

Attachment C

County of Ventura Housing Element Background Report (Excerpt)

Farmworkers

The US Department of Agriculture has noted that although hired farmworkers make up less than one percent of all US wage and salary workers, they play an essential role in U.S. agriculture. Due to the generally low wages associated with labor related work such as field workers, packing house workers, and nursery workers; farmworker households can generally be classified as very low- or extremely low-income. This makes farmworkers and their families particularly vulnerable to living in overcrowded, substandard dwelling conditions along with inadequate bathroom, kitchen, and heating facilities. The agricultural nature of Ventura County shows comparable demographic characteristics as those listed by the Census. Farm laborers often have not had opportunities for higher education, are more likely to be of Hispanic or Mexican origin and are less likely to be US citizens than are workers in other occupations in agriculture.

Farmworker Population

Official counts of farmworkers significantly underestimate the true numbers, with undocumented and poor residents most likely to be undercounted. Farmworkers are notoriously difficult to count due to their mobility, the shared and substandard housing available to them, their fear of authorities, and their lack of involvement in a foreign and unfamiliar culture.⁸

Nonetheless, data from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) reports that there is a total of 18,319 farmworkers in Ventura County with 2,668 living in the unincorporated areas of the County. The ACS data is not a good representation of the farmworker population since the data combines persons employed in farming with persons employed in forestry, fishing, and hunting, and does not provide any distinction between high and low wage occupations. The ACS also excludes labor provided by farm labor contractors, which significantly underestimates the number of farmworkers. It is estimated that roughly one third of all California farmworkers are employed by farm labor contractors.⁹ The 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture, prepared by the Department of Agriculture, reported that there were 22,694 farmworkers in the County. Of the total, 10,529 (46%) worked 150 days or more, and 12,165 (54%) worked less than 150 days.

A Farm Labor study conducted by the University of California in Davis, estimates an even higher number of farmworkers in Ventura County.¹⁰ The study utilized wage and tax data from the California Employment Development Department, and estimated that Ventura County employed approximately 36,500 farmworkers in 2012. Therefore, depending on the data source, the estimated number of farmworkers in Ventura County ranges from 18,000 to 36,500 persons. Based on information received from the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner and the local House Farm Workers! Task Force, the higher end of the range is more accurate and should be used for estimating farmworker housing needs.

Additionally, the farmworker population in Ventura County is shifting. A significant portion of the farmworker population in Ventura County consist of indigenous migrants from Mexico that do not speak Spanish. The indigenous migrants come from the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Michoacan,

⁸ The Agricultural Worker Health Study: Case Study No. 3 - Oxnard and Santa Clara Valley. Kurt Schroeder et. Al., California Institute for Rural Studies, January 2003.

⁹ University of California Agricultural Personnel Management Program, <http://are.berkeley.edu/APMP/pubs/flc/farmlabor>, 2004-5.

¹⁰ Hooker, B., P.L. Martin, and A. Wong. "California Farm Labor: Jobs and Workers." *ARE Update* 18(6): 5-8. University of California Giannini Foundation of Agricultural Economics.

including Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and Purepechas. These populations face unique challenges including language barriers, as they often only speak their native pre-Hispanic indigenous languages. They also have deep-rooted and unique cultural practices and beliefs that often create barriers and isolate them from other Latino populations.

Farm Labor Trends

In order to understand the changing trends in farming and farmworker households and their housing needs, the County reached out to representatives in the agricultural industry consisting of local growers, labor advocates, business interests, farmworker housing advocates, local government such as the Agricultural Commissioner's Office, and nonprofit housing developers. Though these discussions did not result in a more accurate count of farmworkers, they did provide a more germane and local picture of farmworker households and their housing needs.

The discussions revealed that most farmworkers residing in Ventura county work either seasonally or year-round. Most farmworkers need housing which can accommodate families, such as single-family housing or multifamily apartment units. Additionally, there are two other types of farmworkers that have different housing needs:

- (1) Migrant individuals or families (defined as traveling to do farm work and unable to return to permanent residence on the same day). The numbers of migrant workers have declined in the past decade. Migrant workers still need permanent homes.
- (2) H-2A crews of workers. These are farmworkers who enter under a federal guest worker program for a limited number of months (no more than 10) before they return to their country of origin. H-2A visa workers require a sponsoring employer, who provides housing, meals and transportation to the job site. Anecdotally, it appears that the number of H-2A visa workers in Ventura county are increasing yearly due to a shortage of locally based farm labor available for seasonal work such as harvesting. According to the Mexican Consulate in Oxnard, there were 1,500 H-2A visas issued in 2020. H-2A visa workers can share homes or apartments to be housed in bunkhouses, dormitories, or single occupancy rooms. Since very few bunkhouses exist, the employers of H-2A workers now compete with permanent farmworkers for scarce affordable homes and apartments.

