

Food Systems Leadership Institute California Session Speaker Biographies



Dennis Albani
President, California Advocates

Dennis Albani has over 26 years of experience in advocacy and public policy and specializes in energy, natural resources and water, food and agriculture, special districts, technology, and environmental protection including recycling and Proposition 65. He has served as an appointee in two governor's administrations and in the California Senate as the consultant for the Agriculture and Water Resources Committee. He has extensive business experience in real estate, land use, finance and livestock production. Albani is a member of the California State Bar and graduated from McGeorge School of Law with distinction.

Albani has a bachelor's degree in agricultural business and minor in water science from Cal Poly, where he was recognized as an outstanding graduate. He was a fellow in the prestigious California Agricultural Leadership Program and a graduate from the Dale Carnegie Institute.



Andy Anzaldo
Chief Operating Officer, The Wonderful Company

Andy Anzaldo has worked for The Wonderful Company for 25 years and is currently the chief operating officer of Wonderful Philanthropy. He drives and integrates education, health and wellness, and community programs to create positive, generational change in underserved areas. This work supports Wonderful employees, their spouses and children, and other families where they operate, from California's Central Valley to Mexico, FIJI and beyond.



Jeffrey D. Armstrong
President, Cal Poly

President Armstrong began his tenure as Cal Poly's ninth permanent president on February 1, 2011, with a determination to enhance the University's renowned Learn by Doing teaching approach.

Armstrong brings to Cal Poly a blend of experience as an honored teacher, respected researcher, and experienced administrator. At Cal Poly, he has focused on ways to improve graduation rates. To further bolster student success, he has sought to expand university-industry partnerships to attract more applied research to the campus, thus increasing professional development experiences for faculty in order to enrich classroom instruction.

As a first-generation college graduate, Armstrong is particularly passionate about nurturing a campus climate that embraces inclusion and diversity. "To succeed in our increasingly multicultural society," Armstrong says, "our students need to experience the world as it really is."

As a member of the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF) executive committee, Armstrong joins a dedicated coalition of senior business and higher education executives committed to advancing innovative solutions to U.S. education and workforce challenges.

Armstrong also served from 2011 to 2015 on the board of Aware Awake Alive, a national alcohol-awareness program created to educate young people on the symptoms of alcohol poisoning, create awareness on the conditions that enable it, and encourage responsibility for one another in situations where alcohol is consumed.

He participates in numerous California State University (CSU) committees, including the CSU Agricultural Advisory Committee, CSU Agricultural Research Initiative, CSU Water Resources and Policy Initiatives, CSU Technology Steering Committee, and CSU Council on Ocean Affairs, Science & Technology (COAST). Armstrong also is one of two CSU representatives on the Board of Directors of the California Council on Science and Technology.

Before joining Cal Poly, he served as dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and professor of Animal Science at Michigan State University (MSU), beginning in 2001. He was head of the Department of Animal Sciences at Purdue University from 1997 to 2001 and served in various positions at North Carolina State University (NCSU) from 1986 through 1997. As a faculty member at NCSU, Armstrong was known for engaging students in the classroom and was awarded numerous honors for his teaching excellence. He also was named Alumni Distinguished Professor for Undergraduate Teaching.

Raised on a beef cattle, swine, and tobacco farm in Western Kentucky, Armstrong attended Murray State University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in agriculture in 1981. He earned both a master's (1984) and doctorate (1986) in physiology from North Carolina State University.

He and his wife, Sharon, have two children who currently reside in Michigan. Their son Zack is a financial advisor; and their daughter Jessica is a physician in obstetrics and gynecology - married to Dean Gibbie, who is a realtor. Jessica and Dean are parents to the Armstrongs' two grandchildren – Colton and Carter.



Christine Birdsong
Undersecretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture

Christine Birdsong was appointed by Governor Newsom as Undersecretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. Previously, Birdsong was senior vice president, general counsel and director of people and culture for the Sun Valley Rice Company. She has also served as general counsel for the National Cotton Council of America, counsel for the Committee on Agriculture for the United States House of Representatives, and federal government affairs leader for CropLife America. Birdsong earned a Juris Doctor degree from the UC College of the Law, San Francisco, and is a UC Berkeley alumni.



