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“Outdoor Tales Columnist Hired as TMDL Consultant”

By Nicole Rothfleisch

The Imperial County Farm Bureau is very excited to have a new person on board to help with the Total Maximum Daily Load issues. Al Kalin, a local farmer, will be the On-Farm TMDL Consultant. Not to worry, I (Nicole Rothfleisch) will remain as the program director, but the state grant provides funding for on-farm assistance and with over 6000 fields in our county, that is a huge job in and of itself.

You may recognize Al as the Outdoor Tales columnist from the Sports page. Believe it or not, Al does a whole lot more than have adventures in his giant outdoor playground, the Salton Sea. It all began many years ago...

Al was born and raised in Brawley and is the son of A.J. Kalin (a past IID Director) and Louise Kalin Willey. The family farm was near the Salton Sea so Al grew up hunting and exploring the area. He attended Brawley schools and was the school marble champion in 1959. (He probably could have gone on to be the champion of the entire city of Brawley, but tragically, he was stricken with the mumps the weekend of the competition – now he’ll never know what could have been...) Al went on to graduate from Brawley Union High School and then attended Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. He did quite well in college, receiving a degree in Farm Management with minors in Crop Science, Soil Science, Game Bird Management and Agricultural Engineering.

Al graduated in 1971, during the Vietnam War, and immediately joined the California National Guard, which included six months of active duty learning to fix army tanks. In the late 60’s Al and younger brother, Carson, started the Tile Maintenance Company, a business that cleaned farm drainage tile lines. After returning home from school and army training, Al used a once classified military technique of aerial infra-red photography to detect problem areas in farmers’ fields. These techniques, that he actually pioneered and developed, were successful in finding plugged tile drains, insect damage, herbicide damage and plant diseases.

Other hobbies of his were turned into careers such as developing and maintaining duck clubs for other hunters. (He of course has one of his own on the Salton Sea). His experiences fishing then led him to opening a world wide fishing lure company where he and his wife, Patti, not only run the day-to-day operations, but he designs the numerous fishing lures, machinery, molds and plastic formulations to produce them, administers the grass-roots promotional staff, designs all display advertising, trade show displays and store displays, writes all press releases, informational brochures and product information sheets, and has developed an informational staff to visit over a thousand stores around the country. So many adventures have been had by Al over the years that his friends have encouraged him to write about them – so he does. He is a freelance outdoor writer for Western Outdoor News as well as the outdoor writer and weekly columnist of “Outdoor Tales” for this very newspaper.

Along with these numerous other activities, Al continues to maintain the legacy of his family farm. He and his brother, Carson raise alfalfa, sugar beets, carrots, dehydrator onions, sugar cane, wheat, Bermuda grass and Kline grass.

Following in his mother's footsteps, Al is extremely involved in his community and is an advocate for agriculture. He sits on the Westmorland Union Elementary School Board, the Imperial County Farm Bureau Board (where he is also involved in various committees including water quality), the IID's Water Conservation Advisory Board, the Research Advisory Committee for the UC Desert Research and Extension Center, and is the Chairman of the Regional Water Quality Control Board's TMDL Technical Advisory Committee, just to name a few.

Hobbies are an intricate part of Al's life and these include bird watching, fishing, hunting (mostly birds), photography, lapidary, precious gemstone intarsia and gemstone faceting (in laymen's terms; if you men need a gift for your wife, Al can custom make her some cool jewelry).

Family, of course, is Al's top priority. He has a wife, Patty, of 26 years (who can usually out-fish him), three children; Kristin, Linda and Mike, and four grandchildren.

Al was not hired for this consulting position simply because he is such an interesting character. He probably knows as much or more about water quality issues in the Imperial Valley than anyone else. After serving the IID on their Drain Water Quality Technical Advisory Committee, he went on to participate in the Regional Board's TMDL Technical Advisory Committee for the first TMDL they decided to implement here and continues to do this. Not only does he understand the science of water quality, but he understands the politics as well. He has also tried out virtually every Best Management Practice for TMDLs and has first-hand farmer experience in how they actually work.

If you are interested in taking advantage of his plethora of knowledge, you can call the Farm Bureau to set up an appointment with him. He will come to your farm and assess all your fields, write up recommendations on how to reduce silt loads in your tailwater, assist you with implementation of BMPs, get a documentation file set up for you and answer any other questions you might have at no charge to you.

The Imperial Valley and the Farm Bureau are very fortunate that Al has offered to share his expertise with the rest of us. Now that you know a little more about him, you will have some interesting things to talk about when he comes to visit your farm! I bet some of you used to play marbles too...or might have an army tank that needs fix'n.