



## MONTEREY COUNTY AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER

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Contacts:

Eric Lauritzen, Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner	(831) 759-7325
Juan Uranga, Executive Director – Center for Community Advocacy	(831) 753-2324
Joel Hernandez, Lead Organizer – Center for Community Advocacy	(831) 753-2324
Maia Carroll, County Communications Coordinator	(831) 796-3092
Kathy Nielsen, Agricultural Commissioner’s Office	(831) 759-7301

### **AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER & FARMWORKER ADVISORY COMMITTEE ANNOUNCE HISTORIC PESTICIDE INITIATIVE**

Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner, Eric Lauritzen and the Farmworker Advisory Committee, formed with the assistance of the Center for Community Advocacy (CCA), today announced a historic initiative aimed at providing additional pesticide safety protections for farmworkers. The initiative launches a pilot program with leading growers to enhance worker notification through warning signs when pesticides are used in the fields.

Additionally, up to 50,000 farmworkers in Monterey County will receive information cards (in Spanish and similar to business cards) advising them to call the Agricultural Commissioner’s Office if they suspect violations of safety rules. The cards also advise employers that it is illegal to retaliate against farmworkers who seek the help of the Agricultural Commissioner’s Office.

“California has the toughest farm pesticide restrictions in the nation, and Monterey County already imposes local rules that further protect farmworkers,” said Lauritzen at a press conference today. “But we are going to do even more to communicate our commitment to safety in the fields. Farmworkers are the backbone of Monterey County’s \$4.8 billion ag industry, and they are entitled to the highest standard of pesticide safety.”

Currently, regulations for posting pesticide warning signs do not require information indicating the date or time when it is safe for farmworkers to re-enter the fields. The pilot program will include the addition of one sign that will be prominently marked with a red flag and include the date and time that the law allows workers to safely reenter the field. Only the grower or his officially designated representative may remove the signs, after first showing the crew leader proof that the re-entry restrictions have expired.

Oswaldo Cisneros, a lettuce worker and member of the Farmworker Advisory Committee, feels that the change is very important. “Some farmworkers have been showing up for work and have been told by their *mayordomos* (supervisors) to re-enter fields even though warning signs are still up,” said Cisneros. “They have to depend on the word of the *mayordomos* even though they have no way to verify what they are told. This change will allow farmworkers, themselves, to tell when it is safe to enter fields.”

The posting and information card initiatives were developed in cooperation with the Farmworker Advisory Committee, a group formed jointly by Lauritzen and the non-profit Center for Community Advocacy. “Many farmworkers are unaware of their right to a safe working environment,” said CCA Executive Director Juan Uranga. “That’s why it is important to provide farmworkers with the information they need to both protect themselves and also gain access to the agencies, like the Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office, that exist to protect them.”

Lauritzen pledged to provide a card to every farmworker in the county, with assistance from the Farmworker Advisory Committee and others. The card reads: “If you have questions or complaints on pesticides, the Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office will help.” The card includes phone numbers and advises workers that state law also protects them against retaliation if they report a pesticide problem.

A second member of the Farmworker Advisory Committee, Maria Elena Andrade, added: “It is important for our community to know that the Agricultural Commissioner’s Office exists to serve us, as well as the other parts of the agricultural industry. We are trying to create that message through the Farmworker Advisory Committee, even as we work with the Ag Commissioner and his staff to improve safety for farmworkers.”

Growers involved with the initiative include SeaMist Farms, Tanimura & Antle, Bayview Farms, Scheid Vineyards and Costa Family Farms. Lauritzen recognized these leading for growers for their, support, innovation and dedication in their effort to provide additional protections for farmworkers.

Lauritzen briefed officials at the state Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) on the pilot warning sign program and the information card campaign. DPR Director Brian Leahy praised the Monterey County initiative. “We all know that farmworkers are the most vulnerable population in terms of potential exposure to pesticides,” said Leahy. “When we protect farmworkers more effectively, we also enhance protection for the environment and the community at large. This initiative represents an important step forward for farmworker safety, and it underscores California’s leadership in environmental protection.”

Lauritzen and the Farmworker Advisory Committee held a public briefing at the Agricultural Commissioner’s Office in Salinas. The briefing recognized Farmworker Committee members and growers including SeaMist Farms, Tanimura & Antle, Bayview Farms, Scheid Vineyards and Costa Family Farms for their contributions to the initiative.

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