Soren Bjorn
CEO, Driscoll's

Soren Bjorn was named CEO of Driscoll's in January 2024 and oversees the company's global operations.

Bjorn joined Driscoll's, the world's berry company, in 2006 and has been involved in nearly every facet of the business over the past 17 years. As the former senior vice president of international business and global technologies, he led business development in Europe, South America, and Australia, as well as global R&D and breeding. He became the leader of Driscoll's business unit in North America in 2013 and was elevated to his current position as president of Driscoll's of the Americas in 2017.

Driscoll's berries are beloved by consumers worldwide, making it one of the top retail grocery brands. As CEO, Bjorn's priorities are to maintain the company's thriving culture and continue accelerating its global growth. Drawing from his experiences leading R&D and innovation, he will also guide the company's efforts to implement new technologies that improve operational efficiencies and ensure the business remains resilient against industry-wide challenges such as climate change.

As a seasoned executive in the food industry, Bjorn spent six years with Del Monte Foods in San Francisco. There, his responsibilities included outsourcing of manufacturing operations globally, and the management of the company's sales and operations planning department. He also held the role of president and CEO for UniMark Foods, Inc. a vertically integrated citrus and tropical fruit growing and processing company headquartered in Texas.

Bjorn earned an MBA from Texas Christian University (TCU) and a BBA in marketing from Baylor University. He was born and raised in Silkeborg, Denmark, where his mother still lives today.



Walt Duflock
Senior Vice President, Western Growers Association

Walt Duflock is a partner at a fifth-generation family farming operation in Monterey County that grows specialty crops, wine grapes, and cattle. He has 30 years of experience at Silicon Valley tech startups with sales and marketing executive roles at eBay and three others that were acquired. He helped build THRIVE into the top agri-food-tech accelerator and is currently the vice president of innovation at Western Growers Association.

He earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from Cal Poly and a juris doctorate from Santa Clara University School of Law.



Claudia S. Plaisted Fernandez DrPH, MS, RD, LDN
FSLI Leadership Core Director

Claudia Fernandez is a Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and currently serving as the Associate Chair for Inclusive Excellence, Belonging, & Engagement in the department of Maternal and Child Health at the Gillings School of Global Public Health, the top-ranked public school of public health in the country. She specializes in helping leaders meet the challenges of running complex organizations, communicating to public and media audiences, and engaging employees. She is the co- author of *It-Factor Leadership: Become a Better Leader in 13 Steps*.

Dr. Fernandez has extensive experience developing custom executive education programs that focus on personal leadership development, innovation, and business skills for senior, middle, and front-line managers and leaders. For the past 19 years she has served as the Director of the Leadership Core for the Food Systems Leadership Institute (www.FSLI.org), the flagship leadership program of the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU), which is offered to higher leadership and administration in academia, industry, and government. For the past 18 years she has directed the ACOG Robert C. Cefalo International Leadership Institute for the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. From 2015-2024, she served as Co-PI and Co-Director for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation-funded Clinical Scholars National Leadership Institute (ClinicalScholarsNLI.org), a three-year intensive program for interprofessional healthcare teams working to solve community-based health disparities. She is an executive coach and certified in a wide range of leadership and psychological assessment tools, including 360 assessments, the EQi-2.0 Emotional Intelligence Instrument, the FIRO-B, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Change Style Indicator, the Decision Style Profile, the Paper Planes, Inc. simulation, the Thomas Kilmann Conflict Instrument, The FourSight tool, The Influence Style Indicator, the Poverty Simulation, and the CPI 260 and the Coaching Report for Leaders among others.

Dr. Fernandez is also a licensed and Registered Dietitian, and as such has a particular interest in leadership in healthcare systems and high-performing healthcare and public health teams. She earned her doctorate in public health leadership and health policy from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is also a two-time national literary finalist in creative writing.

You can contact Claudia at Claudia_Fernandez@unc.edu



Terrance Harris
Vice President, Strategic Enrollment Management, Cal Poly

Terrance Harris serves as the vice president for strategic enrollment management. He has spent most of his entire professional career in the enrollment space serving in rolls in recruitment, as well as managing admissions advising and operations, data management, communications and enrollment development. Outside of his professional experience, Harris has coached high school basketball for 20 years and mentored hundreds of students as they navigated through this critical portion of their lives. His spouse and three young daughters are the inspiration for all that he does. Harris earned his bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in educational leadership from Cal Poly.



