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**IN THIS ISSUE:**

- ✓ February 12, 2026 meeting agenda
- ✓ Variety trial results
- ✓ Fusarium foot rot, scurf
- ✓ Fumigation and nematicide trial

**Special Note:**

*Significant permit changes for use of Telone fumigant this year.*

*CA external quarantine for Guava RKN passed by CDFA Secretary Karen Ross restricts incoming plants from North Carolina*

*Covington comes off patent in May!*

Scott Stoddard, farm advisor

## 60<sup>th</sup> Annual SWEETPOTATO MEETING

Thursday, February 12, 2026

8:00 am - noon

UCCE Classroom

2145 Wardrobe Ave., Merced

- 7:30 am Signing in, coffee, and Jantz Sweetpotato muffins. Sponsored by Brian Hegland, Teleos Ag Solutions.
- 8:00 Scott Stoddard. Research update on 2025 trials with fumigation, nematicides, and virus management
- 9:00 Brian Hegland, Teleos Agriculture Solutions. Telone best management practices and availability updates.
- 9:30 Sean Runyon, Merced County Agriculture Commissioner. 2026 regulatory updates and phenoxy herbicide permit changes.
- 10:00 Break
- 10:20 1,3-D 2026 regulatory requirements in 2026 and air monitoring network overview. CA DPR Staff (speaker TBD)
- 11:20 Jill Silverman Hough. Sweetpotato Council of California marketing and social media activities.
- 11:45 Matt Alvernaz, President Sweetpotato Council. Membership and call for new members.
- 12:00 Questions, comments, and additional updates.
- 12:15 Lunch. Sponsored by Simplot in Ballico; drinks and snacks sponsored by Nutrient Ag Solutions in Merced.
- 1:30 pm The Sweetpotato Council of California BOD meeting.

**2.5 CE units applied for**

January, 2026

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## PRODUCTION NOTES

The winter of 2024-25 had average precipitation for the Merced area, with 9.66" of rain based on the CIMIS weather station in Ballico (Merced County no longer has any functioning CIMIS stations). We had a cool spring followed by a very mild summer weather — there were only six days at or above 100° F, for example. This resulted in low plant stress and excellent yields — overall production was even better than 2023, which also was a good year because of the mild summer temperatures. This was reflected in the Collaborators Trial yield results, where the standard lines exceeded 1400 boxes/A, or about 70 bins/A (Table 1). There were several **Bellevue** fields this year that went over 80 bins/A.

Rains came early during harvest, with a storm on October 13 producing about 1.5" and another in early November. The mid October storm may cause some problems for the stored crop, especially if **Diane** was still in the ground. Soil temperatures at 6" dropped 4° F after this rain. The combination of cold and wet soil during harvest creates the potential for accelerated decay issues in storage.

**Murasaki** and **Vermillion** continue to have inconsistent set and erratic production. Zero carry-over from last year resulted in high prices for Murasaki in August and September. My guess is that many fields were harvested early to take advantage of the price at the expense of yield, which means a short crop is likely by summer of 2026. Vermillion quality and yield varies wildly, going from excellent to almost nothing. Its problem seems to stem from

setting too many roots that never fully develop. This is why I continue to screen new reds. Potential new releases include L-19-20, L-14-31, and L-14-11.

The market for purple flesh sweetpotatoes continues to grow and command good prices. In the last two years, new purple flesh varieties have yielded well in my trials, over 35 bins per acre, and are very attractive with good shape and skin color.

L-24-71p looks especially promising in its first year, with deep purple flesh and good flavor and texture. There are now six varieties commercially available: Stokes, Ben Yagi, Regal Purple (USDA ARS), Purple Majesty (NCSU), Purple Splendor (NCSU), and Purple Reyne (LSU), grown on about 1000 acres.

Despite being a good growing season, certain diseases remain problematic: Fusarium root rot, scurf, and Southern blight. **Fusarium root rot** (putatively *Fusarium oxysporum* + *F. solani* complex) mainly impacts Bellevue, though the other varieties



L-24-71p interior flesh color. This purple/purple has excellent flavor according to Don La Bonte.



L-14-11 (left) compared to Diane (right). L-14-11 had superior shape and color, but 20% less yield. 14-11 stores better, and has some nematode resistance), which could improve pack-outs to compensate for lower production.



are not immune. Scurf impacts Covington, but also can infect all the other varieties. Southern blight is mostly a problem in Diane in the hotbeds, but can also impact any variety.

New work by UC Davis Plant Pathologist Cassandra Swett shows that the organism responsible for Fusarium foot rot may not be *Fusarium oxysporum* at all, but rather the newly named *Fusarium noneumartii*, which used to be lumped with *Fusarium solani* f.sp. *batatas*.

