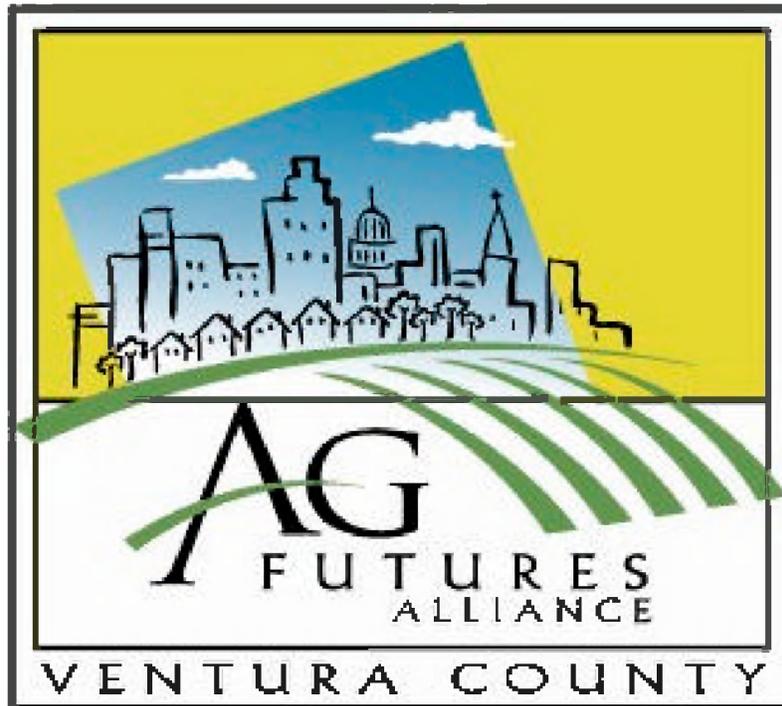


# **Farm Worker Housing: A Crisis Calling for Community Action**



**Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance  
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## ***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

Housing is extraordinarily expensive in Ventura County, out of reach for the majority of residents. Although Ventura County agricultural *land* is preserved from development for almost two decades by the SOAR (Save Our Ag Resources) initiatives, agriculture remains at risk from many factors. One factor which can be addressed locally is farm worker housing.

Agriculture makes an approximate \$3.6 billion annual contribution to the Ventura County economy. Given the types of crops grown in Ventura County, agriculture cannot survive without farm workers. Farm worker incomes typically fall within the low to extremely-low income designation; therefore market forces on their own do not create housing that farm workers can afford.

Depending on how farm workers are defined and counted estimates of their number in Ventura County range between 19,000 and 36,000. There are currently fewer than 1000 units dedicated to farm worker housing in Ventura County. Other low-income housing does not begin to close the gap between the need and the supply. Farm workers live where and how they can, which in Ventura County often means overcrowding and living in dilapidated and/or unsuitable structures.

New farm worker housing is generally built when either the County or a city makes it possible by identifying sites and granting permits, and when a non-profit or for-profit farm worker housing or low income housing developer lines up the necessary financing from state and federal sources. Identifying sites, getting permits, and arranging financing takes years, exacerbating the discrepancy between supply and demand. The construction of new housing for farm workers lags significantly behind the need.

Although the scale of the problem is daunting, there are some reasons for hope, outlined in the body of this report. In Ventura County, new farm worker housing units are underway in Oxnard and Santa Paula and the Board of Supervisors is exploring what County government can do to address the need. Examples of successes in building farm worker housing can be found in several other California counties.

This report was developed by the Ag Futures Alliance (AFA), an organization dedicated to the long-term viability of Ventura County agriculture and to the promotion of policies that ensure social equity and justice for farm workers and their families. The AFA is a broad-based community group that brings together concerned citizens from a wide range of perspectives in Ventura County. They seek consensus on difficult issues in order to move beyond long-established polarization in favor of achievable solutions that the entire community can support.

The Ag Futures Alliance believes that we, the total community of Ventura County, can and must work together to encourage, facilitate and promote the provision of housing for farm workers. We recommend a community effort functioning through a Farm Worker Housing Task Force at the Countywide level and through Farm Worker Housing Support Coalitions in each local jurisdiction. These groups can provide information, develop production goals and strategies, support state and federal farm worker housing initiatives, and develop local funding resources.

If agriculture is to survive in Ventura County it must have farm workers and they need clean, safe, affordable housing. Supporting its provision is in the interest of every resident of Ventura County. It is a matter of economic common sense and the right thing to do!

## *INTRODUCTION*

Farm workers are essential to farming. In Ventura County housing is scarce and costly. If nurses, teachers and firefighters can't afford housing, how much worse is it for farm workers?

Recognizing this, the Ag Futures Alliance of Ventura County (AFA) established its Farm Worker Housing Committee in April 2001. A key concern of the AFA is sustainability, defined as balanced concern for economic viability, environmental responsibility and social equity. It is the opinion of AFA and this committee that decent, safe and sanitary housing at an affordable price for farm workers is a key element of this sustainability.

Preserving agricultural land is a popular cause in Ventura County, where all residents benefit from agriculture's multi-billion-dollar annual contribution to the local economy as well as the lush green vistas and semi-rural character that distinguish it from neighboring Los Angeles County.

While necessary, preserving acreage from development is not sufficient for sustainable, economically viable agriculture to continue in Ventura County. Factors ranging from economic globalization to the importation of exotic pests threaten agriculture's existence. Many of these factors are beyond the ability of any local group to affect. One factor that can be addressed locally is an adequate supply of safe, sanitary and affordable housing for farm workers.

The committee offers this report as a general overview of the issue and the factors that contribute to the current critical shortage of farm worker housing. It is intended as a resource document for decision-makers and other members of the public who are concerned for the continued survival of agriculture in Ventura County.

This report offers a vision of what the community owes to farm workers, the people who grow our food and are at the base of one of the most important pillars of our local economy. It explores the factors that make it so difficult to create new housing for farm workers and highlights a variety of success stories. It acknowledges some steps that are being taken by the county and some of its ten cities to create farm worker housing, and it offers a list of specific recommendations that can help us tackle this problem together.

