



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO

Ag ID (Agricultural Access Verification) Program Concept Sheet

Purpose

The County Agriculture/Weights and Measures Department has begun soliciting feedback from stakeholders, to inform the creation of a new Ag ID (Agricultural Access Verification) program. The goal of the program is to provide a transparent and uniform way to identify commercial farmers and ranchers to law enforcement and emergency personnel, to facilitate safe access to agricultural properties within a mandatory evacuation area during a wildfire or other emergency. This fact sheet gives a brief summary of the program development and outreach activities that are in progress.

During a disaster, an Ag ID program would provide a framework for firefighting personnel, California Highway Patrol officers, Sheriff's deputies and other emergency personnel to allow farmers and ranchers limited emergency access to areas that may otherwise be restricted to the public, to undertake critical and essential agricultural work. Our goal is to create a program for the 2023 fire season in a way that protects the health and safety of agricultural workers and safety crews, while enabling safe access to growing sites to protect and ensure the viability of local agriculture.

Ad-Hoc Program

During the 2020 CZU Complex fires, the County saw an urgent need for agricultural producers to access their properties in the coastal evacuation zone to avoid heavy crop and livestock losses. At that time, the County Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures compiled a list of verified growers requesting access, which was submitted and reviewed by CalFire before being sent to law enforcement personnel operating the evacuation checkpoints. This enabled producers and their employees to gain entry through these checkpoints in the short term, but there is a need to create a more formal countywide program that addresses the many limitations of this ad-hoc solution.

Regulatory History

In October 2021, the State Legislature passed Assembly Bill 1103, which created a legal framework for establishment of agricultural access programs for livestock producers. In the most recent legislative session a new bill, Assembly Bill 1141 has been introduced. If chaptered in its current wording, this bill would expand the previously chaptered livestock access framework to all producers, including those of row crops, nursery stock and other, "planted," agriculture. The County is discussing the creation of an Ag ID program using this framework that will allow safe entry to producers of both livestock and "planted" agriculture in a disaster.

Other rural-urban counties in the Bay Area such as Sonoma, Napa, and Marin have adopted Ag ID programs. The experiences of those counties have highlighted the need to ensure that the process to inform the program is inclusive of the needs and knowledge of farmworkers, community organizations that serve that population, as well as agricultural

employers. Some of the considerations to keep in mind are employee safety and training policies, and language access to ensure that the Ag ID program is implemented equitably.

Community Outreach

Last year, the Agriculture Department conducted outreach to the county's agricultural producers and other community organizations. A survey sent to producers in June of 2022 offered a useful snapshot into the disaster staffing needs of the county's agricultural operations. Preliminary conversations are beginning with community-based organizations working with the farmworker community, such as Puente de la Costa Sur.

- Share what the county's current Ad-Hoc Ag ID program is, how it is currently working in SMC, preliminary limitations identified based on CZU experience, and the ultimate policy outcome
- Determine what resonates with the community about the program and intended outcome, and identify concerns, gaps or unintended consequences
- Determine the best ways to engage farmworkers and groups, including:
 - Language preference
 - Format and venues
 - Policy (what's working, worked, and needs to improve)

Program Contact Information

For Ag ID program updates or more detailed questions, please contact Deputy Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer Jeremy Wagner at (650) 363-4700, or by e-mail at jwagner@smcgov.org.