Bill Hendricks
Interim Dean, Cal Poly College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences

Bill Hendricks was named interim dean for the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences on Jan. 1, 2024. Hendricks most recently served as an associate dean for the college, overseeing college operations and enrollment management.

Since joining Cal Poly in 1994, Hendricks has taught in the recreation administration program and served as professor and first department head for the Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration Department. In 2016, he oversaw the transition of the Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration to the Experience Industry Management Department – making it one of the first of its kind in the country. In recent years, he was a critical player in the development of a vision and launch of the Experience Innovation Lab within the college’s Boswell Agricultural Technology Center housed in the Frost Center for Research and Innovation. He is the recipient of Cal Poly’s Distinguished Scholarship award; Cal Poly’s Distinguished Faculty Service-Learning award; and the CAFES Faculty Teaching Excellence award.

A former park ranger, Hendricks earned a doctorate degree in recreation and leisure from the University of Utah with an allied area in organization communication and behavior. He earned his master’s degree in business and public administration from John F. Kennedy University with an emphasis in general management, and his bachelor’s degree in recreation administration specializing in park and natural resources from California State University, Chico.



Jeff Huckaby
President and CEO, Grimmway Farms

Jeff Huckaby is the President of Grimmway Farms and Cal Organic Farms headquartered in Bakersfield, Calif. He is a fourth-generation farmer born and raised in the southern San Joaquin Valley. He learned to grow carrots and potatoes working for his grandfather at an early age. Shortly After graduating from California State University Bakersfield he went to work for Wm Bolthouse Farms as a production manager. He also held positions as a grower representative and eventually farm manager before moving to Grimmway Farms in 1998 as a ranch manager. Huckaby was responsible for the organic program at Grimmway and in 2001 became general manager of the organic division when Grimmway purchased Cal Organic Farms. In 2006 he was promoted to executive vice president and in 2016 became president.

During his tenure at Grimmway the organic program has grown from several hundred acres to over 40,000 acres of certified organic ground. Today Cal Organic Farms is one of the largest single growers of organic produce in the nation and grows approximately 65 different organic fruits and vegetables throughout California while Grimmway Farms grows and processes over 42,000 acres of carrots in seven states. Huckaby has served on numerous boards and committees over the past 25 years and presently serves on Cal Poly’s Deans Advisory Council for the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences, the United Fresh Produce Association Board of Directors, and on the California State Board of Food and Agriculture.



Cynthia Jackson-Elmoore
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs,
Cal Poly

Cynthia Jackson-Elmoore is responsible for the formulation of academic policies and priorities and oversees the Academic Affairs division, which includes the university's six colleges, along with the international and extended education programs, the Kennedy Library and academic programs and planning. In addition, she shares oversight of research and economic development, graduate education, financial aid, the registrar, admissions and enrollment. Jackson-Elmoore previously served as dean of the Honors College at Michigan State University and a professor with affiliations in the School of Social Work and the Global

Urban Studies Program. She also co-chaired a university level Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee and was a presidential appointee to MSU's Strategic Planning Committee. She earned doctorate and master's degrees in public administration, with a public policy emphasis, from the University of Southern California and a bachelor's in chemical engineering from the University of Delaware.



Russ Kabaker
Assistant Dean, Advancement and External Relations, Cal Poly
College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences

Russ Kabaker joined the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences as the assistant dean of advancement and external relations in June 2014. His focus is to provide a seamless and coordinated program of outreach that fosters strong relationships with internal and external partners, enhancing support for the college and its many disciplines.

Prior to joining Cal Poly, Kabaker had an extensive agribusiness management career at Bayer CropScience Vegetable Seeds, where he was responsible for the sales and marketing for the Americas, Australia and New Zealand for various segments within the produce industry. Prior to that, Kabaker worked for the ag operations division of Bakersfield, California based Grimmway Farms. Kabaker is an alumnus of Cal Poly. While a Cal Poly student, he spent his summers working as a wild land firefighter with the U.S. Forest Service for six seasons.