## **VISION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE COMMITTEE**

### **VISION**

The vision of the Ag Futures Alliance (AFA) is incorporated in its purpose, which is to support and enhance an interdependent and viable agriculture in Ventura County in perpetuity through an alliance that values dialogue and cooperation and where a diversity of affected views and interests are represented. Keying off the words “interdependent,” “viable,” and “in perpetuity,” it is the vision of the Farm Worker Housing Committee of the AFA that every farm worker have shelter which provides basic amenities and security of self and possessions at a cost not to exceed 30% of the worker’s gross earnings.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE COMMITTEE**

1. **Purpose** - The purpose of the Ag Futures Alliance Farm Worker Housing Committee is to support and promote the provision of decent, safe, sanitary, legal and affordable housing for farm workers and their families, including building of new housing and upgrading/preserving existing housing.
2. **AFA Constitution** - The Farm Worker Housing Committee will adhere to all AFA principles of practice. (Please refer to AFA’s website, [www.agfuturesalliance.net](http://www.agfuturesalliance.net))
3. **Regulations** - This committee supports compliance with regulations that protect the residents of housing and the environment. We oppose unnecessary regulations that act as impediments to building farm worker housing.
4. **Community** - We affirm that farm workers are members of the larger Ventura County community and that social equity is best advanced when all people are incorporated into the larger community.

5. ***Affordability*** - We seek to ensure that housing costs are appropriate for the wage levels of farm workers. We believe that housing dedicated to farm worker use must be protected and must not be converted to non-farm worker occupancy.
6. ***Quality of Life*** - Although amenities may vary according to the type of housing and occupancy, we believe that at a minimum, all farm worker housing must be decent, safe and sanitary and, as appropriate, should provide for community services such as child care, education (English classes), a community center etc.
7. ***Sustainability*** – As this committee formulates recommendations and policies we will consider the three principles of economic, environmental and social equity.
8. ***Variety of Needs*** – We understand that the farm worker community is multi-faceted, consisting of year-round (full-time), temporary, seasonal and migrant workers; unaccompanied workers and families of various sizes; documented and undocumented workers; recent immigrants, long-time residents and United States citizens and therefore, various types of housing must be provided, including owner-occupied, short and long-term rental, apartments, houses, and barracks-type developments.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Overview of Crops and Economics of Ventura County Agriculture**

Agriculture plays a dominant role in the economic vitality of Ventura County, as do the military, local government, technology and biomedical giants such as Amgen. Ventura County agriculture ranks 10<sup>th</sup> among California counties in terms of agricultural revenues.<sup>1</sup>

In 2000, the estimated gross value for Ventura County agriculture was \$1,047,128,000, making it the highest value per acre in California. Since there is a multiplier factor of 3.5 for every dollar value of agricultural revenue, the total estimated

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<sup>1</sup> California Agricultural Resource Directory (2001)

economic value of agriculture to Ventura County's economy is approximately \$3.6 billion.<sup>2</sup>

The following is a breakdown of harvested acreage for 2000:

<u>Crop</u>	<u>Acreage</u>
Fruit and nut	59,762
Vegetable	38,089
Nursery stock	5,106,256 sq. ft. (greenhouse)
Cut flowers	1,219
Alfalfa and pasture	148,335
Grain, hay, flower and vegetable seed	1,306

The top nine crop categories for 1999 - 2000 in order of value were:

1. Fruit and nut crops;
2. Vegetable crops;
3. Nursery stock;
4. Cut flowers;
5. Field crops;
6. Livestock and poultry;
7. Apiary products;
8. Timber;
9. Sustainable agriculture, i.e., organics, etc.<sup>3</sup>

Because of its temperate climate, its rich soil and availability of water, Ventura County agriculture produces crops year round, sometimes with two or even three harvests per year on the same acreage.

The citrus industry harvests from December through October. Row crops such as celery harvest from early November through mid-July. Strawberries are harvested almost year-round. During the summer months many growers plant minor crop varieties such as

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<sup>2</sup> Annual Crop Report of Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner - Year 2000; Hansen Trust Report, 2000 Annual Report.

peppers, onions, tomatoes, pumpkins, corn and lettuce, which are ready for harvest in late summer and fall.

The most important significant recent trend in Ventura County agriculture is a 65% increase in the number of acres devoted to fresh strawberries, from 4,565 acres in 1994-95 to 7,533 acres in 2000-01. For 2001-2002, the estimated acreage is 8,582 acres. Another trend is an increase in horticultural production (that is, flowers and nursery stock).

The local orange industry has been in a steady decline for the past decade. The same can be said of lettuce, cauliflower, broccoli, miscellaneous fruits and nuts, tomatoes and other minor crops.

At this time, key marketing indicators predict that strawberries, lemons, avocados, and nursery stock will continue to maintain their production consistent with market demands. The local lemon industry, which has occupied the number one spot for most of the last 60 years, continues to be the number one cash crop<sup>4</sup> and the largest employer of packinghouse workers in the county.

### **Overview of the Farm Worker Population in Ventura County Agriculture**

Because of the diversity of crops grown, harvested and shipped from Ventura County, local agriculture employs a diversity of agricultural and packinghouse employees who plant, harvest, process and transport crops and value-added products such as pre-packaged salad mix. Recent increases in production of labor-intensive crops such as strawberries and nursery stock have increased the demand for workers. As a result, the composition of the farm worker population in Ventura County is neither static nor easy to verify.

For the purposes of this report, the agricultural workforce does many jobs, including weeding, thinning, planting, pruning, irrigation, tractor work, pesticide applications, harvesting, transportation to the cooler or market, and a variety of jobs at packing and processing facilities.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore not surprising that estimates of the total

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<sup>3</sup> Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner's Annual Crop Report – 2000

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Workers who are employed in primary agricultural operations such as weeding, thinning, planting, irrigation, tractor work, harvesting and transportation to the cooler or

number of farm workers residing in Ventura County vary. Recent estimates, depending upon the definitions of agricultural workers used, range from 19,684 to 35,181.<sup>6, 7</sup> While the estimates of the number of farm workers may vary, there is consensus that most are very low-income or extremely low-income employees, and all need affordable, decent housing.

Farm workers are classified as “direct hire” when they are employed directly by the farmer, as is generally the case for strawberries and nurseries. Farm labor contractors

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market, including nursery workers, are legally considered agricultural employees within the meaning of California Labor Code § 1140.4(b). Additionally, employees who work in fixed structures on the farm such as processing or packing facilities, and who handle crops that are exclusively grown by their employer, are likewise deemed to be agricultural employees within the meaning of state and federal employment laws.

On the other hand, workers who are employed in processing facilities or packinghouses for lemons, oranges, avocados, grapefruits, and to a lesser degree fresh vegetables, are not agricultural workers within the meaning of either state or federal labor laws. Nevertheless, these employees are essential to the continued viability of Ventura County agriculture and to the extent that they are low-income workers their need for housing is included in this discussion.

<sup>6</sup>For example, County Snapshot, Ventura 2001, a recent document issued by the Labor Market Information Division of the California Employment Development Department, estimated annual average employment in the agricultural community to represent 6.7% of the county’s total employment of 293,800 workers or 19,684 employees in the agricultural industry. EDD also, in a release dated 5/8/02, noted total farm employees of 27,200 as of April, 2002. This was broken down to 16,100 workers in farm production and 11,100 in farm services, including employees of farm labor contractors. The Ventura County General Plan (June 2000) - Land Use Appendix, Housing Element p. 35 which relies on a federal study, estimates there are 35,181 farm workers, of whom 7,758 are full-time, 14,726 are seasonal workers and 12,697 are migrant workers. Other sources of data include Migrant Health Services, the public schools, and the National Agricultural Worker Survey.

