

# Ventura County Farm Worker Housing Summit

## Ventura County Farm Worker Housing Summit

Thursday,  
January 29, 2004

8:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.



Santa Paula Community Center  
Santa Paula, CA

Conveners:

The Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance,  
Ventura County Farm Bureau  
and SOAR



The Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance, Ventura County Farm Bureau and SOAR invite you to a Ventura County Farm Worker Housing Summit on Thursday, January 29 from 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Santa Paula Community Center, 530 W. Main Street. Join civic and business leaders, farmers, city and county elected officials, land use planners, affordable housing, farm worker and environmental advocates, and concerned citizens in this open forum on issues, challenges and solutions to the farm worker housing crisis in Ventura County.

Through speakers, panels, and community breakout sessions, the summit will lay the foundation of future efforts to provide safe, sanitary and affordable housing for the workforce upon whom our county's economy and quality of life depend. The summit will:

- Educate members of our community and dispel myths about the issues related to agricultural housing
- Examine programs, policy alternatives, and success stories that other California communities have embraced
- Introduce a framework for collaborative action throughout Ventura County to create, preserve and maintain housing for farm workers and their families.

Registration for the summit is \$20 in advance, \$25 at the door, and includes lunch. For more information contact Veronica Saldana at Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation, 659-3791 ext. 28 or e-mail [vsaldana@cabrilloedc.org](mailto:vsaldana@cabrilloedc.org).

# Farm Worker Hous

**By Peggy Kelly**  
**Santa Paula Times**

Housing is critical not only for the 19,000 to 36,000 farm laborers who work in Ventura County but critical also to sustain the county's top revenue producer, those who attended a Farm Worker Housing Summit held last week in Santa Paula.

Over 300 farmers, developers, farm worker advocates, elected officials, bankers, community activists and business people attended the Ventura County Farm Worker Housing Summit held at the Community Center on Thursday where they learned there are fewer than 1,000 units to house them.

Overcrowding in dilapidated and often unsafe housing has become common but there is a movement to find innovative ways to create more housing for farm workers.

Santa Paula Mayor Dr. Gabino Aguirre opened the event urging that awareness of the problem lead to solutions.

Aguirre told of his own experience as the child of farm workers who also worked the fields and of the time that his family was left penniless by a contractor who disappeared with their wages.

"Let's hear it for the small farmers," who helped the family, he noted.

An array of speakers followed "Mi Casa es Su Casa" by director Dulanie Ellis-La Barre of Ojai, which showed farm worker living conditions in the county.

Speakers used slide presentations to show farm worker developments through-

out the state ranging from dormitory living for single men workers to housing for families.

"...without workers, there is no agriculture," in the county that leads the state in production per acre, said Ventura County Farm Bureau CEO Rex Laird.

Jesse Ornelas of Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation described Rancho Sespe, a 100-unit complex built in the 1990s near Piru that "put a new face on farm worker housing."

Leslie Leavens-Crowe of Santa Paula said her family farms provide housing for almost two dozen workers and their families.

Not only does the arrangement work for the employees - the average longevity of each worker is 20 years - but for the grower: Those living on the Leavens Moorpark operation "literally saved our ranch" when it was threatened by the October wildfires.

"The answer to your problem is here in this room," said Peter Dreier, executive director of the Napa Valley Housing Authority.

Dreier's presentation was on housing for unaccompanied workers including a camp near Half Moon Bay that offers meals, public phones, laundries, recreation room, sports and reading materials.

Some camps have soccer fields and vegetable gardens, he added, and offer onsite English classes and medical/dental screening services.

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Housing programs are partially funded by growers who pay up to a \$10 fee per acre, said Dreier, an assessment that was approved by 75 percent of Napa Valley voters.

"I'm overwhelmed with the turnout, it's resounding that people care," said Supervisor Kathy Long.

The event typified "building coopera-

tion, working together and creating opportunity," she noted. "Our farm workers feed the world and they are entitled to the respect and dignity that safe and sanitary places to live affords them."



A large crowd attended the Farm Worker Housing Summit held at the Santa Paula Community Center last Thursday, including many from Santa Paula

Photo by Don Johnson

# Sunday STAR Opinion

2/1/04

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## Editorials

# Focus rightly on farmworkers

## Time is ripe to provide housing

Efforts to provide more farmworker housing in Ventura County got a boost Thursday as more than 300 community leaders gathered for a farmworker housing summit in Santa Paula.

The conference comes on the heels of two separate reports by the Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance and the county of Ventura, outlining the need to provide housing for some of Ventura County's poorest residents and exploring ways to get it done.