Notwithstanding the difficulties associated with procuring a precise count of the farmworker population, the total number of farmworkers in Ventura County appears to have increased over the last two decades. This may be partly explained by changes in crop type and the related value of the specialty crops, which are more labor intensive. The Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner's 2019 Crop and Livestock Report estimated that the gross value of Ventura County's agricultural industry was approximately two billion dollars, making it one of the top 10 agricultural counties in the state. Over the last two decades, the cultivation of labor-intensive and high yield crops has increased. Ranked in order of financial yield, the report listed strawberries as the highest value crop in the County, followed by celery, lemons, raspberries, nursery stock, avocados, tomatoes, cut flowers, peppers, and hemp. Industrial hemp was reintroduced into Ventura County in 2018, replacing cabbage as the tenth leading crop.

Types of Housing Needed for Farmworkers

Like most families, farmworker households require housing near both the agricultural fields and packing houses where they are employed and areas convenient to shopping, schools, and other support services. For this reason, the vast majority of farmworker households reside in conventional, lower-income housing located within the existing cities near the irrigated farmland (e.g., Oxnard, Santa Paula, Fillmore, and Ventura) and the existing unincorporated communities of El Rio, Nyeland Acres, Saticoy, Somis, and

Piru. Anecdotal information provided by sources close to the agricultural community indicates that many farmworker households reside in single family residences with multiple families sleeping in garages or detached accessory buildings. The global pandemic of 2020-21 made it clear that a safe and secure food supply requires a healthy trained and stable workforce, which is more attainable when essential workers have the ability to live in affordable, quality housing. The California Department of Public Health listed “transmission in overcrowded housing” as one of the top contributing factors to the high rate of COVID-19 virus infections in Ventura County¹¹. Farmworker families sharing private rentals and farmworkers in the H-2A visa program living in dormitory style housing are likely to live in more overcrowded conditions.

In addition to the lower-income housing options available throughout the incorporated and unincorporated County, there are two housing types specifically for the farmworker population available in the unincorporated areas of the County.

- (1) Farmworker or Animal Caretaker dwelling units (one to four dwelling units) on existing farms or ranches.
- (2) Farmworker complexes, which generally fall within the following sub-categories:
 - Farmworker camps (five or more dwelling units) on existing farms or ranches and licensed by the State and exempt from local building inspection; or
 - Farmworker housing projects developed by non-profit corporations and subsidized with Federal, State and/or local funding.

Since the housing types listed above are specifically for the farmworker population, the County’s Zoning Ordinance requires that the property owner provide an annual verification to the Planning Director, demonstrating that the residents in the farmworker dwelling units or farmworker housing complexes meet the employment criteria established in the Zoning Ordinance. As of March 2020, the verification forms mailed to the property owners by the County included 97 farmworker/animal caretaker dwelling units which have zoning clearances, and an additional 206 units which were permitted through Conditional Use Permits. Of the 206 units with Conditional Use Permits, 165 units are located within two farmworker complexes (Valle Naranjal and Rancho Sespe).

HCD maintains a list of employee housing¹² and H-2A worker housing licensed by the State of California. Table 5-15 below lists the existing agricultural employee housing and H-2A worker housing in the unincorporated County in 2020 by the facility name and location, with the number of structures that can accommodate farmworkers and their families at the facility, as well as the total number of employees in these facilities.

Data from HCD’s website indicates that 182 employees in the unincorporated County live in HCD-regulated agricultural employee housing structures, and 109 employees live in HCD-regulated H-2A worker housing. An additional 231 agricultural employees and 1,441 H-2A workers live in other housing located in cities. Most of the H-2A worker housing consists of converted hotels and motels located within the cities.

¹¹ Rode, Erin (2020, July 4). Overcrowded housing is contributing to coronavirus spread in Ventura County. Ventura County Star. <https://eu.vcstar.com/story/news/local/2020/07/03/overcrowded-housing-contributing-rise-county-s-covid-19-cases/3278476001/>

¹² “Employee Housing” refers to housing enforced by HCD pursuant to *California Health and Safety Code, Section 17000-17062.5* (Employee Housing Act). Although the permittee is required to get permits based on the requirements of the local government, the actual housing is regulated by HCD.

