



Photographs by LUIS SINCO Los Angeles Times

A WORKER sprays water on a dusty road in the Cuyama Valley, where some residents and farmers are touting a boycott of carrots.

SOAKED IN CONTROVERSY

In the Cuyama Valley north of Santa Barbara, lush green fields stretch across the desert. Sprinklers spray thousands of acres to grow a single thirsty crop: carrots. Wells and pumps pull groundwater from as deep as 680 feet, and the aquifer's levels are dropping.

As the valley's only water source shrinks, a bitter legal battle over water rights has arisen between carrot growers and the community. Residents are fighting back with a campaign urging everyone to stop buying carrots.

Along the valley's roads, in cattle pastures and outside homes and businesses, signs and banners have sprung up declaring "BOYCOTT CARROTS" and "STAND WITH CUYAMA AGAINST CORPORATE GREED."

The signs target two of the world's largest carrot-growing companies, Grimmway Farms and Bolthouse Farms, which are the valley's biggest water users.

The companies stirred outrage when they, along with several other allied entities, sued property owners throughout the valley,

Big Carrot guzzles water in large volumes. Residents, farmers counter with a boycott.

By Ian James | REPORTING FROM NEW CUYAMA, CALIF.



A SIGN promoting the carrot boycott hangs on a fence at Charlie Bosma's ranch in Cuyama Valley's high desert agricultural area.

asking a court to determine how much water everyone can pump.

The lawsuit, filed in 2021, has left small farmers, ranchers and other property owners with staggering legal bills. Residents have accused the companies of going to court to try to secure as much water as possible, while forcing painful cuts on smaller farms.

"They're all for themselves. It's all about the money," said Chris Wegis, who runs a family farm with her husband. "It's totally disheartening that somebody wants to come in and basically destroy you for their own personal gain."

After many residents rallied around the carrot boycott, Bolthouse Farms and Grimmway Farms recently dropped out of the lawsuit, filing requests to remove themselves as plaintiffs. Other companies that lease farmland to the growers are staying on as plaintiffs and pressing ahead with the case.

Grimmway Farms, the largest carrot grower in the world, said in an email to The Times that the lawsuit was intended to "ensure [See Carrots, A10]

'Go faster': The race to repair the 10

Engineer details how the freeway is being reopened without compromising safety.

By Thomas Curwen and Nathan Solis

In the days after a huge pallet fire shut down one of the busiest traffic corridors in the nation, Gov. Gavin Newsom delivered bitter-sweet news: The damaged section of the 10 Freeway in downtown Los Angeles would not need to be demolished, but repairs would leave it out of commission for three to five weeks.

Publicly, state officials stood by that timeline for most of this week, saying the freeway was likely to reopen in December. But behind the scenes, according to a Caltrans engineer familiar with the project, crews were scrambling to hit a more ambitious target and have the overpass ready for Thanksgiving travel.

The work paid off, and on Thursday, Newsom confirmed what the Caltrans crews had been working toward: All lanes in both directions will be open to traffic by Tuesday "at the latest," he announced, though repair work will be ongoing.

"Things continue to move favorably in our direction," Newsom said. "The bridge structure itself seems to be in better shape than we anticipated."

The quick reopening does not mean any corners have been cut, L.A. Mayor Karen Bass said Friday.

"Let me just assure you that the reason why the freeway is going to be open quickly is because the deep structural damage that we were worried about did not take place," she said at a news conference. "There [See Freeway, A5]

Seeking out syphilis patients to curtail newborn infections

By Emily Alpert Reyes

Under the afternoon sun, Maggie Tran stopped one person after another on a hectic stretch of Skid Row, asking if they knew a particular woman.

No one seemed to recognize the name she repeated at tent after tent as she made her way along the block. "She could have a whole different name out here," one person replied.

"Do you have a picture?"

Tran shook her head before heading back to her SUV, disappointed but undeterred. It's rare for Tran to find the people she's looking for right away.

As a public health investigator, she searches for clues: An emergency contact number listed by a patient during a clinic visit. An old address saved in a database. The location of a homeless encampment where outreach workers found a particular

person in the past.

Then she heads to the streets. Her job at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health is to track down a crucial set of patients who slipped away from the health system: women of childbearing age who have tested positive for syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease that can cost newborns their lives.

Cases of syphilis have skyrocketed in L.A. County [See Syphilis, A5]

U.N. halts Gaza aid shipments

Agencies say they've had to stop deliveries of food and other basic necessities and warn of possible starvation in the enclave. **WORLD, A3**

Altman ousted as OpenAI CEO

Board says it lost confidence in the top executive, who "was not consistently candid in his communications." **BUSINESS, A8**

Protester death brings charges

Evidence is laid out in pursuit of involuntary manslaughter, battery counts against a professor in Paul Kessler's death. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Coaches face own crossroads

Ahead of rivalry game, USC's Lincoln Riley and UCLA's Chip Kelly saw promising seasons quickly deteriorate. **SPORTS, B12**

Weather Showers.

L.A. Basin: 67/57. **B8**

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A string of fraud lawsuits follows indie producer

Bret Saxon and his companies have been sued at least 14 times. His attorney disputes the claims.

By Stacy Perman

Last March, when filming on the dystopian thriller "Hard Matter" was underway, reporters descended on the movie's various sets along Mississippi's Gulf Coast.

Inside the stately Oak Crest Mansion Inn in Pass Christian, a correspondent for the local TV station WLOX interviewed actor Frank Grillo. On WXXV-25, the Fox and NBC affiliate, an anchor told viewers "a famous actor could be seen around Gulfport," referring to Harvey Keitel, Grillo's co-star.

Downtown Gulfport had been transformed into a post-apocalyptic battlefield for the movie about a despotic corporation that had taken over America's prison system, replacing law enforcement with criminals. The mayor's office put out a statement warning residents not to panic if they heard gunshots in the area around city hall, as one reporter explained, "It was all make-believe."

Latavius Powell, founder of Gridiron Productions, the movie's main investor, now says that it wasn't just the plot that was make-believe.

In a recent federal lawsuit, he is accusing independent producer Bret Saxon of bilking Gridiron investors out of \$5.05 million and leaving the film in limbo.

Powell alleges in the suit that Saxon, his producing partner Jeff Bowler and their company Wonderfilm falsely claimed that Mel Gibson would star in the film and used Gridiron's investment to secure a [See Producer, A6]

A college motif: Swiftie classes

By Terry Castleman

If she could talk to Taylor Swift, recent UC Berkeley grad Crystal Haryanto knows what she'd say:

"When I was a kid, I would listen to you because I wanted to learn everything about you. But as I grew up, I realized that I was listening to you because I was learning everything about me."

Though she may never get the chance to meet the pop star, Haryanto will soon



CHRIS PIZZELLO Invision/AP

TAYLOR SWIFT arrives at the world premiere of her "Eras Tour" concert film on Oct. 11.

be sharing her love for all things Swift with some lucky students and fellow fans.

She put together a course, "Artistry & Entrepreneurship: Taylor's Version," that will be available at Berkeley as a student-led, for-credit class during the spring semester, the latest in a wave of higher education offerings that highlight Swift's ascent to global phenomenon.

She's not the first musical artist to be studied in a [See Swift, A7]



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