseville, and other new communities in

between. Our plan includes new water storage tanks along these pipeline routes to ensure adequate pressure and supply.

These projects are just part of our long-range infrastructure plan. We continue to build upon the foundation for reliability today while anticipating the needs for tomorrow.

In summary: Yes, we have water to serve the growth that's coming. And we're working diligently to get that water where it's needed. It's a big job, and it's a job we take seriously to maintain the quality of life current and future generations can enjoy.

Board of Directors

PCWA is an independent public agency governed by an elected Board of Directors. Directors represent each of five districts in Placer County and are elected by voters to four-year terms.

Your PCWA Board of Directors:

- DISTRICT 1: Gray Allen
(2024 Vice Chair)
- DISTRICT 2: Primo Santini
- DISTRICT 3: Mike Lee
- DISTRICT 4: Robert Dugan
(2024 Chair)
- DISTRICT 5: Joshua Alpine

Public Meetings

The Placer County Water Agency Board of Directors meets regularly the first and third Thursdays of each month at 2:00 p.m. at the Placer County Water Agency Business Center at 144 Ferguson Road in Auburn.

Let Mother Nature Do the Watering

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WEBSITE: PCWA.net

MAILING: P.O. Box 6570
Auburn, CA 95604

PHYSICAL: 144 Ferguson Road
Auburn, CA 95603

PHONE: (530) 823-4850
(800) 464-0030

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