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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Not Going Up in Smoke: Arbuckle Orchard to Host November 19th “Chip Off”

Arbuckle, CA: Twenty-seven year old Jack Hurley used to farm 8,000 acres of almonds with his family in the Bakersfield area, but he recently gave up farming to help other San Joaquin almond growers comply with air quality regulations.

After college graduation, Hurley recognized a real need to provide orchard brush chipping services for almond growers in regions where burning orchard brush is no longer permitted. Hurley now provides brush chipping throughout the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys.

Hurley is not alone in his recognition of this growing market. Over the past decade, a number of new chipping and shredding machines have come on the market including ones with names such as Pow'r Trak Shredder, and Brush Bandit.

Almond and other tree crop growers are encouraged to attend a free, informational field day on November 19th in Arbuckle, CA (Colusa County) to learn about the options growers have for chipping and shredding orchard brush.

This free, rain or shine event will include presentations by University of California Farm Advisor and almond farmer Brent Holtz, local air quality experts—and of course—a roaring demonstration of chipping and shredding machines.

Chipping and shredding orchard brush continues to gain popularity as the multitude of benefits to soil quality from brush shredding become better understood, and as agricultural burning regulations make burning more difficult due to air quality concerns.

A consortium of local groups, including the Colusa Resource Conservation District, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, Natural Resource Conservation Services, and Audubon California will host a November 19th field day to bring shredding and air quality experts to local farmers.

According to University of California research, chipping or shredding brush and leaving it on the orchard floor provides significant benefits to soil quality. These benefits include increased organic matter resulting in better soil tilth and water infiltration, a more robust microbial community, and increased nitrogen content.

Brent Holtz, has helped lead much of the research. Dr. Holtz has compared orchard soils with and without brush chipping. “The soil with wood chips is building up high populations of free-living nematodes and reducing the number of parasitic nematodes that attack trees. ... [Parasitic] nematodes are a big problem” in many California orchards.

In addition to the benefits to the orchard, reduced burning helps protect local air quality. It’s long been recognized that smoke—whether from cigarettes or wood fires—can threaten human health, particularly for those with respiratory problems, and young and older residents.

Growers in the San Joaquin Valley have been under increasing brush burning restrictions since 2005. Many have found chipping only slightly more expensive, and enjoy the freedom of being able to chip without waiting for a permit or permissible burn day.

The main drawback to chipping or shredding orchard brush is the potential for incomplete decomposition of the wood particles at harvest time, meaning more “trash” for the almond huller. The amount of rain and the type of machine used to chip or shred the pruning plays heavily into whether or not this is a problem at harvest.

Registration for the field day begins at 8:30AM, presentations begin at 9AM. From the town of Arbuckle, head West on Hillgate Rd. Take a left (heading South) on Almond Ave. The orchard will be on the left, 500 yards past the intersection with Grant Ave.

Please call Libby Earthman, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, for more information: (530) 756-8518 x12.

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The Community Alliance with Family Farmers is a 501(c)3 (non-profit) building a movement of rural and urban people to foster family-scale agriculture that cares for the land, sustains local economies, and promotes social justice.