"We are committed to capturing the energy in this room and making sure housing gets built," said Ellen Brokaw, of Brokaw Nursery and a member of the Ag Futures Alliance, which helped organize the conference.

Ventura County voters have said through overwhelming support of Save Open-space and Agricultural

Resources initiatives that they value agriculture. Since farmworkers are essential to farming, it follows that Ventura County voters would also be supportive of ensuring there is decent, affordable housing for them.

The plight of farmworkers has been exacerbated by the decreasing number of growers providing housing for farmworkers and rising housing costs.

Despite helping generate at least \$3.6 billion for Ventura County's economy, farmworkers are among the most poorly paid wage earners, making from \$8,000 to \$25,000 a year in a county where the average rent for a two-bedroom unit is \$1,300 per month and the median sales price of a house is \$414,000.

## Issue online

To learn more about the farmworker housing issue, log on to the "County of Ventura Farmworker Housing Study," Aug. 6, 2002, at

[http://www.ventura.org/planning/studies\\_eirs/studies\\_eirs.htm](http://www.ventura.org/planning/studies_eirs/studies_eirs.htm); and the Ag Futures Alliance Issue Paper No. 2, June 2002, at

<http://www.agfuturesalliance.net> (under "Community Papers and Information"). Also, log on to <http://www.VenturaCountyStar.com> to view the video "Mi Casa es Su Casa" by director Dulanie Ellis-La Barre, of Ojai. Click onto the video link to this editorial. Copies may be ordered by e-mail: [dulanie@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dulanie@sbcglobal.net).

It is estimated there are between 19,000 and 36,000 farmworkers in Ventura County, but only 1,000 units dedicated to farmworker housing. So, it is inevitable that many live in crowded, unsafe conditions.

Dulanie Ellis-La Barre, of Ojai, has produced a video of local farmworkers showing the dilapidated and crowded places too many of our neighbors live, including an aluminum shed that houses a family of four. (A poignant shot is of two pairs of children's shoes neatly tucked under a shed shelf.)

"Totally inhuman" is how Lauro Barajas, regional director of the United Farm Workers of America, in Oxnard, described some farmworkers' living conditions, and reminded us "if anyone has injustice, we all have injustice."

Now that the problem has been so well-documented, there is a moral imperative as well as an economic one to increase farmworker housing in Ventura County.

Thursday's summit was especially useful in presenting several examples of successful farmworker housing developments in Ventura County and in other California communities such as Napa and Half Moon Bay. The examples of beautiful developments, with such amenities as community gardens, soccer fields, education centers, demonstrated, as Redwood City housing coalition director Fran Wagstaff said: "Farmworker housing is not a burden for a community, it is an asset."

The next step, after this summit, is to convene individual task forces in Ventura County cities to realize the potential here.

**VENTURA COUNTY**

**Summit will examine farmworker housing**

Farmworker housing is the subject of a countywide summit Jan. 29 for civic and business leaders, elected officials, concerned citizens and housing and farmworker advocates.

The summit, sponsored by the Ag Futures Alliance of Ventura County, the Ventura County Farm Bureau and Save Open space and Agricultural Resources, is an open forum to discuss issues, challenges and

solutions to the farmworker housing crisis in Ventura County.

Speakers, panels and community breakout sessions will be used to dispel myths about the issues related to agricultural housing; examine programs, policy alternatives and success stories that other California communities have used; and more.

The organizing committee also includes representatives from the county, the Rural Community Assistance Corporation, California Rural Assistance League, Cabrillo

Economic Development Corp., Habitat for Humanity, People's Self-Help Housing, Tejada Trust, United Farm Workers, and the cities of Fillmore, Santa Paula and Oxnard.

The event will run from 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Santa Paula Community Center, 530 W. Main St. Registration is \$20 per person.

For more information, contact Veronica Saldana at Cabrillo Economic Development Corp., at 659-3791, ext. 28 or e-mail her at [vsaldana@cabrilloeduc.org](mailto:vsaldana@cabrilloeduc.org).

# Farmworker housing a critical county issue

By Ellen Brokaw, Rex Laird and Karen Schmidt

Thursday, a historic summit will take place in Santa Paula that we encourage all citizens of Ventura County to attend. The topic is the critical need for decent and affordable housing for the farmworkers who underpin our \$1 billion-plus agricultural industry.

