



January 29, 2021

Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Immediate Action Needed to Ensure Equitable COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution
for Farmworkers**

Dear Governor Newsom:

We thank your administration for rightfully placing farmworkers in Tier 1 of Phase 1B of your statewide vaccination plan. We're very concerned, though, that such prioritization will be illusory and ineffective without immediate, targeted, statewide action by your administration to effect it. The current, more traditional vaccine distribution channels will not be enough to reach this most vulnerable population, so we implore you to do more—and to do more now. Specifically, we request a robust community-based vaccine outreach campaign. In addition, vaccines should be allocated based on the number of farmworkers in a given region, even if this means distributing directly to cities, neighborhoods, growers, and trusted community-based organizations.

Throughout this pandemic, farmworkers have not stopped working. As you know, farmworkers are disproportionately being infected and dying at higher rates from the novel coronavirus.¹ Therefore, while we are grateful that farmworkers were prioritized in Phase 1B, there are several areas where the State is lacking in allocating and distributing the vaccine to these essential workers. Even before COVID-19, farmworkers have been a hard-to-reach population because they live in rural areas, fear government assistance due to their immigration status, face language barriers, and lack access to technology and internet. As such, farmworkers are not receiving vaccine information that is culturally and linguistically accessible.

On top of convincing farmworkers that the vaccine is safe, effective, and available to them, areas with large farmworker populations simply do not have enough doses to distribute. We've seen this particularly occur in counties that have opened up vaccine eligibility to seniors of 65 years of age and over during Phase 1B. As a result, farmworkers find themselves having to compete with seniors who more often have the resources, knowledge, and ability to navigate what can be a complex vaccine appointment process. Moreover, a county's COVID-19 cases may seem moderate as a whole—when in actuality, farmworker communities within that county are being devastated

¹ See University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), [Excess mortality associated with the COVID-19 pandemic among Californians 18–65 years of age, by occupational sector and occupation](#) (Jan. 22, 2021).

by the virus. To address this issue, your administration should allocate vaccine doses on a more localized level driven by need.² Whether it's using census tracts, the Healthy Places Index, cities, farmworker advocates, growers, or community-based organizations to allocate and distribute the vaccine,³ this method ensures that there is enough vaccine for the most in-need and at-risk residents. We implore your administration to continue finding innovative ways to make the vaccine widely available by utilizing local pharmacies,⁴ community centers, work sites, and other familiar settings that farmworkers can easily access.

Farmworkers are the backbone of our state and country's food chain. This group has historically been underserved and must be a top priority for an equitable vaccine rollout. We trust that your administration will exhaust all resources to educate and engage with farmworkers through trusted messengers, community-based organizations, and employers on the efficacy and safety of the vaccine. Once farmworkers are informed and compelled to receive the vaccine, it is critical that there be enough doses available for them by using the aforementioned equity methods on allocation.

We stand ready to work with you to ensure that equity is at the core of our COVID-19 response in theory and in practice. Thank you for your consideration of these requests and please let us know if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



ROBERT RIVAS
Assemblymember, 30th District



EDUARDO GARCIA
Assemblymember, 56th District

² See *attached* Letter to Community Vaccine Advisory Committee from the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation (Jan. 18, 2021).

³ We hear that many growers, such as in Monterey County, are ready and willing to help deploy the vaccine at their grow sites, and have even offered to provide logistical support and pay their workers for their time spent receiving the vaccine. See *attached* Letter to Governor Newsom from Monterey County Board of Supervisors ("Monterey County is ready with plans, capacity, and partnerships... [the County's plan](#) can be easily scaled as we receive larger amounts of vaccine.") (Jan. 28, 2021). Farmworker advocates too are mobilized to assist—the United Farm Workers, for example, is collaborating on vaccine deployment with certain growers and Stanford University medical students. See *attached* Letter to Monterey County Health Officer from UFW Foundation (Jan. 16, 2021).

⁴ We support the pharmacy deployment pilot program with the California Retailers proposed to you in a Jan. 14 letter led by Senator Caballero, focused on certain highly vulnerable farmworker communities. See *attached* Letter to Governor Newsom from the California Legislature (Jan 14, 2021).

