

Monterey County Farmworker Advisory Committee

Overview:

The Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner and Center for Community Advocacy established a Farmworker Advisory Committee to work on safety issues, particularly around pesticide use.

Challenge:

An estimated 50,000 farm workers live and work in Monterey County for all or part of the year. While agriculture is by far the county's largest employer and chief economic driver, these workers have had a limited voice in our community. Farmworker health and safety is critical to sustaining agricultural production and farmworkers are most vulnerable to pesticide exposure and other health and safety concerns in the fields. But many farmworkers are unaware of the resources available to them, and the responsibility of the County Agricultural Commissioner (CAC) to enforce laws that protect them. The Farmworkers Advisory Committee (FAC) tackled these issues by bringing farmworker leaders and the CAC's staff together to kick-start changes through social and regulatory initiatives and public outreach. The FAC generally meets monthly at the CAC's Office with simultaneous Spanish/English translation service provided.

As its first priority, the FAC focused on establishing a trusting, professional relationship between County regulators and leaders in the farmworker community. Committee members exchanged information about pesticide use, enforcement, farmworker rights, and the means to identify other major issues of concern while improving communication and mutual understanding. The strong personal relationships developed during FAC meetings have fostered honest discussion and the free exchange of ideas. Implementation of the FAC has resulted in truly innovative actions and productive dialogue between County officials and the farmworker community that no longer feels it is ignored.

Innovative Solution:

Improved Pesticide Warning Signage: In close consultation with the FAC, the CAC launched a pilot program to improve pesticide warning signage in the fields, going beyond state regulations. This was a major concern identified by the FAC. To address uncertainty about safety, the CAC recruited several key

growers to provide application-specific time and date on one field posting sign. This pilot project has been a success and is already expanding.

Workers' Rights Wallet Card: Another FAC product was a laminated wallet card with information about workers' rights. It includes the CAC's contact information so that workers can directly report concerns or incidents. Several thousand cards have been distributed to farmworkers, and the CAC has committed to providing cards for all farmworkers in the County.

Building Trust and Cooperation: Creation of the FAC and its tangible results have sent a powerful message to the farmworker community that is building a bridge of trust and cooperation between farmworkers and local government.

Originality:

This program is the first of its kind in California and appears to be the first in the nation. It is under study by other California CACs interested in replicating its success. The Director of the California Department of Pesticide Regulation has met with the FAC and applauds its efforts.

Cost Effectiveness:

The FAC project has been extremely cost effective, utilizing the existing staff and resources of the CAC, although cost savings were not the objective of the project. Through the outreach efforts of the FAC, the broader community is being educated about the CAC's roles and resources available to them. This is exponentially more effective than the CAC's outreach alone.

Results:

Since the FAC was launched, it has received significant and positive feedback from the farmworker community, the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, health officials, agricultural associations and community leaders. While FAC participation is voluntary, their level of commitment is incredibly high. Eleven growers have now taken the initiative to voluntarily implement the field posting pilot program on more than 9,000 acres. Monterey County's pilot posting regulation is now on track for countywide implementation.

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Para información (831) 759-7325

Si usted tiene preguntas o quejas de pesticidas, el Comisionado Agrícola del Condado de Monterey puede ayudarle.

Para emergencias con pesticidas LLAME AL 911



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Para información (831) 759-7325

- Si ocurre un incidente con pesticidas y usted lo reporta al Comisionado Agrícola, es ilegal que su empleador tome represalias contra usted (3 CCR §6704 y 40 CFR §170.315).
- Al reportar un incidente, proporcione la fecha, describa la actividad y cultivo, la hora, ubicación (nombre del rancho, bloque, camino más cercano), fotos, si es posible y el nombre de su empleador (su reporte será confidencial).
- Si usted se enferma (intoxicó) por causa de pesticidas, su empleador es responsable de llevarlo a un médico (3 CCR §6726 y §6766).

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Pilot program created to protect farmworkers from pesticide exposure

Pilot project will run until end of current harvesting season

By Claudia Meléndez Salinas, Monterey Herald

Monday, August 29, 2016



SALINAS >> For the second time in less than four months, agricultural and farmworker leaders announced an agreement intended to protect field laborers from pesticide exposure.

The agreement announced Monday will run through the end of this harvesting season and consists of more noticeable posting of pesticide applications and dates when it's safe for the workers to enter fields. Field workers will also be given a plastic, wallet-size card with a phone number to report potential violations.

“Putting a card in somebody's hand may not seem like a big deal, but it's clear that farmworkers are beginning to understand we care about their health and we care about them as people,” Monterey County Agricultural

Commissioner Eric Lauritzen said Monday at a news conference. “The pilot posting, it's going to make a difference in protecting farmworkers. If we can protect our farmworkers we make an investment in our community.”

Although California has some of the strictest pesticide regulations in the country, farmworkers are often not aware of what those regulations are or they're afraid to refuse to enter fields that were recently fumigated, Lauritzen said. It was a group of field laborers now working with the agricultural commissioner who suggested this type of program, said Juan Uranga, executive director of the Center for Community Advocacy.

“This is one more way to let the community know that farmworkers can speak for themselves, that they don't need other people to voice their dreams and take action,” Uranga said “They're the new pioneers of the United States. They bring with them from Mexico those values of hard work, dedication to family and spirituality. These are people to be treasured and honored.”

The idea of improving communication for increasing farmworker's protection was born out of conversations with the Farmworkers' Committee of the ag commissioner, the only group of its kind in California. The farmworkers who sit in the committee have been trained by the advocacy center and have demonstrated their leadership skills in other projects, Uranga said. The committee was formed two years ago, and in addition to bringing this initiative forward, it also co-created a pilot program to improve notification of pesticide applications near schools. That program, announced in May, is underway in the Pajaro Valley.

The pilot program in Monterey County is independent of an ongoing review of pesticide regulations at the state level.

Five agricultural companies agreed to be part of the pilot project in the Salinas Valley: Tanimura & Antle, Ocean Mist Farms, Scheid Vineyards, Costa Farms and Bay View Farms.

Mike Antle, vice president of Tanimura & Antle, praised the ag commissioner and the Center for Community Advocacy, saying both contributions are valuable and perhaps not well understood in the wider community.

“It may seem like a long time to get this program, but you have no idea what Juan and Jim (Bogart) and Eric have been dealing with in the last few years, and even then before that,” Antle said. Grower-Shipper Association President Jim Bogart “was hired to represent the industry back when the industry used to fight farmworkers, and Juan was in the middle of all that. ... CCA is an incredible organization that we all need to support, they tell us the way the people feel, the way they should be treated, how they completely understand they need to be productive so we can stay a viable industry here.”

Maria Elena Andrade, a health advocate with the Center for Community Advocacy, said the agreement is proof that the ag commissioner is not just working for the growers but also for the laborers.

“We’re hoping that the signs will be very high, in the past they’ve been hidden and that’s caused a lot of illnesses,” she said in Spanish. “I used to think that the ag commissioner was somebody scary, like a policeman. Now that I’m a member of the committee, I feel the department is here to help everyone.”

Claudia Meléndez Salinas can be reached at 726-4370.

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