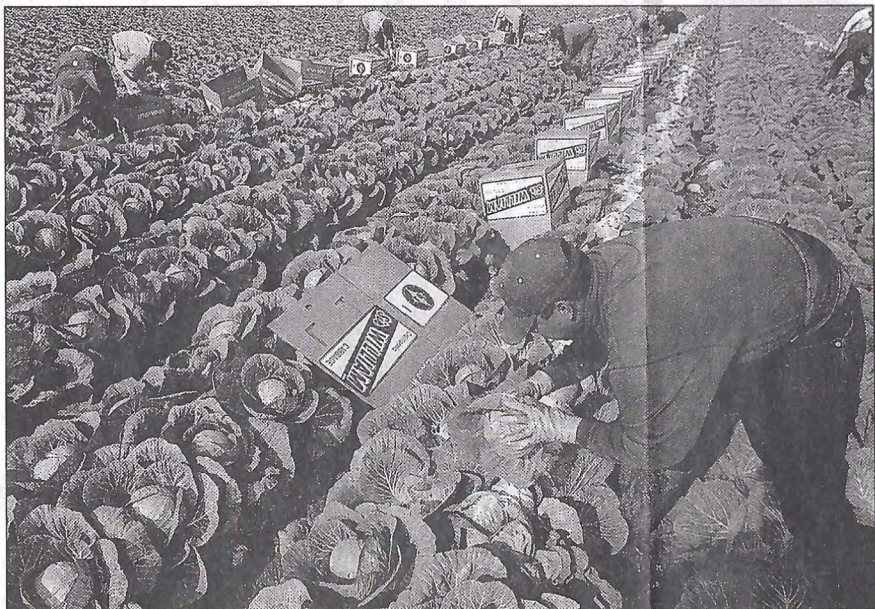
Preserving agricultural land has broad support in Ventura County, where all of us benefit from agriculture's multibillion-dollar annual contribution to the local economy as well as the lush green vistas and semi-rural character that distinguish us from neighboring Los Angeles County.

We are aware of the workers who plant and harvest the fields because we see them as we drive by every day. But we are unaware of how or where they live, or of how much our own quality of life depends on their hard work.

The sad truth is that these are the people hardest hit by the extreme scarcity and expense of housing in our county. They often pay more than they can afford to live in crowded, unsafe and unsanitary conditions.

Agriculture here cannot survive without them, given the types of crops grown year-round in our rich soils. Farmworkers are essential to Ventura County's agricultural health, but their essential needs are not being met.

Participants in the Thursday



Star file photo

Farmworkers harvest cabbage in a field off Pleasant Valley Road near Wood Road east of Oxnard. A summit to be held Thursday will discuss the critical need for decent and affordable housing for farmworkers.

summit will explore together the ways in which we, as a community, can change this pattern of neglect.

Speakers from Coachella Valley, Napa, the San Francisco Bay area and elsewhere in California will introduce us to a range of farmworker housing models and success stories. Local experts on financing, land-use planning, and political and regulatory processes will examine obstacles, opportunities and resources for

farmworker housing here in Ventura County. And we will hear from the farmworkers themselves about their lives and living conditions in a short documentary, "Mi Casa Es Su Casa" by Point of View Films, Ojai, that will premiere at the summit.

Most importantly, the summit will bring together members of each of our communities to engage in direct dialogue to begin building a common vision, voice and commitment to

action.

The summit is being convened by an unprecedented alliance of diverse farming, labor, environmental, business and civic organizations led by the Ag Futures Alliance, Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources, and the Ventura County Farm Bureau.

These seemingly strange bedfellows are united in their belief that:

— Farm laborers are vital to a sustainable agricultural economy in Ventura County.

— Farmworkers and their families are members of our community. It is in everyone's interest that their homes be located in or adjacent to existing cities with ready access to education, child care, transportation, and other services and opportunities for full community involvement.

— Farmworker housing must be decent, safe, sanitary and affordable. Housing dedicated to farmworker use must be protected and not converted to nonfarmworker occupancy.

— The farmworker community is diverse and multifaceted. Efforts to provide housing must address a range of needs, including owner-occupied, short- and long-term rentals, apartments, houses and barracks-type developments.

— If the people of Ventura County are vocal and united in their support for farmworker housing, the necessary resources and political will to get it done will be here.

## To attend

The Ventura County Farm Worker Housing Summit will take place Thursday from 8 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. at the Santa Paula Community Center, 530 W. Main St., Santa Paula. Registration is \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door and includes lunch. Space is limited, so please call 653-3791, ext. 28, to secure a place.

Please join fellow citizens, public officials, farmers and civic and business leaders in Santa Paula on Thursday to get a better understanding of the issues, obstacles opportunities and next steps in our community to tackle this important problem.

We all have a stake and a role in making sure that these hard-working and essential members of our community are adequately housed.