ATTACHMENTS



January 18, 2021

Dear Community Vaccine Advisory Committee members:

We are pleased that California's agricultural workers have been placed, and remain in, Phase 1B, Tier 1 of vaccination distribution. However, recent pronouncements at the federal and State levels are making this prioritization illusory. By elevating age as a priority category and not taking into account occupational, demographic, community and household risk, vaccines will not reach farmworker communities in an expeditious manner.

As we pointed out in our November 2020 policy brief, signed by 11 California farmworker advocacy organizations, farmworkers are an essential workforce at particular risk of COVID-19 due to occupational exposure, their demographics, their lack of access to health services and their local home and community environments. We advocated for a specific strategy to reach the largely immigrant farmworker population which has diminished access to health resources, and a fear of accessing those services that are available.

County implementation plans differ widely, some without taking into account the heightened priority for the food and agricultural workers. No County plans appear to employ an equity metric that would target low-income, high risk agricultural communities. The mass vaccination approach in urban areas for medical workers and seniors, do not account for the smaller remote, rural communities with populations that are not adept at navigating the complex vaccination appointment systems.

As we advocated in our November policy brief, vaccine priorities should include the communities in which farmworkers live. The Healthy Places Index, upon which California relies for its Health Equity Metric, identifies the highest risk communities. Our colleagues have developed an even more robust data tool that identifies census tracts with high numbers of farmworkers from the American Community Survey data. They have already identified high-risk farmworker neighborhoods in Monterey County and Fresno County, and we are happy to share that tool with the Committee and any local health jurisdictions. This tool can help in determining how many doses are needed in each neighborhood or community, the FQHC's that serve the area and what partnerships with grassroots organizations might be needed to augment vaccination outreach.

For vaccine administration to be effective, outreach and education through trusted messengers (e.g. community health promoters, community based organizations and promotoras, community clinics, labor groups, faith-based communities) should begin now, as vaccines are rolled out. To overcome the fears of cost, health consequences, as well as the barriers of language, immigration status and public charge, distance and time, a targeted educational campaign is long overdue.

We appreciate the Committee's efforts and want to ensure that our agricultural workforce, their communities and families are protected from COVID-19. Our food supply depends on it.

Respectfully submitted,

Noe Paramo
Legislative Advocate
CRLA Foundation

Cc:

Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
California Latino Legislative Caucus
California Department of Public Health
Farmworker Advocacy Coalition

MONTEREY COUNTY



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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January 28, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: COVID-19 Vaccination Requests

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, I write to respectfully request your immediate assistance on several critical issues related to the equitable supply and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to keep our residents safe, especially our farmworker community which has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

The Significance of Monterey County Agriculture. With an extensive farming history dating back to the 1850s, Monterey County currently grows over 150 specialty crops and exports nearly 400 billion pounds of produce from the Salinas Valley every year. Monterey County is one of the nation's top agricultural producers. The agricultural industry is the county's largest economic and employment sector, in 2018 generating \$11.7 billion and employing 63,921 individuals. Keeping the agricultural industry and its workers safe and productive is vital to ensure the food supply of the county, state, nation and world.

Impacts on the Monterey County Economy. COVID-19 infection rates among the agricultural workforce has had devastating effects, impacting far more than the County's agricultural industry. Due to high infection rates in the Salinas Valley, Monterey County largely has remained in the most restrictive tier of California's Blueprint for a Safer Economy and will likely remain there unless the agricultural workforce can quickly be vaccinated. Even though infection rates in the Monterey Peninsula were significantly lower, the County's categorization in the most restrictive Purple Tier and later shelter-in-place resulted in an estimated \$1.8 billion loss to the County's hospitality industry, thousands of lost jobs and business closures.

Concerns in Preparation for the Agricultural Season. Farmworkers are the fulcrum of the food chain. Over the past months it has become clear that our County's infection rates are the highest among the agricultural workforce and their family members. Ensuring the health of agricultural workers is of paramount importance to ensure the health of all county residents.

