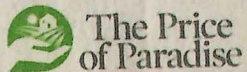


Where will area's farmworkers live?

■ Zoning, cost, infrastructure pose hurdles

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At the Ventura County Farm Worker Housing Summit on Friday, speakers made it clear that while creative ways to finance housing exist, the struggle remains where to put it.



Chris Stephens, director of the Ventura County Resource Management Agency, said that little land is readily available for development in unincorporated parts of the county and that there are impediments to building in the available areas.

At a time when housing is

See FARM, 2A



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Attorney Barbara Macri-Ortiz leads a discussion group Friday at the Ventura County Farm Worker Housing Summit in Camarillo.

FARM from 1A

sorely needed in the coastal parts of California, building it is not going to be an easy task in Ventura County, where the primary land-use responsibility is the preservation of open space and agricultural land. Greenbelts have been in place here since 1967.

"When you direct urban development into our cities, what that then means is you are not providing the infrastructure for urban development in those unincorporated areas," Stephens said. He said those areas lack access to sewer and water systems.

Another impediment is terrain. Stephens showed the roughly 140 people at the Camarillo event a map of the county showing that most unincorporated land is sloped.

"That is very difficult, to build affordable housing on slopes greater than 20 percent," Stephens said.

For now, the county is looking at altering some of its regulations to allow development on agricultural property adjacent to cities. For example, zoning was changed after developers complained that the county's 40-acre minimum lot size requirement for agricultural parcels was an impediment to building farmworker housing because 40 acres weren't necessary.

Urban parts of the county have their own impediments to building farmworker housing.

Yissel Barajas, vice president of human resources at Reiter Affiliated Cos., showed photos of a complex the berry grower built in the



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About 140 people attended the Ventura County Farm Worker Housing Summit on Friday in Camarillo.

coastal town of San Quintin in the Mexican state of Baja California. It houses 544 people and has amenities like a barbershop, a convenience store, laundry facilities, a soccer field and a medical clinic.

"We've tried to do this in California," Barajas said. "The challenge is, not many cities allow temporary housing."

That's an obstacle when workers come for a four- to five-month season.

Renting an apartment in Ventura County is not feasible for most farmworkers, 75 percent of whom earn less than \$15,000 a year. Ventura County rents for all unit types — studios, one bedroom, two bedrooms and three bedrooms — averaged \$1,623 per month in January, up 5.7 percent from a year earlier, according to Ventura-based Dyer Sheehan's semi-annual report.

"In California, we have a shortage of almost a million homes affordable to the lowest-income households, so we have a big job to do," said Karen Flock, real estate development director for Cabrillo Economic Development Corp.,

which focuses in creating affordable housing. "Unfortunately, rents have been going up, but incomes have been going down."

Rob Wiener, California Coalition for Rural Housing executive director, said the most successful farmworker housing projects he's seen around the state involve growers. His favorite is an example from Napa County, where the wine industry decided to tax itself.

The vintners created a countywide farmworker housing trust fund and had an Assembly member introduce a bill to set up an assessment district for the acquisition, construction and maintenance of farm labor housing. It authorized a \$10 maximum assessment per planted vineyard acre. Since 2002, Napa has generated \$7 million for farmworker housing and built three migrant housing centers.

"It was really revolutionary," Wiener said. "No other county that I know of has done this, although I think Sonoma County is contemplating doing that because their workers are going to live in Napa County because of the facilities they've created."