— Karen Schmidt is executive director of Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources. Rex Laird is chief executive officer of the Ventura County Farm Bureau. Ellen Brokaw is president of Brokaw Nursery. All three are members of the Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance.

**From:** "Rob Corley" <rcorley@sbcglobal.net>  
**Date:** Fri Jan 30, 2004 4:21:13 PM US/Pacific  
**To:** "Ellen Brokaw" <ellen@brokawnursery.com>  
**Cc:** "Karen Schmidt" <karen.schmidt@stanfordalumni.org>, "Dulanie Ellis" <Dulanie@sbcglobal.net>  
**Subject:** Clip from LA Daily News

Ellen:

In case you didn't see the LA paper

Rob

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## Los Angeles Daily News

### **Farmworker homes in very short supply**

**By Andrea Cavanaugh**  
Staff Writer

**Thursday, January 29, 2004**-Ventura County must find housing solutions for thousands of farmworkers if it wants to sustain its billion-dollar agriculture industry, organizers of the county's first-ever Farm Worker Housing Summit said Thursday.

More than 275 elected officials, growers, civic leaders and advocates packed the Santa Paula Community Center to talk about ways to adequately house tens of thousands of farmworkers, two-thirds of whom make Ventura County their permanent home.

Summit panelists showcased model projects from around the state, including cooperative housing, government-sponsored projects, and "sweat-equity" programs such as Habitat for Humanity.

"Agriculture doesn't happen without the people who work in the fields," Santa Paula grower Ellen Brokaw said in a film presented at the summit. "It is not right to treat them as anything less than full members of the community."

As many as 30,000 agricultural workers toil on Ventura County farmlands each year, but fewer than 10 percent live in designated farmworker housing, said Rex Laird, CEO of the Ventura County Farm Bureau.

Farmworkers' often substandard living conditions were shown to summit participants in a documentary film on Ventura County titled "Mi Casa es Su Casa."

The film documented how farmworkers struggle to house their families on a mean income of less than \$17,000 per year in a county where the average two-bedroom apartment rents for \$1,300 per month.

One family with four children lived in a Camarillo tool shed for nearly a year.

David Schwabauer, who grows lemons and avocados on 700 acres in Moorpark, provides on-site housing for his 10 full-time employees. But about 50 seasonal workers must fend for themselves, he said.

"It's much more difficult for the seasonal help to find housing," he said. "They have to room together because they can't afford the rent."



# New Farmworker Housing

LA Times 1/30/04

Advocates and others call on officials to provide affordable and safe homes for Ventura County laborers.

By FRED ALVAREZ  
Times Staff Writer

Farmers, housing advocates and community leaders pledged Thursday to build on momentum surrounding the creation of new farmworker housing in Ventura County, saying the issue is critical to the stability of the county's oldest and most prominent industry.

More than 300 people gathered in Santa Paula for the county's first Farm Worker Housing Summit, a call to elected leaders and others to improve the crowded and sometimes dangerous housing conditions that low-paid farmworkers often are forced to endure.

Following a series of panel discussions, those in attend-



**FIELD WORK:** Laborers harvest strawberries at a farm along Vineyard Avenue in El Rio on Thursday.

ance called for the creation of task forces in each city to address farmworker housing needs and for elected bodies to review regulations that could be standing in the way of building such housing.

"I'm blown away — this is just the most beautiful thing I've seen in a decade or so of working in this county," Ox-

nard poverty law attorney Barbara Macri-Ortiz told a standing-room-only audience at the Santa Paula Community Center. Macri-Ortiz has been at the center of several legal battles to force the construction of low-cost housing countywide.

"It really is a question of political will, and we're in the [See Housing, Page B10]

## Improved Housing Sought for Farmworkers

[Housing, from Page B1] process of getting the will here," Macri-Ortiz added. "You show us the will, and we'll show you the way."

The issue has won attention in recent years as skyrocketing housing prices and soaring rents have made it tough on workers in all sectors to find affordable places to live.

Schoolteachers, biotech workers and corporate professionals all have felt the squeeze of a housing market in which the average rent is \$1,300 a month and the median home price hit \$414,000 by the end of 2003.

But the housing crunch has been especially hard on low-wage farmworkers, who earn on average less than \$17,000 a year.

But in what many are calling an unprecedented spirit of cooperation, a campaign is underway to bring some relief to the county's agricultural workforce.

The attention comes after years of arm-twisting by affordable-housing advocates — lawsuits by legal aid attorneys over the years have prompted commitments to housing.