- **New York Times Article.** Starting in March we expect a large influx of seasonal farmworkers coming to the Salinas Valley from Yuma, Arizona to work in our agricultural industry. According to a January 22, 2021 [New York Times](#) article, "... the Yuma area has identified coronavirus cases at a higher rate than any other U.S. region." The report further states "Arizona has seen among the highest increases in newly reported deaths of any state over the past two weeks."

- **U.C. San Francisco Study.** According to a new [U.C. San Francisco Study](#), *“Latino Californians experienced a 36% increase in mortality during the pandemic (RR=1.36; 95% PI: 1.29–1.44), with a 59% increase among Latino food/agriculture workers (RR=1.59; 95% PI: 1.47–1.75).”* The report concludes that, *“Certain occupational sectors have been associated with high excess mortality during the pandemic, particularly among racial and ethnic groups also disproportionately affected by COVID-19. In-person essential work is a likely venue of transmission of coronavirus infection and must be addressed through strict enforcement of health orders in workplace settings and protection of in-person workers. Vaccine distribution prioritizing in-person essential workers will be important for reducing excess COVID mortality.”*

Inequities in Vaccine Allocation Impacting Monterey County. Monterey County has been placed at a distinct disadvantage compared to Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and San Luis Obispo counties and other counties around the state. These factors make the calculation for distribution to Monterey County patently unfair to County residents.

- **Multi-County Entities (MCEs).** Residents of counties with MCEs, such as those listed above, benefit from an influx of vaccines through MCEs (e.g. Kaiser, Common Spirit/Dignity, Sutter, etc.) **and** from the county’s allocation. While Monterey County only gets an allocation after the MCE cut has been taken off the top at the state level.
- **Allocations to State Prisons.** The same is true for allocations to our State Prison (e.g., Soledad State Prison).
- **Inequities in Population County.** Additionally, because the County’s seasonal agricultural workers are not included in the County’s population, there is no allocation for the estimated 35,000+ seasonal workers which migrate to the County starting in March.

Request for Special Allocation of Vaccine for Agricultural Workers. Monterey County is requesting a special allocation of vaccine for agricultural workers. The County, our hospital and health partners, and industry leaders from agriculture, hospitality and education all agree that it is imperative that we vaccinate the most at-risk for exposure who are our valued farmworkers, quickly and safely, for the wellbeing of the entire community.

Previously, the County requested that farmworkers be prioritized for receiving the COVID-19 vaccination in order to adequately keep our farmworkers safe. While this community was included in Phase 1B of the State’s initial vaccination plan, and the State is currently in that Phase, the County is not receiving an adequate amount of vaccine to quickly and effectively vaccinate this population. We request the State’s immediate assistance to supply vaccines for the current agricultural workforce population, and for the additional influx of migrant agricultural workers coming to our community starting in the next few weeks.

Data and Transparency. The County requests more transparency in the number of vaccine allocations per county to ensure we receive our fair and equitable share. It is important that the state and local health departments have a clear line of sight as to what is being allocated, received, and administered statewide so that we can identify when there are data inconsistencies and/or vaccine is not being administered in a timely manner. This will allow further investigation and identification of the challenges and will allow for more improvement of the system.

In addition, timely and accurate data supports local health departments in making key decisions at the local level. For example, because of delays with the federal pharmacy partnership, many long-term care and congregate living facilities have asked local health departments to step in and vaccinate their staff and residents. However, local health departments have no line of site as to the progress being made by CVS/Walgreens and/or how much vaccine is being distributed in their jurisdictions. In addition, multi-county entities (MCEs) have requested additional vaccine from local health departments and again, due to a lack of data transparency, it is difficult to assess whether they are being provided enough vaccine through the MCE process or whether the MCE’s allocation

process needs to be reevaluated. Prisons are also receiving vaccines that are counted as part of the overall County share of doses.

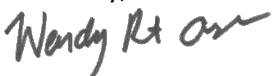
Monterey County is Ready with Plans, Capacity and Partnerships. The County stands ready to partner with the State to assist in the distribution and administration of the COVID-19 vaccine. We have detailed plans in place ([Monterey County Health Department Strategy for Implementing California's COVID-19 Vaccination Plan](#)) to achieve this including strong partnerships with local entities, hospitals and health care providers, large employers (e.g., The Pebble Beach Company) – and specifically in the agriculture community with the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, D'Arrigo and Taylor Farms. All of which are ready to stand-up vaccination sites prioritizing those with occupational risk exposure and residing in vulnerable communities as determined by the California Healthy Places Index. The County's plan can be easily scaled as we receive larger amounts of vaccine. Additionally, we request state and federal support to scale up mass vaccination sites, as have been coordinated in other areas of the State.