TABLE 5-15 FARMWORKER HOUSING REGULATED BY HCD UNINCORPORATED COUNTY				
Facility Name	Facility Address	Property Owner	No. of Structures	No. of Employees
Farmworker Housing Regulated by HCD				
Pine/Foothill	802 Pine Road, Santa Paula	Limoneira	68	68
La Campana	2297 Sycamore, Fillmore	Limoneira	6	6
Orchard Farm	12404 W. Telegraph, Santa Paula	Limoneria	11	11
Newhall Ranch	4 ½ miles east of Piru, Hwy 126, Piru	Newhall Land and Farming Company	22	11
Plant Warehouse Inc.	5612 Donlon Road, Somis	Janice Pierce	2	2
Leavens Ranches	12681 Broadway Rd., Moorpark	Leavens Ranches	3	3
B-Camp	2512 Balboa St., Oxnard	Sursum Corda Properties	18	18
Rancho Medio Día	1989 Hondo Ranch Rd., Somis	Grether Farming Co Inc	5	5
Rose House	2600 N. Rose Ave, Oxnard	Elkhorn Packing Co. LLC	1	10
TOTAL number of employees in State Licensed Employee Housing				182
H-2A Worker Housing				
Almond Drive	3544 Almond Drive, Oxnard	Coastal Farm Labor Services, Inc.	10	50
Heavens Honey Inc.	777 Hopper Canyon, Fillmore	Heavens Honey Inc.	1	7
Magana Family Ranches	1041 Bardsdale Ave, Fillmore	Magana Labor Services, Inc.	1	7
Berry Land Management Company, LLC	3860 Etting Rd, Oxnard	Rancho Nuevo Harvesting	1	20
GH Land Holdings LLC	2292 E Hueneme Rd, Oxnard	Rancho Nuevo Harvesting	2	25
TOTAL number of employees in State Licensed H-2A Worker Housing				109

Source: The California Housing and Community Development Division of Codes and Standards, Housing Standards Program provided a current database of active employee housing facilities in Ventura County, pursuant to CA Health and Safety Code, Section 17000-17062.5 (2020).

In addition to the farmworkers residing in the State licensed housing options listed above, farmworker housing complexes such as Rancho Sespe and Valle Naranjal apartments were built in the unincorporated area of Piru, which lies in close proximity to agricultural areas. These apartment complexes are reserved for farmworkers and their families and contain a total of 165 two, three, and four-bedroom units.

The need for additional safe, clean, and affordable housing for farmworkers in Ventura County (cities, unincorporated County) is well documented. The 2002 County of Ventura Farmworker Housing Study concluded that, based on the trends in agricultural production anticipated by local growers and farming officials, a clear need exists for all types of farmworker housing. That is, housing for permanent farmworkers and seasonal migrant farmworkers, housing for large farmworker families, and housing tailored to single male day laborers.

Farmworker Resources

In 2018, the County Building Division released a set of free template building plans for three sizes of farmworker dwelling units (700, 900, and 1,200 sq. ft.). The intent was to increase the supply of affordable farmworker housing. There was no charge for use of the architectural drawings and using them would reduce plan review times in the Building Department. Although County staff held public informational meetings touting the plans and received statewide publicity, further public outreach is recommended. One of the Housing Element programs includes more targeted outreach with bilingual (Spanish/English) materials on the County website. It could be helpful to interview stakeholders for insight into why so few farmers have taken advantage of the free plans.

In Fall 2018, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors approved the implementation of a new Farmworker Resource Program to build trust and relationships among the agricultural community and provide assistance to farmworkers in seeking prompt resolution to workplace issues and understand existing labor laws protecting them. The Farmworker Resource Program includes interpretation services in both Spanish and Mixtec.

There is significant collaboration among organizations interested in farmworker housing in Ventura County, including the following: House Farm Workers!, the Ventura County Farm Bureau, VC CoLAB, MICOP, CAUSE, Friends of Fieldworkers, the Vulnerable Populations Group, and others.

Affordable housing developers who are developing and operating farmworker and/or very low-income housing in the county include the Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation, Many Mansions, People's Self Help Housing, AMCAL, Housing Authority of Ventura County Area, and the Housing Authority of the City of San Buenaventura. These farmworker housing developments are typically designed around a community center that offers an array of programs and services. Residents enjoy English as a Second Language and citizenship classes, computer lab, music classes and events, tutoring, holiday celebrations, and crafts onsite. Despite the various financial resources available for farmworker housing as listed in Table 5-38, below, farmworker housing developed or operated with any federal funds requires tenants to be legal residents of the United States. This poses a significant barrier for some farmworkers to access housing since many farmworkers in California are undocumented. Eventually this may be resolved by federal immigration reform, but another solution involves committing local private and public funds to supplement State funding to develop and maintain farmworker housing.