Fusarium foot rot first appeared as a major problem in 2022 during harvest, resulting in 10 - 20% loss on some fields harvested in October after a September heat spell with several days above 105° F and a record high of 112° F on Sept 6. Roots developed the advanced rotting while still in the ground. No such conditions occurred in 2025, which makes the high incidence of this problem worrisome. No doubt we’ve had this problem for decades, but why it has suddenly become so prevalent is not known.

The reason for the increase in scurf, however, is most likely because of reduced use of clean seed these last few years. Scurf is easily transferred from cuttings to transplants, but does not live long in fields in the absence of sweetpotatoes. One year out and it’s basically gone.

Suggested management practices for Fusarium root rot include using thiabendazole (Mertect) fungicide in the hotbeds, using clean seed, cutting transplants above the soil line, managing nematodes, and timely harvests (the longer the roots are in the ground the more likely they will become infected). These suggestions also help control scurf. A CDFA



research proposal may be started next year to determine the cause and improved management.

**Table 1. Total marketable yields, boxes/A, from the Collaborators Trial 2022 - 2025 (Livingston and Atwater).**

	2022	2023	2024	2025
<b>Cov.</b>	795	1414	1133	1560
<b>Diane</b>	1087	1157	950	1486
<b>Bonita</b>	not in trial	not in trial	680	not in trial
<b>Vermillion</b>	741	1069	817	1448
<b>Bellevue</b>	660	1222	768	1972
<b>Beauregard</b>	936	1223	575	1989

Results from 1-row x 50 ft, 4 replications, one location. Beauregard shown for comparison as it has been in this trial for more than 30 years. Seed age varied each year.

### ACRES

USDA has revised their estimates for production acres in California:

- 2020: 22,000
- 2021: 21,000
- 2022: 21,000
- 2023: 19,000
- 2024: 18,000
- 2025: not published

At 29.5 bins/A average yield and 18,000 harvested acres, total production in 2024 was around 530 million pounds. USDA estimates for 2025 have not been published, but my guess is 18,000 acres at 35 bins/A, for total production of 630 million pounds.

### VARIETY TRIAL RESULTS

The National Sweetpotato Collaborators Group trial

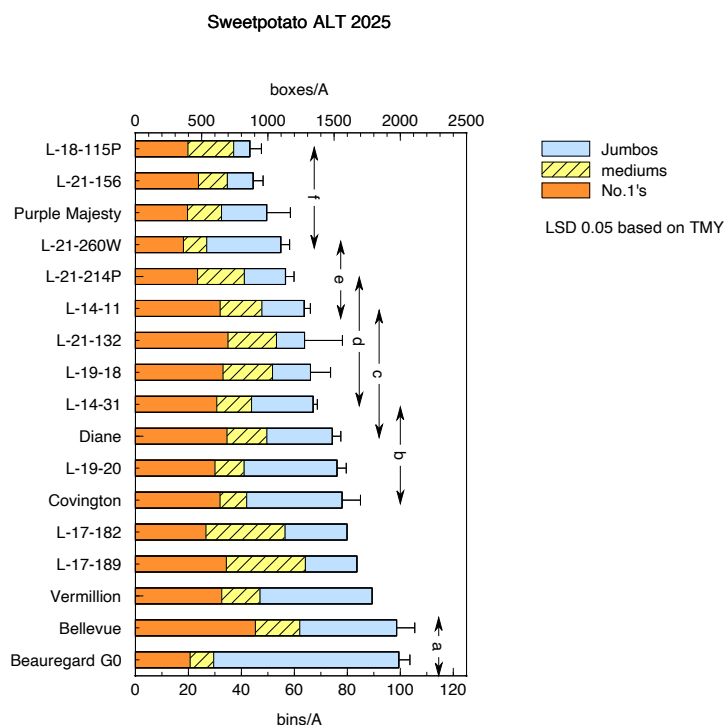
is a variety trial that is conducted in multiple states. It provides regional information to plant breeders Don La Bonte from LSU, Craig Yencho from NCSU, and Phil Wadl from USDA. Unfortunately, I lost much of my seed after the 2024 harvest, and therefore my trial was essentially an expanded version of the ALT that I conduct each year with Dave Souza. Results are presented below. Notice how Beauregard yielded over 100 bins per acre, but mostly because it was all jumbos (only 21% #1's). I used greenhouse plant cuttings straight from FPS, which illustrates the tremendous yield increases that are possible using new seed. This is labeled as Bx-G0 in the graph, but would now be considered G1 seed.



Velum in 2025 included a treatment comparing direct application to the plant rows at the same rate as with single drip down the center.