Local Support. The County has received overwhelming local support from our cities, hospitality industry, health care partners, and education community to assist the agriculture community as quickly and efficiently as possible. The Monterey County Board of Supervisors recently received letters from the Monterey County Hospitality Association, as well as from the Mayors of Carmel-by-the-Sea, Del Rey Oaks, Marina, Monterey, Pacific Grove, Salinas, Sand City, and Seaside urging COVID-19 testing and vaccinations for the agriculture community.

Ready to Partner with the State. The County stands ready to partner with the State and other local entities to administer COVID-19 vaccines, but in order to do so, we need 1) an adequate vaccine supply; 2) an equitable distribution process across the state; 3) data and transparency about vaccine distributions; and 4) vaccine prioritization for the agricultural workforce.

On behalf of the County of Monterey, we appreciate your consideration of our requests and look forward to working together to keep our communities safe. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Senior Policy Advisor, Ashley Walker of Nossaman LLP at 916-442-8888.

Sincerely,



Wendy Root Askew
Chair, Board of Supervisors

CC: Hon. Anna Caballero, 12th Senate District
Hon. John Laird, 17th Senate District
Hon. Robert Rivas, 30th Assembly District
Hon. Mark Stone, 29th Assembly District
California State Association of Counties (CSAC)
Rural Counties Representative of California (RCRC)



**UFW
FOUNDATION**



January 16, 2021

Edward Moreno, MD, MPH
Monterey County Health Officer
1270 Natividad Road
Salinas, CA 93906

Dear Dr. Moreno:

As facilitators and messengers trusted by farm workers, we—the United Farm Workers, UFW Foundation and Monterey Mushrooms®—propose collaborating with you in coordinating mobile vaccination efforts that Dr. Walter Newman and Stanford University medical students are prepared to help provide agricultural workers at their job sites. We would start at the large unionized Monterey Mushrooms® facility in Watsonville and then expand the outreach to other farm workers laboring in Santa Cruz, Santa Clara and Monterey counties. Notably, Dr. Newman's flu vaccination efforts are featured by the Center for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/resource-center/partners/success-stories/success-stanford-flu-crew.htm>.

Recently, the California Department of Public Health recommended state and local health authorities prioritize farm workers for COVID-19 vaccinations under the 1B phase, Tier 1 for vaccine distribution, which would put farm workers high on the preference list. While making final distribution decisions you must ensure farm workers remain at the top of the list of those who will get the next round of novel coronavirus vaccines.

Some California county health officials have cited potential challenges in vaccinating farm workers who are often seasonal and transient. Farm workers' mobility doesn't mean they can escape the perils of the virus. They regularly live in overcrowded, substandard and unsanitary conditions, commonly in multifamily households. They carpool to work packed into vehicles out of necessity and as a result of how poorly they are paid. Workers frequently toil shoulder to shoulder in fields or packinghouses. Even when social distancing is observed at workplaces, they often can't avoid sharing close spaces.

Not only should the county follow state guidelines by prioritizing agricultural workers for vaccine distribution, they must also provide factual, scientific information about vaccines in the languages farm workers speak. Farm workers' insecurities and skepticism over vaccine costs, side effects and disclosure of their personal information must be addressed, especially since at least half are undocumented. Especially effective in delivering this information and these assurances are the UFW, UFW Foundation and employers such as Monterey Mushrooms®.

Even before COVID struck, farm workers were among the most vulnerable employees in America. As the nation went into lock down and many Americans sheltered and were able to work at home, farm workers—officially classified as essential by federal, state and local governments—continued going to work. Now, due to multiple effects from the pandemic, farm workers who are overwhelmingly Latino are being disproportionately devastated by the virus, with alarming and growing numbers of infections and deaths.

