



MONTEREY COUNTY

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER

For immediate release
April 24, 2019

Contacts: Henry Gonzales, Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner (831) 759-7301
Maia Carroll, County Communications Coordinator (831) 796-3092
Heather Healy, Chief Deputy Agricultural Commissioner (831) 759-7316
Cesar Lara, Executive Director, Monterey Bay Central Labor Council (831) 422-4626

Monterey County Pilot Project Expands to Provide Fumigant Use Notification Near North Monterey County Schools

A bilingual website that is the cornerstone of a Monterey County pilot project to provide information and notification about fumigant pesticide use on farmland within a quarter mile of schools is expanding. North Monterey County School District schools will now be part of the program and the effort will now accept sign-ups for text message alerts as well as email alerts.

“Monterey County initiated this pilot project in 2016 with three schools to show our commitment to safety and transparency about pesticide use on crops grown near schools,” Gonzales said. “We wanted to better educate the community about how food is grown in one of the top agricultural counties in the state and provide confidence in the pesticide regulatory system that has many layers of protection for human health and the environment.”

The original pilot project schools included Ohlone Elementary, Hall District Elementary and Pajaro Valley Middle Schools in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District. They were selected because of their proximity to fields where crops are grown and their willingness to participate in the project, the first of its kind in the nation.

Farmingsafelynearschools.com is a bilingual website and reflects two years of extensive research and collaborative outreach by a team of experts assembled by the Agricultural Commissioner’s Office. People who sign up are notified five days in advance of fumigant pesticide applications within a quarter mile, or 1,320 feet, of the ten schools now in the pilot project. The website originally only allowed for email notification, but based upon stakeholder input, the ability to provide notification via text messaging has been added. The email and text notifications provide the location of the application, the scheduled day of application and the materials to be applied.

Representing concerned teachers and working families, Cesar Lara, Executive Director for the Monterey Bay Central Labor Council, supports the efforts to inform and protect the community when it comes to pesticide use, especially near schools. Lara collaborated with the Agricultural Commissioner's Office from the outset and says, "We applaud the work done to protect schoolchildren, teachers and as community members, we have a right to know what toxic pesticides are applied near us. This pilot project--now in 10 schools--is a hopeful step toward and we look forward to expanding to more schools in future years Monterey County."

Funded with a grant from the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (CDPR), the pilot project started on a small scale so the team could easily work with the schools and other community stakeholders to design a system that was easy to use and met their needs.

Monterey County recently received another grant from CDPR to expand the pilot project to seven schools in the North Monterey County School District: Castroville Elementary, Central Bay High School, Echo Valley Elementary, Elkhorn Elementary, North Monterey County High School, North Monterey County Middle School and Prunedale Elementary.

In addition to the notification system, the [farmingsafelynearschools](http://farmingsafelynearschools.com) website has a section displaying maps of the schools in the pilot project and surrounding farms, information on pesticide use regulations, commonly asked questions about pesticides, a health section featuring tips on reducing pesticide exposures and information on what to do if you think you have been exposed to a pesticide.

While signing up for notifications, Gonzales also encouraged the community to take the short survey on the website to help his office determine what information users find useful and what additional information would be helpful.

"With the website and notification system now expanded and improved, my office and the outreach team will continue to meet with community members to learn what they think of the site, what works, what doesn't and what needs to be added or changed," Gonzales said. "Monterey County is committed to a dynamic website where information related to pesticide use on both conventional and organic crops is easy to find and understand."

For example, in addition to expanding the program geographically, Gonzales said he hopes to add other restricted use pesticides to the notification system in the future.

The website reflects input provided by key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, school administrators, farmers and farm organizations, community organizations, pesticide activists, elected officials and health care providers.

The team coordinating the pilot project includes:

- Traci Townsend-Gieg, a non-profit health care professional who has overseen projects examining pesticide exposure and the effects on reproductive health of farm workers as well as directed pilot implementation of a clinical pesticide exposure risk assessment tool;

- Dr. Joanne Perron, an OB-GYN who earned a master's degree in public health from the University of California, Berkeley;
- Stephanie McMurtrie, specializing in health programs, research and facilitation and holding a master's degree in health science from Johns Hopkins University;
- Lea Brooks, former assistant director of communications for CDPR.

Gonzales encouraged the public to comment on the pilot project via phone at (831) 759-7340 or email AgComm@co.monterey.ca.us.

At a press conference today, Gonzales was joined by:
Martha Sánchez, Environmental Justice Liaison, California Department of Pesticide Regulation
Cesar Lara, Executive Director, Monterey Bay Central Labor Council
Michelle Rodriguez, Superintendent, Pajaro Valley Unified School District

#