Haley Marconett
Assistant Dean, Strategic Initiatives, Communications and
Student Leadership, Cal Poly College of Agriculture, Food and
Environmental Sciences

Haley Marconett is responsible for college-wide strategic initiatives, communications and stakeholder engagement, and student leadership and recruitment. She has more than 25 years of experience as an executive-level advisor overseeing strategic communications, planning and operations. Before joining Cal Poly in 2013, she spent her career in private industry, leading strategic communications and executive positioning for Fortune 100 companies including

SUPERVALU/Albertson's, Target, General Mills and Target. Marconett is a graduate of Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota.



Bill Newlands
President and CEO, Constellation Brands

Bill Newlands is Constellation's president and chief executive officer. He is responsible for providing strategic leadership and working with the board of directors to establish long-range goals, strategies, plans, and policies. He leads the executive management committee and is a member of the board of directors. Newlands joined Constellation in 2015 as executive vice president, chief growth officer. In 2016, his role expanded to include leadership of the Wine + Spirits Division. In 2017 he became the company's chief operating officer and in 2018 his role expanded to include president.

He previously served as president, North America at Beam, Inc. Under his leadership, Beam became one of the fastest-growing companies in its category.

Previous appointments included president, Beam Spirits U.S., president, Beam Wine Estates, president and CEO, Allied Domecq Wines USA, CEO and board director, wine.com, managing director, and U.S. and global marketing officer, LVMH Chandon Estates.

Constellation Brands (NYSE: STZ and STZ.B), a Fortune 500 company, is a leading international producer and marketer of beer, wine and spirits with operations in the U.S., Mexico, New Zealand, and Italy. Constellation is the No. 3 beer company in the U.S. with high-end, iconic imported beer brands such as the Corona and Modelo brand families, and Pacifico. Its high-quality wine and spirits brands include the Robert Mondavi and The Prisoner Wine Company brand families, Kim Crawford, Ruffino, Meiomi and SVEDKA Vodka. The company's portfolio also includes a collection of highly-rated, wine brands such as SIMI and Mount Veeder Winery, spirits brands High West Whiskey and Casa Noble Tequila, as well as new wine innovations such as Cooper & Thief, 7 Moons, and Crafters Union.



Samuel L. Pardue
FSLI Director

Dr. Sam Pardue has had the great privilege of studying and working at four U.S. Land Grant universities and the University of Sydney, NSW during his career. He served as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Massachusetts- Amherst, a faculty member in the Department of Poultry Science at Texas A&M University, Undergraduate Coordinator, Department Head, and Associate Dean in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) at NC State University, and most recently as Dean and Director of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at the University of Georgia.

Dr. Pardue is a native of Yadkinville, NC, and he holds a B.S. degree in Poultry Science, and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Physiology, all from NC State University. As a faculty member, he has had appointments in instruction and research. His areas of interest have included stress and reproductive physiology in poultry and student success initiatives.

Throughout his career, Dr. Pardue sought to create or expand a number of programs to address the issue of access for rural students to higher education. He helped to champion



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programs such as **STEAM** [Student Transfer Enrollment, Advising, and Mentoring], an alternative admissions pathway for rural students, **ASPIRE** [ACT Supplemental Preparation in Rural Education] initially developed in the Prestage Department of Poultry Science by Dr. Jackie Hoffman Golden and co-workers to provide low cost SAT/ACT preparation, and **DFNCF** [Developing Future North Carolina Farmers] which combined a rich university experience with robust mentoring from external agri-businesses to nurture creative thinking in combination with an academic foundation needed for each student to succeed.

He was a member of Cohort 3 of the FSLI program and Class 5 of the Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy and Academic Programs Committee on Organization and Policy (ESCOP/ACOP) Leadership Development Program. He has also served on the CALS Commodity Leadership Development Program Advisory Board and the Animal Strategic Working Group of the Growing North Carolina's AgBiotech Landscape Taskforce.

In June of 2020 Dr. Pardue became the Director of the Association of Public and Land Grant University's Food Systems Leadership Institute (FSLI), which provides executive leadership education for food and agriculture systems leaders in higher education, government, and industry.