The threats farm working communities face from COVID-19 are getting worse. Not providing vaccines to vulnerable farm workers due to logistical challenges is unacceptable. In order to help address some of these challenges, we are ready to support the local vaccination administration through a mobile strategy and hope that the county health department will provide vaccines to this collaboration as soon as Phase 1B commences.

Please join us in this crucial collaboration. Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Sincerely yours,



Teresa Romero
President, United Farm Workers



Diana Tellefson Torres
Executive Director, UFW Foundation
Member, California Community Vaccination Advisory Committee



Shah Kazemi
CEO, Monterey Mushrooms



Dr. Walter Newman
Consulting Medical Director, Robert F. Kennedy Medical Plan

Cc: Senator John Laird, District 17
Cc: Assemblymember Mark Stone, District 29
Cc: Assemblymember Robert Rivas, District 30
Cc: Monterey County Supervisor Luis Alejo, District 1



January 14, 2021

Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Vaccinations for farmworkers: Pilot Project

Dear Governor Newsom:

I write to urge your administration to authorize a pilot project, to develop and implement a vaccination strategy for the farmworker community in key geographical areas of the State. I write with experience as a former state agency director and in concert with five legislative colleagues: Senators Melissa Hurtado and Ben Hueso, and Assembly Members Robert Rivas, Eduardo Garcia, and Jim Frazier.

The scientific and medical consensus to control the rampant COVID pandemic is to vaccinate as many people as fast as possible. We know the logistics are daunting, which is why we propose a pilot project partnership in select farmworker communities that are the most vulnerable and most likely to communicate infection unknowingly.

Unique factors affect vaccinating the farmworkers community within the current structures available. The constant demonizing of immigrants by President Trump has intensified fear and suspicion among farmworkers, which has highlighted the association between government and ICE, rather than government and health care. Another barrier to vaccinating this population is the cultural and language diversity among them, which affects outreach, testing, and vaccinations in this largely rural population. Additionally, dense often-substandard housing precludes the option to quarantine for those testing positive, making timely vaccinations all the more vital.

Farmworkers are the fulcrum of the food chain, ravaged by COVID-19 with no available replacement labor pool. Therefore, we ask for an executive order authorizing a pilot project through state and private partnership in the following locations:

Parlier, San Joaquin, Arvin, Los Baños, Soledad, Coachella and its unincorporated areas, Brawley, Calexico and El Centro, chosen for their sociocultural challenges and transmission rates. We as Legislators would partner with Administration staff and the California Retailers, to use pharmacies to deliver the vaccination. Pharmacies have the public's trust, already give influenza shots, and have the best logistical infrastructure to deliver vaccines in these rural locations. Stationary locations could also be utilized, such as religious and community locations, as well as mobile clinics, which can be set up next to agricultural jobsites to offer convenient and secure access to the vaccine.

Together, we would plan an inoculation delivery system for each city. As your administration "certifies" other suitable professionals, we can immediately integrate them into this deliver system.

If the pilot proves effective, it would be scalable for adaption in regions throughout the state. However, given what we know about our constituencies, this pilot is the best means to vaccinate thousands of the most at-risk farmworkers, quickly and safely. All Californians are pandemic weary and in need of hope and relief. We fervently believe this pilot partnership will help accomplish those ends.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you are amendable to assisting in making this pilot project a reality, or should you have any questions, please feel free to reach me or my Chief of Staff, Aracely Campa Ramirez, at 916-508-7115, or Aracely.Campa@sen.ca.gov.

Respectfully,



Anna M. Caballero
Senator, 12th District



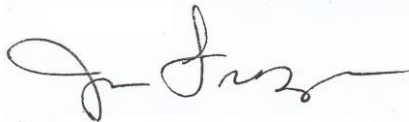
Melissa Hurtado
Senator, 14th District



Ben Hueso
Senator, 40th District



Robert Rivas
Assemblymember, 30th District



Jim Frazier
Assemblymember, 11th District



Eduardo Garcia
Assemblymember, 56th District

cc: Tam Ma, Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor Newsom
Tomas J. Aragon, Director, Department of Public Health
Monica Wagoner, Leg and Gov. Affairs, Department of Public Health
Tricia N. Blocher, Deputy Director, Emergency Preparedness Office, CA DPH