

FARMWORKER HOUSING

Affordable, safe, and sanitary housing is virtually nonexistent for the vast majority of California's farmworkers. When a migrant farmworker arrives in a rural agricultural town, he/she has few options: most of the existing housing is occupied; available units often consist of the most dilapidated units in the community; rents are high; and per-person charges are used to capitalize on "doubling up." If the migrant fails to arrive in town early enough to get a substandard unit, there are four choices available: double up in an occupied unit; pay rent to live in a shed, barn, garage, or backyard; live in a car; or try to obtain housing in a surrounding community and commute to work. Although there are a number of state-operated farm labor camps and some employer-provided housing, these programs address only a minimal portion of the total housing need.

Several reasons are commonly cited for the lack of farmworker housing. Housing advocates maintain that government has not spent enough money for farmworker housing. The agricultural industry maintains that housing is expensive to provide and investments are rarely recaptured because the housing is only used seasonally. Agricultural interests also contend that governmental regulations and community opposition make farmworker housing difficult to build and maintain. Moreover, the increasing use of farm labor contractors as intermediaries has increased the distance between growers and labor, which blunt workers' attempts to attain better working conditions and benefits directly from growers.

Two state programs and a number of private camps offer a combined total of 5,607 units assisting an estimated 39,374 farmworkers and their families. The federal Rural Economic Development Services Agency (formerly the Farmers Home Administration) provides funding to build low- and moderate-income farmworker housing.

The state housing programs are:

- 1) **Office of Migrant Services (OMS):** This program, administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), operates 26 migrant centers in 16 counties, annually serving an estimated 11,000 migrant farmworkers and their families in 2,100 units.

Thirty percent of the farmworkers come from California, 35% from Mexico, and the rest from Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. The centers generally operate from April through November. Land is provided by the local jurisdiction. The state owns the buildings and equipment and operates the program, usually by contracting with a local housing authority. The Fiscal Year 2004-05 Budget funded this program with \$5,291,000 for operations through the General Fund and \$1,400,000 for repairs through the Housing Bond Act of 2002.

- 2) **Farmworker Housing Grant Program:** This HCD-administered program offers up to 50% matching grants for the construction and rehabilitation of owner-occupied and rental housing for low-income, year-round farmworkers. This program has assisted 9,200 units and an estimated 36,800 total farmworkers and their families since 1977. The Fiscal Year 2002-03 Budget provided \$14 million for additional grants.
- 3) **Housing and Emergency Shelter Trust Fund Act of 2002:** \$200 million for farmworker housing.

Major legislation

AB 32 (Salinas) Chapter 866, Statutes of 2004:

- Allows local public agencies or nonprofit organizations that construct or rehabilitate farmworker housing with public funds to enter into lease agreements with agricultural employers to provide housing for their employees on the same terms as would the local entity.

AB 868 (Parra) Chapter 671, Statutes of 2004:

- Allows migrant farm labor centers to open earlier than is currently allowed and requires that existing notices to migrant farmworkers regarding the extended operation of a migrant farm labor center include the beginning date of the extended occupancy period.
- Provides that occupants and operators of centers are eligible for specific energy rate or grant programs.

AB 1462 (Salinas) Chapter 672, Statutes of 2004:

- Allows the Department of Housing and Community Development to waive the requirement that applicants to the Joe Serna Jr. Farmworker Housing Grant Program provide matching funds.
- Allows the Cal-Home loan program to provide secured forgivable loans to low income households to rehabilitate, repair, or replace a manufactured home that is not permanently affixed to a foundation.

SB 1611 (Ducheny) As introduced:

- Would have clarified the current land use exemption for farmworker housing by changing the designation requirements for agricultural employee housing from 12 or fewer employees to 12 or fewer units or beds.

As amended August 23, 2004 (Vetoed):

- Would have required the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to staff at least four persons on all department fire engines.
- Would have required a phased deployment in certain counties.
- Would have required the department to prepare a biennial California fire prevention plan.

Governor's Schwarzenegger veto message: "It is critically important for us to ensure that California is well prepared for fighting wildland fires and that we take action to improve our fire response system. Equally important is developing and implementing programs to reduce hazardous fuels that are causing wildfires in California to be more frequent, destructive, and costly to suppress.

This bill would require the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) to staff at least four persons on all department fire engines during fire season, and additionally require CDF to staff at least four persons year-round in Southern California pursuant to a specified schedule. The bill also requires CDF to prepare a biennial fire prevention plan and conduct an evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of the four-person staffing on its fire engines.

On May 7, 2004, I issued an Executive Order which directed CDF to secure and deploy the following additional resources to protect the safety of persons and property from wildfires during the 2004 fire season:

- Assign a minimum crew of four firefighters to 53 CDF engines in the Counties of Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego;
- Assign additional resources in the CDF Contract Counties of Los Angeles, Ventura, and Orange as warranted based on established criteria of fire threat conditions;
- Place back into service ten refurbished fire engines to be staffed with a minimum crew of four firefighters to increase CDF fire engine resources to assist with wildfire suppression in the Counties of Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego;
- Staff four additional CDF Conservation Camp Fire Crews in the Southern portion of the state; and
- Lease, staff, and deploy a helicopter to be based in San Diego County.

The continued use of the Executive Order provides the flexibility to prioritize and increase wildland fire resources in areas of high fire danger that will help protect the citizens and the natural resources of this State against wildfires in a responsible and cost effective manner."