<sup>7</sup> The Housing Element of the Oxnard General Plan (December 2000) has the following to offer on the subject: “Estimating the magnitude of farm labor is problematic. For instance, the government agencies that track farm labor do not consistently define farm labor (e.g., field workers versus processing plant workers), length of employment (e.g. year round (full-time) or seasonal), nor place of work (e.g., location of the business or field.) The eighteen licensed farm labor contractors in Oxnard may report their place of

or custom harvesters employ other farm workers. Growers of vegetables, citrus and avocados generally utilize the services of farm labor contractors or custom harvesters. In Ventura County, most farm workers are direct hire although farm labor contractors also employ substantial numbers.

In another significant distinction, the Ventura County farm worker population includes migrant, seasonal and year-round (full-time) workers.

A “migrant agricultural worker” is defined legally as “an individual who is employed in agricultural employment of a seasonal or other temporary nature, and who is required to be absent overnight from his permanent place of residence.” A “seasonal agricultural worker” does the same work but is not required to be absent overnight from his permanent place of residence.<sup>8</sup> A full-time agricultural worker generally does what a seasonal worker does but is employed year-round.

Migrant workers come during the summer months to harvest peppers, onions, lettuce and other minor crops. Migrant workers are also part of the larger farm worker population in the strawberry industry. Many migrant workers who start harvesting fresh strawberries at the beginning of the season in Ventura leave at the beginning of the processing season and follow the fresh strawberry harvest to Santa Maria, Watsonville, or out of state. Migratory workers are also present in the local citrus industry through farm labor contractors. Nevertheless, because of the stability of agricultural production throughout the year in Ventura County, approximately two thirds of Ventura County farm workers are seasonal or year-round (full-time) workers, as opposed to migrant workers.

#### **Current Housing Situation In Ventura County**

As is true for all lower-wage workers in Ventura County, both availability and cost of housing are major problems. California farm workers have the lowest family income of any occupation, earning \$17,700 with a median of \$9,828 per person according to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1997. Current annual farm worker household income in Ventura County is estimated to range from \$8,000 to \$25,000. Some piece rate jobs

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employment as Oxnard, yet dispatch laborers to the unincorporated greenbelts or even out of Ventura County.”

<sup>8</sup> Migrant Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, as amended, 29 U.S.C. 1801, et.seq.

produce an annual income in excess of \$30,000 and households with more than one employed farm worker may have a larger annual income. However, even those families with higher earnings cannot buy a median priced home in Ventura County and the majority of farm workers pay rents that greatly exceed the commonly accepted guideline of 30% of income.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, farm workers often cannot qualify for loans, cannot commit to long-term leases, and cannot provide rental deposits. As farm workers attempt to find housing, they sometimes experience discrimination for reasons of economic status, race, national origin, and size of family, language or occupation.

Up-to-date data are hard to find but reliable anecdotal evidence tells us that farm workers, both unaccompanied workers and those with families, live in houses, apartments, trailers and motels at best. Sometimes they live in garages, sheds or other structures not designed for human habitation. Often multiple families share space designed for one family. Most farm workers rent their living space although some long-term residents own their own homes. More definitive information will be available later this year when Ventura County's current survey of farm worker housing is completed and additional 2000 Census data are released.

Meanwhile we do know that there are two affordable housing developments dedicated to farm worker use: Cabrillo Village in the City of Ventura (Saticoy) housing 160 families, and Rancho Sespe in an unincorporated area near Piru, housing 100 families.

In addition, some unaccompanied workers are housed in long-established privately run farm labor camps: El Campo de Piru (capacity 165 beds), Piru Labor Camp (capacity 165 beds), Tres S in Oxnard (150 beds) and Garden City in Oxnard (45 beds). No new camps have been built for many years.

Finally, according to Ventura County records, zoning clearances have been granted for 85 farm worker houses on farms since 1995. We don't know how many were built, how many are still occupied by farm workers, or affordability levels of these houses. No record exists of the number of farm worker homes built on farms before 1995.

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<sup>9</sup> According to a January 2002 survey by Dyer-Sheehan Group, Inc., it requires an annual income of \$50,440 to afford the average rental of an unsubsidized 2-bedroom apartment (\$1,261.)

Additionally, ten farming companies and individuals are providing five or more units for families or individuals. According to Ventura County records, these units, licensed by the state, totaled 275 in 1999, including 183 owned by the Limoneira Company.

### **History and Trends of Farm Worker Housing in Ventura County**

Before Spanish settlers arrived, the Chumash people, hunter-gatherers whose diet consisted largely of acorns from the abundant oak trees and shellfish from the Pacific Ocean populated the area now known as Ventura County. After the San Buenaventura Mission was established in 1782, the Franciscan fathers put some of the Chumash to work cultivating and harvesting mission crops, which included wheat, barley, corn, beans and peas as well as various types of livestock. Primitive housing for these workers was provided on the mission property.

During the Rancho era (1834-1865), the scale and variety of farming in the area increased to include wine grapes and more vegetables but the housing of workers remained the same: some were housed on the rancho where they toiled, others were left to find shelter wherever they could.

Following the Gold Rush of 1849 and California's admission to the Union in 1850 Yankees from back east, Italians, French, Germans, Chileans, Irish and Chinese began arriving in California and all, in one way or another, were involved in the development of Ventura County agriculture.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, barley, lima beans and sugar beets were important crops in Ventura County. The American Beet Sugar Co., founded in 1898 in what is now Oxnard, provided housing for its workers.

During World War I, the U.S. government needed castor oil to lubricate the increasing number of airplanes and so Ventura County farmers planted castor beans. More laborers were needed to increase agricultural production in order to feed the troops and thousands of workers from Mexico quickly became the largest group of farm workers in Ventura County. Many were housed on the land they tilled; others settled in Santa Paula, Oxnard and Fillmore.

The Great Depression spurred a new wave of immigration in the 1930s. Thousands fled the Dust Bowl states; migrants from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas and Missouri came by the hundreds and settled in the Santa Clara River Valley. In the late

1930s, Limoneira Co. built approximately 400 houses for workers and their families. Other farm operators, both large and small, also built small, single-wall houses, many designed by the same architect.

World War II brought immense changes to Ventura County. Two military bases were opened with huge complements of men and machines. Residents of Japanese heritage, some of them farmers, were confined to internment camps. More farm workers had to be brought in to make up for their loss and to keep the crops flowing to a nation geared up for the war effort. Military bases and other war-related industries drew many thousands to California and many of them stayed.

