

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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