

NEWS

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For Immediate Release

County Launches Task Force to Improve Living Conditions for Farm Laborers

In separate move, Board of Supervisors to vote on providing continued housing assistance for workers and families displaced by mass shooting

Half Moon Bay – The County of San Mateo today announced the launch of a task force that is committed to improving the living conditions of farmworkers who reside in employer-provided housing.

The task force will ensure compliance with local and state rules and regulations that affect the health and safety of employer-providing housing for farmworkers and their families.

Under local regulations, farm operators are required to obtain permits from the County if they provide housing for five or more workers.

The January 23 mass shooting revealed that the displaced farmworkers working on those farms were living in unpermitted housing in conditions that were crowded and unsanitary.

Because of the potential for other unpermitted farm labor housing, the total number of farm labor sites is not known. The task force will rely on complaints and relevant state and local laws to identify any unpermitted farm-labor housing sites.

The focus is on improving living conditions at all farm-labor housing sites throughout the county.

“I am so grateful to have the expressed support and partnership of both our County’s agricultural community leaders as well as our county’s farmworker advocate stakeholders as we undertake this work,” said County Supervisor Ray Mueller, whose District 3 includes much of the county’s agricultural land.

“We understand many farmers and ranchers in the county are doing things the right way, providing legally permitted farmworker housing. But the goal must be 100 percent compliance, to find those living in the shadows, who need help. This work will ensure that every farmworker is living in a safe, healthy, and legally permitted home,” Mueller said.

The task force includes the County’s Planning and Building Department, County Environmental Health, Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures, County Attorney’s Office and the District Attorney.

“It’s imperative that these members of our community be treated with the respect and dignity they deserve and that starts with safe and healthy housing,” said Mike Callagy, the County’s chief executive.

The County’s \$100 million annual agricultural industry relies on a mix of migrant and more permanent laborers whose children are enrolled in local schools.

Farmworkers who rely on employer-provided housing are often reluctant to speak up or complain for fear of both losing their job and home, even if that home is sub-standard.

Employer-owned farmworker housing is subject to regulations that mandate minimum housing and safety standards. The goal, County officials said, is that farm operators will voluntarily work with the County to remedy unpermitted housing and bring housing up to health and safety codes.

“If they want to come into compliance, we will work with them,” Callagy said. “If not, we will use all of the tools available to us to ensure these members of our community have safe and healthy housing. We simply cannot delay.”

Since the tragedy of January 23, the County is providing emergency housing and support services for 19 families displaced by the shooting. The Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, Feb. 14, 2023) is scheduled [to vote on a proposal](#) to allocate \$750,000 to house displaced workers and also to seek community donations to assist families.

The agricultural industry in San Mateo County that mainly stretches along the coast roughly from Montara to the Santa Cruz County border includes a mix of small and large producers.

A [2017 Agriculture Census](#) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture counted 241 total farms in San Mateo County. Of these, 224 were less than 500 acres; 17 were 500 acres or larger.



Fifty-seven percent of farms hire farm labor, according to the census. No data is provided on employer-provided housing.

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