With labor scarce because of the war, the federal government created the *Bracero* Program, (Public Law 78.) Under this program, which lasted from 1942 to 1964, thousands of Mexicans were brought into California as “temporary workers.” Their employers were required to provide housing and a specified level of wages. More than 3000 “braceros” worked in Ventura County harvesting citrus fruit. They were employed by grower-owned cooperative harvesting associations or citrus packinghouses, which built farm labor camps to house them. Some large farming companies, such as Santa Paula-based Limoneira Company, also employed and housed “braceros” on their own properties.

When the *Bracero* program ended in 1964, Limoneira Company removed about 150 of their most isolated family houses and renovated the rest in order to attract workers. Many former “braceros” stayed on, first as single men living in an employer-provided trailer camp and later with their families in the Limoneira houses. The farm labor camps which existed under the *Bracero* program continued to be owned and operated by a number of local citrus packinghouses. By the mid-1970’s, some of the labor camp facilities closed and some were sold resulting in private ownership by the employees. Labor camps formerly operated by F & P Growers Association (Piru) and Coastal Growers Association (Campo Tres S) continue to operate today under private ownership. Some unaccompanied workers live in these camps, but the number of available beds has declined to about 525 today.

The United Farm Workers Union was active in organizing farm workers throughout California during the mid-1970s and early 1980s. In Ventura County, after

the UFW unionized most of the citrus industry, many of the grower-owned harvesting associations closed down. Farm labor contractors who provide harvesting crews to local citrus growers replaced them. A very large number of farm labor contractors are in business today. They are highly competitive and normally do not provide their employees with benefits or housing.

Many growers maintain that State and federal requirements for farm labor housing, and associated liabilities, raised the cost to growers of providing housing for workers which resulted in the sale or destruction of such housing. Nevertheless, some local growers continue to provide housing for their year-round workers.

Cabrillo Village, which had been owned by Saticoy Lemon Association, a major cooperative grower association, was sold to its employees in the early 1970s. Out of that sale came Cabrillo Cooperative Housing Corp., since 1976 a 160-unit limited equity housing cooperative owned and managed by the farm workers. The Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation, a major local affordable housing builder, including family farm worker housing, grew out of the redevelopment of Cabrillo Village and was formed in 1981.

Also during the 1970s, the Ventura County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), which must approve changes in the boundaries of governmental units, established Guidelines for Orderly Development that strongly discouraged step-out development by annexation to cities. Strong municipal “spheres of influence” around cities led to the establishment of Greenbelt Agreements; non-binding but effective agreements between cities not to encroach on designated agricultural lands between them.

During the 1990s, the loss of farm acreage to residential or commercial development consumed approximately 1,000 acres per year. Voters approved the SOAR (Save Open Space and Agricultural Resources) anti-sprawl measures by substantial majorities in 1995 (City of Ventura), 1998 (countywide and most of the county’s other nine cities), 2000 (Santa Paula) and 2001 (Fillmore). By requiring a public vote of approval before land designated for agricultural use in unincorporated areas can have its land use designation changed to permit development, the measures are intended to channel population growth inside urban growth limits, thereby preserving agricultural land from development pressures.

Ventura County, like all of Southern California, is currently experiencing an explosion in housing prices. These skyrocketing housing costs increase the difficulty of providing housing for farm workers.<sup>10</sup>

### **OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

There are many reasons for the serious shortage of housing in our urban centers for Ventura County residents at the lower end of the economic scale. They include:

- The market, which is our society's primary mechanism for providing housing, doesn't favor construction of less profitable low-income housing.
- There is strong, and often very vocal, community resistance to higher density construction and to low-income neighbors.
- Liability suits and federal tax code changes, among other factors, have dramatically reduced construction of condominiums which constitute one of the more affordable forms of home ownership or multi-family rental units.
- Slow-growth policies limit new construction and, since the passage of Prop 13 and the loss of property tax revenue to the state, city government fiscal policies tend to favor commercial development and high-end housing.
- In the past twenty years there has been little apartment construction in Ventura County. The development that has taken place has primarily focused on providing housing for "move up" as opposed to "first-time" home buyers.
- Financing for construction of new affordable housing is hard to obtain and must come from a combination of sources, including competitive government grants and loans.

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<sup>10</sup> Sources for this section include: "Ventura County: Land of Good Fortune", an article in the Broadcaster, Fall 1976 #3 by Johanna Overby; "American Exodus" by James N. Gregory; "The Mexican Outsiders: A Community History of Marginalization & Discrimination" by Martha Menchaca; "The Value of Agriculture to Ventura County: An Economic Analysis," sponsored by the University of California Hansen Trust, 1996.

- Supply is reduced by non-renewals of Housing Authority rental subsidy contracts by landlords and conversion to market-rate housing of affordable multi-family housing units.
- Development standards, not essential to public health or safety, increase building costs and restrict land supply.

Farm worker housing on farms is in short supply. Although some workers live on the farms where they are employed, farmers currently are disinclined to provide housing. A 2001 survey<sup>11</sup> of 1,100 California farmers reveals that only one third currently provide housing for their workers. Farmers are motivated to provide housing in order to house skilled year-round workers on site and to attract dependable seasonal workers back each year. But almost two thirds (62%) of the growers surveyed cited the cost of development as a major discouraging factor. Other concerns were government regulations (49%), cost of liability insurance (43%), day-to-day operation of housing (39%), and liability for worker safety (38%). Many respondents expressed the need to simplify government regulations and to consolidate regulation/enforcement, which is now, in some cases, provided by three different levels of government agencies: local, state and federal. The study concludes that farmers, in general, recognize the need for good-quality, affordable housing as a way to provide a stable and healthy work force. Public or private financing for new construction, rehabilitation and acquisition of housing, and reductions in government regulation would encourage a greater number to provide housing. However, most farmers have little interest in owning or managing the housing themselves and would prefer public or private housing providers in those roles.

Some of the need for temporary housing for migrant workers was met in the past by growers jointly establishing labor camps. However construction and maintenance of such housing is expensive, especially if it will be occupied only during a short harvest

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<sup>11</sup> “Operation of Farm Labor Housing in California, A Survey of Farmers/Ranchers by the Working Group on Agriculture and Affordable Housing”, April 2001. The Working Group was convened in 1998 by the UC Davis College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, USDA Rural Development, California Dept. of Housing and Community Development, and the California Coalition for Rural Housing, to generate discussion and

season. Additionally, in the last two decades, the trend has been toward the hiring of temporary harvesting crews by individual farm labor contractors, rather than by groups of growers. Farm labor contractors do not generally finance housing for their employees and no new labor camps have been built for many years.