*'It takes a lot of dedication, a lot of hard work. But it can be done.'*

Peter Dreier, executive director of the Napa Valley Housing Authority

But it also has been spurred by a growing belief that, in order to keep farmers in business — which Ventura County voters have said they want to do through the adoption of farmland preservation measures — steps must be taken to house those who work the county's \$1-billion-a-year harvest.

"I think there has been a change in attitudes," said fourth-generation Moorpark-area farmer David Schwabauer, president of the Ventura County Farm Bureau. "This is tremendous. I think there's more awareness than there has ever been, and that's really a good sign."

Housing advocates from around the state were on hand Thursday to showcase model farmworker housing projects and prove that they can be built.

Peter Dreier, executive direc-

tor of the Napa Valley Housing Authority, said his organization oversees more than 200 housing units built for workers in that grape-growing region.

Those projects include a 60-bed facility constructed last year after voters loosened zoning restrictions allowing landowners to section off small swaths of land to build housing.

Napa County growers also have agreed to tax themselves up to \$10 an acre per year to cover the cost of operating the authority's farmworker housing projects.

"The answer to your problem is in this room," Dreier told attendees. "It takes a lot of dedication, a lot of hard work. But it can be done."

Perhaps nowhere in California is more being done to solve the farmworker housing crisis

than in Ventura County.

Saticoy-based Cabrillo Economic Development Corp. showcased a trio of housing projects currently in the pipeline for farmworker families, including a 24-unit apartment complex in downtown Oxnard scheduled to receive its first tenants March 1.

That \$5.9-million project, known as the Meta Street Apartments, represents the first large-scale farmworker housing built in the county in a decade.

Federal assistance will ensure that no family pays more than 30% of its income toward rent. The complex also will feature an innovative effort to explore the link between housing quality and farmworker health, providing medical assistance and other services to more than 100 residents.

"This is the face of farmworker housing for us in this county," said Jesse Ornelas, senior project manager with Cabrillo Economic Development Corp. "We have been trying to put together projects that have dignity . . . and that will look this way 10 to 15 years from now."

# Farmworker housing an important county issue

Star 1/11/04

*I was a stranger and you welcomed me into your house.*

— Matthew 25:36

There are a few things that we seem to agree with in this county when it comes to housing issues. First, while the average income in this county is around \$70,000, this is not enough for the average person to purchase a home here. Teachers, police officers, nurses and similar professions are in this category.

Second, county residents have, through a variety of means, indicated that they appreciate the rural ambience of the area and want to preserve open space. The common saying is that we don't want to become another Orange County.

The third reality is that the county's agricultural economy is based on crops that require very high investment and that are very labor-intensive. All one has to do is drive by a strawberry field and see the number of people working there. It is estimated that at the peak seasons of



Alfonso A.  
Guilin

the various crops, there are some 30,000 farmworkers in the county.

However, at this point, there seems to be some disconnect between our wishes and reality. If we assume that the average income earner in the

county has a difficult time finding an affordable place to live, then we have to assume that farmworkers earning \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year find it almost impossible to find a reasonably decent place to live.

Farmworkers are in that strata of society where they are easily overlooked and, as a rule, they make themselves invisible so we tend not to focus on them.

But the facts are that until we can harvest strawberries, lemons, avocados or flowers mechanically like wheat or cotton, farmworkers are the underpinning of Ventura County's

## Summit

A Farm Workers Housing conference will be held Jan. 29 in the Santa Paula Community Center, 530 W. Main St., Santa Paula, from 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. For more information, call Veronica Saldano at 659-3791, ext. 28.

agriculture industry. This industry, with farmworkers as the key component, contributes more than \$1 billion to our economy annually.

The question, therefore, is, that if these workers are so important in helping us maintain many of the things we find desirable in the county, shouldn't farmworkers have a decent place to live? At this point in the discussion, there is no agreement.

Some seem to think since farmworkers are generally out of the

mainstream, their living conditions are of no importance, or that they prefer to or are used to living in substandard conditions. Others see farmworkers as human beings and that, as our neighbors, they are entitled to live in clean, safe, decent housing.

This is indeed a serious situation that we all need to be better informed about. To that end, the Ventura County supervisors have encouraged a group of concerned citizens to convene leaders and people from various disciplines to discuss the issue.

In order to take a closer look at this issue a Farm Workers Housing conference will be held Jan. 29. The Santa Paula Ministerial Association encourages all interested people to attend this conference, which will address this very important issue affecting Ventura County and Santa Paula in particular.

— Deacon Alfonso A. Guilin, of Santa Paula, is president of the Santa Paula Ministerial Association.