



# County of Monterey

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RESOLUTION

Resolution No.: 25-168

Adopt Resolution Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Short-Handle Hoe or “El Cortito” Being )  
Outlawed in California and Honoring Sebastian Carmona, Other Courageous Farmworkers and Leaders of )  
California Rural Legal Assistance for Their Exemplary Advocacy..... )

**WHEREAS**, For decades in the Salinas Valley, the short-handle hoe, known as “El Cortito,” was used for weeding and thinning rows of crops that kept farmworkers stooped over for long hours each day. Workers were only able to stand and stretch when they reached the end of a row, finishing each workday with stressed and strained spines. Over many years, the stoop labor was not only physically debilitating, often resulting in permanent back injuries, but also reflected a systemic disregard for the health of our farmworkers; and

**WHEREAS**, The workers referred to “El Cortito” as “the devil’s arm” in Spanish and its use was not about efficiency or productivity. It was about control. Keeping workers stooped meant keeping them under constant supervision, a silent assertion of dominance embedded in the fields; and

**WHEREAS**, For years, farmworkers protested its use. But their cries went ignored. But in 1969, a group of agricultural workers in Soledad, California, including Sebastian Carmona, complained to a young attorney named Maurice “Mo” Jourdan of the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) office in Salinas. They wanted justice. The United Farm Workers (UFW) and labor leader Cesar Chavez, who attributed his own chronic back pain to the tool, also urged Jourdan to take the case and advocated for the hand tool to be banned; and

**WHEREAS**, At first, Jourdan was skeptical about whether the courts would outlaw the tool whose widespread use dated to the Depression Era. It was not until CRLA community worker and former farmworker Hector De La Rosa challenged Jourdan to attempt working with the tool for a single day. After just a couple of hours, Jourdan felt sharp excruciating pain down his spine and his shoulder became numb from the challenging, repetitive movement. What had once been a legal question became a moral obligation; and

**WHEREAS**, With Salinas CRLA’s Director Marty Glick, Jourdan would begin a six-year legal fight. Their first step was to petition the California Industrial Safety Board. Eleven physicians testified that the tool aged workers’ bodies prematurely – men in their 30s and 40s resembled 70-year-olds with advanced arthritis. But in 1973, the Governor Ronald Reagan-appointed Board, rejected their petition; and

**WHEREAS**, Undeterred, CRLA took the fight to the California Supreme Court with a writ challenging the adverse administrative agency decision. They had to not only prove “El Cortito” was an unsafe hand tool, but that there were viable alternatives, such as using a long handle instead; and

**WHEREAS**, Sebastian Carmona became the lead plaintiff and was joined by other courageous Salinas Valley farmworkers, including Isabel Cardena, Raymundo Daniel, Eligio de Haro, Emilio Garcia, Juan Lopez, Jose Romero, and Jesús Serrano; and

**WHEREAS**, The legal battle to outlaw the use of El Cortito finally came to an end on April 7, 1975, after the California Supreme Court ruled in favor of CRLA and the farmworkers stating the Industrial Safety Board had given “an unduly narrow interpretation” of state regulations; and

**WHEREAS**, The California Industrial Safety Board subsequently issued a new Administrative Interpretation Number 62 stating “the use of the short handle hoe shall be deemed a violation of safety order Section 8 CAC 3316.” A newly inaugurated Governor Jerry Brown had just assumed office in January 1975, and the Board recognized the political climate had just shifted significantly in Sacramento; and

**WHEREAS**, The victory represented more than just a ban on an unsafe tool. It was a breakthrough and represented a new era in the farmworker rights movement. It proved the courts could be an ally when lawmakers and regulators refused to act. Other states subsequently also outlawed the use of El Cortito, including Texas, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico; and

**WHEREAS**, The case, *Sebastian Carmona, et al vs. Division of Industrial Safety* (Jan. 13, 1975), remains a powerful reminder of what happens when farmworkers, lawyers and local leaders unite to challenge adverse working conditions that have dire health consequences.

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the County of Monterey Board of Supervisors, on behalf of the County and all residents thereof, hereby commemorates the **50th Anniversary of the Short-Handle Hoe or “El Cortito”** being outlawed in California and honors Sebastian Carmona, the other courageous farmworkers, and the leaders of California Rural Legal Assistance for their exemplary advocacy, including CRLA Staff Attorney Maurice “Mo” Jourdan, Salinas CRLA Director Marty Glick, and long-time CRLA Community Worker Hector De La Rosa. The County of Monterey celebrates this landmark case that arose out of the agricultural fields of the Salinas Valley, but improved the health and safety of thousands of farmworkers across California. May it also empower the next generation of Californians to recognize that they too have the power to change the course of history and confront injustice.

**PASSED AND ADOPTED** on this 10<sup>th</sup> day of June 2025

Chair Supervisor Chris Lopez

Vice Chair Supervisor Wendy Root Askew

Supervisor Glenn Church

Supervisor Luis A. Alejo

Supervisor Kate Daniels