Although the obstacles may seem insurmountable, there are also reasons to be hopeful:

- As part of its Housing Element update, the Board of Supervisors instructed the Ventura County Planning Department to create an advisory committee composed of concerned community leaders to survey farm worker housing conditions, identify potential building sites, and review zoning regulations to determine where farm worker housing can be constructed in the unincorporated areas of Ventura County.
- Many cities, currently updating the housing elements of their General Plans, are specifically considering the needs of farm workers as required by state law and can be encouraged to implement plans to meet those needs.
- Three experienced nonprofit housing corporations are positioned to build farm worker housing in Ventura County: Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation, Peoples' Self-Help Housing Corporation, and Mercy Charities Housing Corporation. Other non-profits including Habitat for Humanity and Many Mansions are engaged in meeting the housing needs of low-income families. At least one for-profit developer, Ventura Affordable Homes, is also developing low income housing in the County.
- Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation is seeking approval for four projects which include 109 farm worker housing units in Oxnard and 24 units of farm worker housing in Santa Paula.
- The Area Housing Authority of Ventura County seeks to act as a catalyst to provide affordable housing opportunities through partnerships with the communities it serves.

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collaborative efforts around the role of affordable housing provision in creating sustainable rural communities.

- Several business, agricultural and broad-based citizen organizations currently are addressing the need for affordable housing, including farm worker housing. These include Ventura County Economic Development Association through its HOME Campaign, The Housing Leadership Council, Conejo/Las Virgenes Future Foundation, and Santa Paula Modest Housing Group, as well as the Ag Futures Alliance.
- Information and recommendations regarding provision of housing are disseminated by other groups, both public and private, such as the League of Women Voters and the Solimar Research Group.
- Funding sources, although hard to access, are available.
- A \$2.1 billion Housing Bond will be on the November, 2002 ballot. It includes \$200 million for farm worker housing, of which \$25 million is designated for migrant workers.
- Because the voters of Ventura County overwhelmingly approved the preservation of agricultural lands from development, it should follow that they will support the provision of housing for the very work force upon which agriculture depends.

### **THE PROCESS OF BUILDING FARM WORKER HOUSING**

The job of creating affordable housing, whether for farm workers or other low-income people, consists of locating a site; creating plans; securing permits; securing financing; construction; and on-going property management.

The for-profit housing development sector of the economy often does not produce housing affordable to lower income households (including farm worker households, who are generally extremely low-income households). State and federal programs fail to direct sufficient public revenues to affordable housing programs to satisfy the need. The job of creating affordable housing for low-income residents is thus left primarily to the nonprofit sector and to local governments.

### **The Requirement to Provide and Plan for Farm Worker Housing**

A prerequisite for construction of low-income housing of all types, including farm worker housing, is adequate planning by local communities. Local government must

provide appropriate zoning and infrastructure to make development of affordable housing feasible. Communities must also maintain a development approval process that encourages and facilitates approval of plans and permits for affordable housing. Adequate resources cannot produce affordable housing without adequate local planning.

Since 1980, California has mandated local planning for affordable housing, requiring each city and county to revise and update a detailed housing element as part of its General Plan every five years. In Ventura County, the 10 incorporated cities and the County of Ventura are each required to prepare a housing element.

The housing element must make adequate provision for the housing needs of all economic segments of the community, including certain special needs groups, which include farm workers. It must estimate the number of year round (full-time) and migrant farm workers within the jurisdiction describe the zones where housing for farm workers is allowed and under what conditions, and evaluate whether sufficient opportunities for housing for migrant and year round (full-time) farm workers exist. The State of California encourages cities and counties to work cooperatively to identify and address farm worker housing needs and to identify their respective share of sites needed for farm worker housing, and to locate those sites, to the extent feasible, within or adjacent to existing urbanized areas.

### **The Nuts and Bolts of Farm Worker Housing Construction**

Assuming the will to provide low-income housing for farm workers and others and a cooperative planning process on the part of local government, there still remain the daunting logistical issues of finding a site, developing plans, securing financing, and actual construction.

#### **1. *Finding a Site***

The housing developer first must find the land on which to build. Help can be provided by a jurisdiction that has developed an inventory of potential sites for affordable housing in its housing element. The most desirable of these sites will already have the necessary zoning and permit the desired density. A developer looking for a site will need the jurisdiction's zoning map, distinguishing land available for residential use from that being held for commercial or industrial uses. Other necessary

partners in the search for sites are real estate agents and brokers, who can guide the developer to willing sellers and reasonably priced sites. Price can be a motivation for an unwilling seller, but high-priced land does not easily translate into low-cost housing.

Once a site is located at an acceptable price, site control is obtained either through an option to buy or outright purchase. The decision to buy or option is based on a variety of factors, including the requirements of the seller and the financial capability of the developer. Either method incurs costs in direct proportion to the length of time elapsing between site control and construction. These costs will eventually have to be recouped by the developer in the sale price or rental income. The longer the development process takes, the less likely it is that the final project will be affordable to farm workers.

## 2. *Governmental Approval*

While each jurisdiction within the county has a different development process and each project has unique requirements, there are significant time requirements and expenses that cannot be avoided. If the site obtained already has the necessary zoning and density approval, the development approval process will still take a minimum of two years and an average of three if no real problems arise. If a zoning change and a general plan amendment are required, at least another year will be added to the process as well as substantially higher costs for environmental impact review etc (conservatively an additional \$50,000 and \$75,000 in development costs.)

Before the process begins, architectural and engineering plans must be obtained (and paid for). Review of the development plans by the planning department of the jurisdiction in which the land is located, completion of specific studies that may be required by the jurisdiction (e.g. traffic or noise studies), and minimal environmental review will take three to nine months, depending on the project and the complexity of the jurisdiction's development standards. Once the Planning and other

departments have completed their review, the development plan will be scheduled for hearing before the Planning Commission for approval. If the development plan is approved by the Commission and there is no further review by the City Council or the Board of Supervisors, the actual construction documents can be prepared and submitted to the planning department and building permits can be expected in six to eight months. If an appeal is made (and low income housing projects are frequently appealed) or if action by the elected body is required because of a request for a variance, density bonuses, fee deferment, or other action beyond the discretion of the commission, those proceedings will add at least six months to the process.

### 3. *Financing*

While the approval process is taking place, financing also needs to be obtained. Sources of funding for farm worker housing include:

- City and County monies (e.g. the low and moderate income housing set-aside fund from redevelopment agency tax increments);
- Federal money that cities and counties control (community development block grant (CDBG) funds, HOME funds);
- USDA Rural Development funds;
- State and federal low income housing tax credits, which enable entities to shelter their income from taxes in exchange for their providing funding for affordable housing projects;
- State of California Farm Worker Housing grant funds;
- California Endowment housing money;
- Conventional bank loans, from banks that have obligations under the Federal Community Reinvestment Act;
- In-lieu fees paid by developers who don't provide low-income housing where an inclusionary requirement is in place;
- Employer subsidies and loans.