The field site was in hotbeds in 2023, but put into field production in 2024. Nonetheless, root knot nematode counts were very low and remained so throughout the entire season. It was fumigated in April, planted May 1 with Diane (RKN susceptible), and harvested Sept 17 - 19, 2025. Nimitz and Nemaclean nematicides were pre-plant incorporated one week before transplanting, while all the others were applied post plant in May and June.

One of the Velum treatments was applied in the row by moving the tape over to the plants, then injecting. This was done because Velum has low



## FUMIGATION AND NEMATICIDE TRIAL

I continued my evaluation of various nematicides this year with an emphasis on placement and timing. The Salibro label is different than the methods I have used for several years, as it limits applications to pre-plant and 30 days after transplanting. Also this year were many different fumigation treatments with Tri Cal to evaluate the impact of adding Pic to Telone.



Vermillion compared to L-19-20 (orange flesh). 19-20 will be named "Rouge" and be released in 2026.

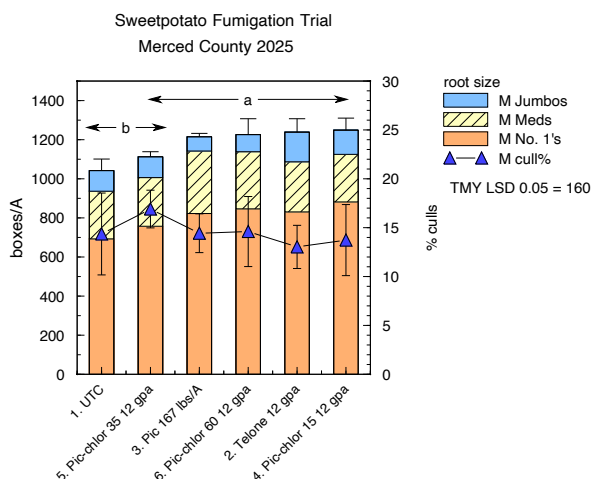
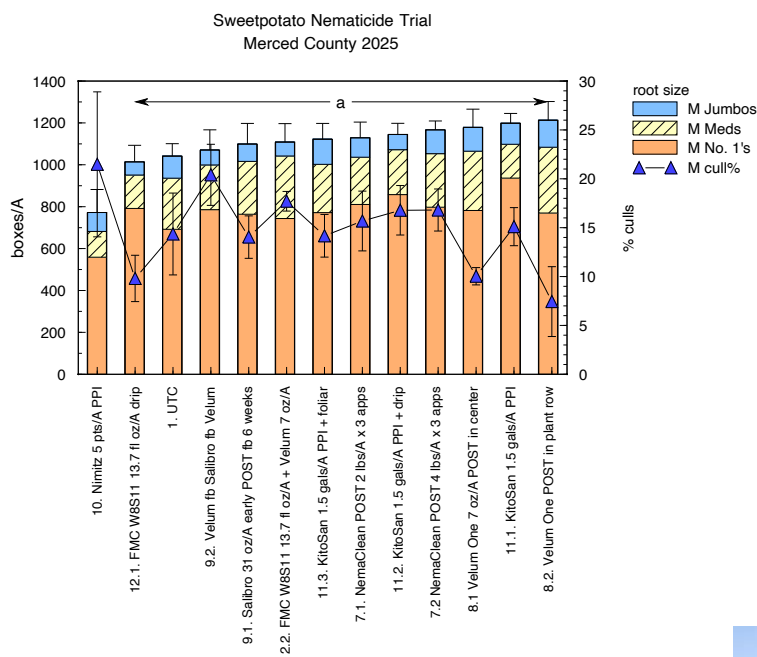


solubility and does not move well in soil, and therefore direct placement near the plants may improve efficacy. A Velum followed by Salibro application was also evaluated.

Results are shown below. Overall, this was a high yielding field and with good quality and very little difference between treatments, likely because nematode pressure was so low. Nonetheless, yields increased significantly in the fumigation treatments as compared to the untreated control, by an average of 8 bins/A.

## CLEAN SEED TRIAL

An ongoing trial to evaluate impact of seed age across different cultivars. This year I did not have old Beauregard in the trial due to the unfortunate loss of this seed in 2024, but I did end up with a nice stand of soybeans. Cooperators Nathan and Nolan Mininger had the best soybean yields in Merced County! These were used to separate the lines of sweetpotatoes to try and limit spread of aphids, which are the main vector for the viruses that cause russet crack and cultivar decline (reduced yields, lower yields, and increased culls).



Above: summer intern Aiden Beene plants soybeans next to sweetpotatoes, June 5. Below: summer intern Miles Stoddard stands next to the fully grown plants, Aug 27, 2025.