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MONTEREY COUNTY AND AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS ENDORSE ADVISORY FOR AGRICULTURAL WORKER PROTECTION DURING COVID-19 CRISIS

SALINAS - Today, the Monterey County Agriculture Commissioner's Office and Supervisors Luis Alejo and Chris Lopez along with Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, Monterey County Farm Bureau, Monterey County Vintners and Growers Association, Coastal Growers Association, and California Strawberry Commission released a model Advisory for Agriculture Worker Protection During COVID-19 Crisis for better protecting Agriculture and cannabis workers in Monterey County during the Coronavirus pandemic, becoming the first county in the state to do so for its Agriculture and cannabis industries.

Last Tuesday, Monterey County issued a "Shelter in Place" Order, and last night California issued a "Stay at Home" Order in response to the coronavirus crisis. Agriculture is included

under the “essential businesses” exemptions on both orders, along with other categories of essential businesses. Knowing the critical role farmworkers play in Agriculture, local elected and Agriculture leaders quickly went to work to devise enhanced worker safety measures to ensure employee health and safety.

The Monterey County Agriculture Worker Protection Advisory Protocols are voluntary, but all these associations are supporting and encouraging their members to implement them at their worksites expeditiously.

The agricultural industry is enhancing its existing food safety guidelines to decrease the spread of acute respiratory illness and lower the impact of COVID-19 in their workplace. Through this advisory, we are identifying and communicating our objectives, which may include:

- Preventing and reducing transmission among staff.
- Protecting people who are at higher risk for adverse health complications
- Maintaining business operations.
- Minimizing adverse effects on other entities in their supply chains.

Protection guidelines from the CDC and public health departments are changing rapidly. The Agriculture community will be responsive to these changes and modify this Advisory as necessary. Further, this Advisory is not only for farmworkers but for all of the individuals involved in Agriculture’s supply chain.

“We knew that we needed to do more to protect our farmworkers as they are valued and do such critical work to ensure a stable food supply during this crisis,” said Monterey County Supervisor Luis Alejo. “With these greater measures that are supported by our Agriculture and cannabis industries, we are leading and showing that we are doing all we can to better ensure their health and safety. This advisory can be a model for the rest of the state to do the same.”

Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner Henry Gonzalez adds, “The food produced by Agriculture is essential to our health and wellbeing. Farmworkers and other Agricultural employees are indispensable. This has long been recognized and is evident in the myriad of government and agricultural company rules designed to protect the health and safety of farmworkers.”

“Monterey County has committed to doing its part to keep the food our nation needs on shelves, from our cattle ranchers to our growers and shippers, we are working to feed America,” said Monterey County Supervisor Chris Lopez. “We cannot do that though without the incredible human beings who work every day in our local fields, plants, and on local ranches. We are

committed to ensuring their safety, they are the backbone and the beating heart of our nation's food supply.”

Chris Valadez, President of the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, said this advisory demonstrates that the health and safety of our employees remain our priority. “Farm employees continue to work diligently during this uncertain time to grow and harvest the fruits and vegetables shipped to consumers throughout the U.S. It is incumbent on all of us to ensure farm employees are protected and can continue to work safely in our fields and facilities. On behalf of the farmers and farming companies we represent, we were proud to be part of this important process and hope these protocols can be used in other agricultural regions as well to protect farmworkers throughout California and the nation as well.”

“While local farms already practice numerous sanitary and safety precautions for their workers and products, this advisory provides additional information related to personal hygiene and steps farm employers can take while the “Shelter in Place” and “Stay at Home” Orders are in place,” states Norm Groot, Executive Director of the Monterey County Farm Bureau. “It’s critical that production of our healthy fresh foods continues and the workers that grow and harvest these crops are in a healthy environment while doing so.”

Aaron Johnson, on behalf of the Coastal Growers Association, stated, “We are proud to submit what we believe are measures each employer and employee should follow in order to deliver Monterey County’s agricultural products to the public safely. The safety of the workforce, their families, and the public are paramount to our operations, and we are proud to deliver our recommendations alongside a broad base of agricultural and Monterey County leadership.”

“California strawberry farmers are well-prepared to protect workers and consumers and continue to supply fruit to the market. This advisory synchronizes well with the helpful procedures and tools prepared by the California Strawberry Commission to use on farms to reduce risk and protect farmworkers, implemented since February,” states Carolyn O’Donnell, Communications Director for the California Strawberry Commission. “These measures are based on the industry’s well-established food safety training program.”

Attached:

**ADVISORY FOR AGRICULTURAL WORKER PROTECTION DURING COVID-19 CRISIS
ON THE CENTRAL COAST OF CALIFORNIA.**

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