Typically, in order to make housing affordable to extremely low-income individuals such as farm workers, a combination of these types of funding will be necessary. There may be different requirements from different funding sources as to the farm worker population served by the housing (such as year round (full-time) versus migrant) One source will seldom be sufficient for the deep subsidies that will be required. Applications for various types of funding each take time. All state and federal housing monies are on different funding cycles and are extremely competitive. Since one of the factors that is typically considered in the application is the status of the governmental approval process for the project, it is rare to get initial funding approval prior to receiving development plan approval. The actual availability of the money typically takes much longer than the preliminary approval. Accordingly, it is not unusual for the financing to take longer - and be more complex - than the development approval process itself.

#### 4. *Community Resistance*

Some people resist low-income housing in their neighborhoods, whether out of concern for damage to property values, fear of crime (justified or not), or other concerns. Because governmental approval is necessary to the development of housing, and the review process necessarily involves the public, community resistance can be a major deterrent to the development of farm worker housing. Even if the project is ultimately approved, time delays caused by appeals and/or legal actions can result in increased costs, loss of funding, or loss of site control and can make it impossible to achieve construction of housing affordable to farm workers. For these reasons, it is helpful (if not absolutely necessary) to engage in a positive public relations campaign around each project.

### **SUCCESS STORIES**

Although the need for farm worker housing (as well as housing for other low-income people) vastly outweighs the supply, there are people and organizations in

Ventura County and around the state who are working, you'd have to say gallantly and against enormous institutional and cultural resistance, to provide both rental and ownership housing for people who qualify as "low income" or "very low income" earners.

In Ventura County the bulk of the work is currently being done by Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation of Saticoy. People's Self-Help, headquartered in San Luis Obispo, and Mercy Housing of California also have been active. All of these are nonprofit housing developers. Ventura Affordable Homes, a private, market-rate for-profit developer, is also active.

Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation (CEDC) has built or has in process almost 1400 units of low-income and very-low income rental and ownership housing in Ventura County since its inception two and a half decades ago. Of these units, 260 were built specifically for farm workers and another 190 were developed working with farm worker community groups. The most recent of those projects to be completed was the Rancho Sespe Workers Improvement Association project in 1993. The remaining 440+ units that CEDC has built are low-income or very-low income units, which are available to but not limited to farm workers. Through 1993, the CEDC developed five substantial projects. Cabrillo Village is the rehabilitation and new construction of 160 units at a former farm labor camp and is restricted to farm workers; it was completed in 1986. A key element in its success was the cooperation of the former owner, Saticoy Lemon Association, in selling the property to the residents. The CEDC worked with Lynn Jacobs, now of Ventura Affordable Homes, and Blue Goose Packing, on the construction of 128 new for-sale homes in Santa Paula at Colonia Santa Paula on the site of the former Blue Goose farm labor camp. Colonia Santa Paula was completed in 1983; the involvement of the former owner was a key element in its success. Villa Campesina, 62 for-sale self-help homes, was completed in Moorpark in 1992. The involvement of the grass roots organization Villa Campesina, many of whose members formerly worked at Egg City, was key to the success of this development. Rancho Sespe, 100 units limited to farm workers, was completed in 1993. The Santa Paulan Senior Apartments, 150 units for seniors, was completed 1992. Since that time, projects have mostly been fewer than 32

units in size, although the CEDC is currently developing a 70-unit rental project in Simi Valley.

CEDC is currently doing three farm worker housing projects in Oxnard: Villa Cesar Chavez, Meta Street downtown, and the Villa Victoria Golf Course. Villa Cesar Chavez will consist of 52 multifamily units and six single-family dwellings, all for farm workers, to be constructed on a site where existing housing was condemned. The Meta Street project is a project of the Oxnard Redevelopment Agency; it will have 24 units of rental housing for farm workers close to downtown Oxnard. The Villa Victoria Golf Course site being developed by Ag Land Services will provide three acres on which CEDC will built 54 units of affordable housing, including at least 27 units for farm workers. CEDC has also begun preparing a 24-unit farm worker housing project in Santa Paula.

Peoples' Self-Help, which builds both ownership and rental units in the south coast counties, is currently doing Citrus Point, a 47-unit self-help project in Piru. This is a low-income/very-low income project that is available to, but not exclusively for, farm workers. Peoples' Self-Help came into the project after Ventura Affordable Homes built the first phase, Citrus View. Citrus Point is a self-help ownership project in which the prospective owners put in 40 hours per week on construction of their home over the duration of the construction period. Three phases have started. Eventually five phases will be required to complete all 47 units.

Mercy Housing of California is a non-profit housing developer active throughout California. It came into being through a series of mergers between Mercy Charities Housing, the housing ministry of Catholic Charities of San Francisco, and Rural California Housing Corporation. Mercy Housing has built 64 units of low income housing called Casa San Juan in Oxnard on land donated by St. John's Hospital (Catholic Healthcare West.) On a contiguous site it constructed Casa Merced, 40 units of senior housing. It has site control of a former Ford dealership on Oxnard Blvd. on which it proposes to build 72 units of family housing, some of which may be restricted to farm workers.

Unlike Cabrillo Economic Development, Peoples Self-Help, or Mercy Housing, which are all non-profit corporations, Lynn Jacobs of Ventura Affordable Homes is a for-

profit developer in the same business. She goes through the same routines as they do, of locating and getting control of a site, preparing plans, securing financing, getting approvals and doing construction. She describes herself as a great believer in home ownership, and in fact does ownership housing only. She says that by not utilizing government loans to finance her projects she can produce them more economically than can the non-profits, and thus offer more house for less money to prospective buyers. She got her start with the Blue Goose project, which CEDC also worked on, that became Colonia Santa Paula. Subsequently she worked with Ralph De Leon (see below) on the Colonia del Parque development. Since then, in Ventura County she has done the 151 unit North Bank Greens, on North Bank and Petit in Ventura, completed in 1996; and Citrus View Homes in Piru, where she did 67 ownership units, turning the balance over to People's Self Help. On Citrus View Homes she secured special state funding for down payment assistance to enable first-time homeowners to purchase.

In the late 1970's, Ralph De Leon, a grower and farm labor contractor, worked with his employees to form a cooperative, Las Piedras Employees Association, which purchased an apartment complex and 5 acres of land in Santa Paula. The apartments were converted to condominiums and single family units were constructed in the development, which was called Colonia del Parque. Financing was sweat equity and conventional, with no government subsidies or tax credits; all 42 units were eventually converted to private ownership, either by being sold to the members of the cooperative (single family units) or converted to condominiums (multifamily units), and have become market rate housing for their owners (that is, the owners are free to sell them at market rate, or live in them for the price they paid initially).

All told, the number of rental and ownership units dedicated to farm workers constructed in Ventura County since 1976 adds up to fewer than 750. All of this housing is for year round (full-time) resident farm workers; no new housing has been built for migrant farm workers in many years.

Elsewhere in California and other western states, other nonprofit and for-profit developers of low-income housing are engaged in the same work. Some of them are:

- Peoples' Self-Help has constructed 80 units of rental farm worker housing plus 50 units of low-income/very-low income ownership housing in

Guadalupe; 54 farm worker housing rental units in Phase 1 of Los Adobes de Maria in Santa Maria, with 52 more units set to begin construction sometime this year for Phase 2; and 16 units of farm worker rental housing in Oceano.

- The Coachella Valley Housing Coalition (CVHC) has constructed about 2000 units of low-income/very-low income housing in the past 20 years, much of which is permanent or migrant farm worker housing. CVHC has approximately 500 units under construction today. Like most nonprofit housing developers currently building housing for permanent residents, CVHC where possible leverages various funding sources to build community centers and set up the infrastructure for social services, so that there will be child care, senior centers, health clinics, police substations, community gardens and other programs available within the housing developments.
- In San Mateo County, Mid-Peninsula Housing Coalition is in the same business. It completed phase 2 of Moonridge, 160 units of farm worker rental housing just south of Half Moon Bay, in August 2001. Moonridge consists of two-, three- and four-bedroom very low income subsidized rental units in duplexes and triplexes, together with community gardens, the largest child care center in San Mateo County, a community building that houses not only the child care center but also classes offered by the local junior college, playgrounds, and two soccer fields. Mid-Peninsula also rebuilt 43 units of condemned former *bracero* housing into the San Andres Farm Labor camp, including also a community center with a sheriff's substation and a computer education room that doubles as a health clinic, and service programs including after-school and summer programs. The trade-offs for building the farm labor camp at the former *bracero*-housing site are that there is no bus service, and the lack of septic and water systems raised infrastructure costs for the development.
- Near Arbuckle, in Colusa County, grower Javier Tirado cooperated with UC Davis design professionals to build Villa Almendra, a pilot migrant labor camp that opened in April 2001. Villa Almendra houses up to 24 single men in four separate dwelling units built around a community center. The project

utilized research-designed manufactured housing and serves as a demonstration project focused on unaccompanied male farm workers.

Improvements from ongoing study of the model will assist in further refining housing concepts for unaccompanied male migrant farm workers.

- In the town of Mattawa in Washington State, the North Columbia Community Action Council worked with the city of Mattawa, the state Office of Community Development, and several contractors to build Nueva Vida, seven demonstration housing units for migrant farm workers which opened in May, 2002. The state Office of Community Development has been working for three years to try to find better ways to shelter the 33,000 migrant farm workers who harvest Washington's crops each year. Nueva Vida features attractive single-family homes, a duplex townhouse, a triplex, a bunkhouse, a manufactured home, steel sleeping modular and a straw-bale library. The designs and materials are meant to be affordable, durable, energy efficient, easy to build, easy to keep clean and relatively pest-proof. The houses were built with the help of crews of unemployed farm workers during the winter. The hope is that Nueva Vida will inspire more community groups, contractors and growers to try some of the forms of housing on display.
- In the Pajaro Valley, an agricultural valley shared by Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties, a group called Action Pajaro Valley coordinated a Pajaro Valley Farm Worker Housing Summit in July, 2001. The problems in the Pajaro Valley read like a litany of Ventura's issues, to wit: "the cost of living in both Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties is one of the highest in the United States. In addition, these counties are home to some of the richest and most fertile agricultural lands in the world... This presents the challenge of supporting the agricultural industry and its farm labor work force by finding ways to develop affordable and well-designed farm worker housing to mitigate the area's high cost of living. In order to address this challenge, the community must answer some key questions: What should farm worker housing look like? How can it be built? What are the obstacles facing its development? How can government, community organizations, developers,

and the farm worker community work together to plan for future needed housing?”

The summit brought together more than 150 farm workers, agency representatives, developers and other interested community members in a three-hour workshop. It came out of a multi-agency Farm Worker Housing and Health Assessment Study, which had been completed the month before. The study found that farm workers had annual earnings that were lower than any other occupational category, that they lived in more overcrowded households, and in some cases, substandard housing conditions, and that the housing was generally unaffordable for them.

The summit was held simultaneously in English and Spanish, with all participants wearing earphones so that all could simultaneously understand and respond to each other. From it emerged findings on locating farm worker housing, housing layout and design, desired amenities and resources, and other issues and comments.

The success story here is that a group of active citizens worked together with public and private agencies in two counties to both (a) gather baseline data and (b) immediately convene a facilitated meeting of all stakeholders to address the issue.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **General Recommendations**

The Ag Futures Alliance (AFA) believes that resources are available to achieve significant change in the housing conditions of farm workers and that we, the total community of Ventura County, can and must work together to encourage, facilitate and support this change. This report makes clear that the barriers are formidable and that it will require sustained effort and the application of social, political and moral will to attain significant progress toward the goal of providing safe, decent and affordable housing.

We recommend a community effort functioning at two levels: Countywide and in each local jurisdiction.

At the County-wide level, a Farm Worker Housing Task Force can develop production goals and strategies, provide information, interact with County government, and participate in other groups working on affordable and workforce housing issues, work with owners of unincorporated land (farmers), facilitate formation of local farm worker housing support groups, carry on public education, develop local funding resources, support State and federal farm worker housing initiatives.

At the local community level, Farm Worker Housing Support Coalitions made up of employers (growers), builders, concerned citizens, and farm workers can set production goals, identify opportunities and address barriers in their own communities and then marshal the resources for the preservation and improvement of existing housing and the addition of new housing. Activities can include making presentations to community groups, testifying before planning commissions and city councils, and identifying sites for new housing.

To launch this effort, the AFA proposes the following steps:

1. Create a Farm Worker Housing task force that includes non-AFA members who have an interest in farm worker housing;
2. Work for passage in November of Housing Bond, SB 1227 which includes \$200 million for housing agricultural workers;
3. Plan a Ventura County Farm Worker Housing Summit in early 2003.

A preliminary list of recommendations follows.

### **Specific Recommendations**

***A new Farm Worker Housing Task Force including members of the AFA and other concerned citizens can:***

- Convene a Ventura County Farm Worker Housing Summit
- Work for passage in November, 2002 of the \$2.1 billion Housing Bond which includes \$200 million for farm worker housing
- Make presentations to civic groups including SOAR and the Ag Leadership Program's current class and graduates

- Testify before planning commission and city council/board of supervisor meetings re housing elements, proposed new building, and preservation of existing housing
- Encourage and support planning department staffs in addressing the problem
- Launch a public education program that focuses on the importance of the farm worker contribution to the economy and community and on the need for decent affordable housing. As part of this program, write letters to the editor, op-ed pieces and appear on local radio shows and television
- Provide and update information re resources and solutions in other communities
- Facilitate the formation of citizen groups to support farm worker housing projects in each community
- Create a trust fund for farm worker housing and encourage public and private investment
- Emphasize the need for a variety of types of housing which will accommodate year round (full-time) and seasonal farm worker families and also migrant and unaccompanied workers
- Seek to influence State and Federal legislation to increase funding for farm worker housing
- Assist the County and each community in setting farm worker housing production goals
- Facilitate partnerships between government, developers, lenders, and private organizations to implement programs that preserve and add to farm worker housing stock

***The grower community and grower organizations can:***

- Establish a fund for farm worker housing with the Ventura County Community Foundation
- Participate in tax credit programs to fund farm worker housing
- Join with farm labor contractors to provide housing

- Provide land, either by selling appropriate sites under helpful terms (time being perhaps more important than money), by long-term lease, or by donation.
- Provide and fund education and outreach to farm workers re housing
- Maintain and expand current housing on farms for farm workers
- Develop a handbook for farmers who wish to provide or facilitate provision of housing
- Testify before planning commission and city council/board of supervisor meetings re farm worker housing issues and/or projects
- Provide funds for rental deposits and/or second mortgages to enable employees to obtain housing

***County and City governments can:***

- Adopt policies to support provision of very low and extremely low income housing, including inclusionary zoning, encouragement of multifamily dwellings, adoption of an extremely low income category and adoption of regional fair share approach
- Eliminate barriers that may exist due to certain planning and zoning laws
- Provide incentives (without harming public health and safety) by changing affordable housing development standards that needlessly contribute to housing costs or unnecessarily restrict land supply. These might include: minimum lot size, building size, building setbacks, spacing between buildings, open space, landscaping, buffering, road width, pavements, parking, sidewalks, oversized water and sewer lines to accommodate future development, reserving infrastructure capacity for housing, establishing a process for expedited approvals and waiver/reduction/deferral of fees for farm worker and other low income housing
- Allocate locally controlled and generated funds (i.e., federal monies, HOME, Community Development Block Grant, redevelopment) towards housing for extremely low-income households; apply for additional grant monies
- Establish a housing trust fund

- Identify suitable sites under private ownership
- Identify and prioritize city and county-owned sites

*The general public can:*

- Realize that survival of Ventura County agriculture depends as much on decent, affordable housing for workers as it does on preservation of acreage and work with those who are trying to provide it
- Join with farm labor housing advocates to solve the problem

**CONCLUSION**

As Ventura County has grown more populous and prosperous, the supply of housing for those who work the fields has fallen ever further behind the demand. If agriculture is to survive in Ventura County, as the two-thirds of county voters who supported SOAR desire, then agriculture must have farm workers and those workers need clean, safe, affordable housing. Supporting efforts to provide such housing is in the interest of every resident of Ventura County. It is a matter of economic common sense. More importantly, it's simply the right thing to do!

## ***APPENDIX "A"***

### ***Members of the Committee***

The Ag Futures Alliance (AFA) established the Farm Worker Housing Committee in April 2001 to address the pressing need for adequate, decent and affordable housing for farm workers in Ventura County.

The committee consists of eight AFA members representing agriculture from the perspectives of grower and worker interests, and the community at large. The members are guided by AFA principles that espouse the creation of consensus through respectful listening and honest dialogue. The eight AFA Farm Worker Housing Committee members are:

Ellen Brokaw, Brokaw Nursery, Inc.

Jim Churchill, Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Ralph DeLeon, Servicios Agricolas Mexicanas (SAMCO)

Sue Kelley, League of Women Voters of Ventura County

Rex Laird, Executive Director, Ventura County Farm Bureau

Eileen McCarthy, California Rural Legal Assistance

Rob Roy, President and General Counsel, Ventura County Agricultural Association

Henry Vega, Coastal Harvesting Inc.

### ***Description of the Committee Process***

The first few months were spent identifying the issues and developing statements of Vision, Purpose, Principles and an Action Plan. Subsequently committee members researched housing issues in the process of developing this report. Members of the committee have attended meetings of the Ventura County Housing Leadership Council formed in the spring of 2001. Five members also participate in Ventura County's Farm Worker Housing Study Committee, created in September, 2001.

The committee intends to broaden its membership in 2002-03 and to actively seek ways to facilitate new housing to meet the needs of farm workers and their families.

## ***APPENDIX “B”***

### ***Ag Futures Alliance of Ventura County - - A Different Approach***

The Ag Futures Alliance (AFA) is a coalition formed by agriculturists in late 1999 to address some critical challenges facing agriculture in Ventura County. The purpose of AFA is to support and enhance an interdependent and viable agriculture in Ventura County in perpetuity.

Recognizing a need for broad-based public commitment to and participation in the AFA, participants agreed that Ventura County agriculture must make the environmental and health concerns of non-farming residents a top priority. The Alliance invited representatives from a variety of social and environmental concerns to participate, and with few exceptions the offer was accepted.

It became clear to AFA participants that the first step must be to create meaningful two-way communication. The second step would be to build trust and the third step would be to discover win-win solutions based on mutual respect and appreciation. It was during the third step that AFA formed two working groups, a Committee on Schools and Pesticides and a Farm Worker Housing Committee.

Information about AFA can be found at [www.agfuturesalliance.net](http://www.agfuturesalliance.net).

### ***Ag Innovations Network (AGIN)***

The Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance partners with Ag Innovations Network in the organization and facilitation of its efforts. Ag Innovations Network is a small group of professionals dedicated to helping preserve and protect our unique agricultural heritage by helping farmers and ranchers develop new practices and new revenue streams that keep land in agriculture.

The mission of Ag Innovations Network (AGIN) is to enhance the long-term sustainability of communities by assisting agriculture to fulfill its essential role as the keystone in a health ecosystem, economy, and society.

AGIN creates and facilitates public processes that bring together divergent groups with a stake in agriculture to find common ground and implement solutions that address local needs. AGIN also designs and implements marketing programs, resource stewardship programs and public education campaigns.

All these activities focus on solutions that increase the use of sustainable farming practices, increase the awareness of the importance of a healthy agricultural base to a sustainable society, and reduce the friction between farmers, governments, and the general public.

To learn more about AGIN, or to contact them, visit their website at:

[www.aginnovations.net](http://www.aginnovations.net).

