



From the Director

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Strong Protections For California Farmworkers.

Farming is a noble profession, but it can also be a dangerous one. I know that from personal experience. Today, as one of California's regulators of pesticides, I can tell you that, regardless of what is happening on the national level, California is more dedicated than ever to the protection of human life and our environment. As a former farmer, I know that our protective rules and regulations are not always easy to follow. But I am old enough to remember what life was like before the commitment to protecting health and the environment were part of the rules of engaging in farming. Take my word for it—we never want to return to those days.

California leads the nation in agricultural production and in the effort to make farmwork as safe as possible. As the nation's leading fruit and vegetable producer, California's farming is labor intensive. According to a University of California study, about 829,000 people work the fields throughout a given year. Some of those workers are tractor drivers, some are pesticide applicators. But the majority of them are fieldworkers. They manually plant, cultivate and harvest vegetables, fruits, nuts and field crops. The operative word is "manually." It can be hard physical work that sometimes includes exposure to repetitive motion, hazardous equipment and, yes, pesticides.

Part of the role of the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) is to create safer working conditions for farm workers who may come into contact with pesticides. No other state nor for that matter, any other nation has as robust a regulatory program as California. My department has built an incredible team of regulatory scientists and enforcement specialists and provides funding and support to over 300 biologists throughout the County Agricultural Commissioner's system. In the decades since I engaged in farm work as a young man, there has been remarkable progress in the safety of agricultural pesticide use in California.

Unfortunately, on the national level, progress has been slower.

In 2015, the EPA updated the Agricultural Worker Protection Standard (WPS) regulation, which had not been updated since the early '90s. However, the current administration is considering revising and rolling back some of the 2015 protections including the requirements for minimum ages, designated representatives, and application-exclusion zones.

That is not the case in California. I'm proud to say that, once more, we are leading the way in this arena.

Not only did DPR adopt the updated 2015 protections for workers, but, in some cases, our rules and regulations give additional protections to farmworkers. This commitment, backed by resources, is shared by our County Agricultural Commissioners and their staffs, and, of course, many farmers. As the experts at the local level, the County Agricultural Commissioners are a key component to creating safe working conditions for all farmworkers.

I recognize there are differing views about pesticide usage in California. However, a primary responsibility of government includes ensuring a reliable food supply and protecting the safety of workers. These depend upon effective pest management, and pesticides are part of that equation. This means we will continue to ensure that farmworkers in California have some of the strongest protections in the country.

For more information, contact DPR Newseditor@cdpr.ca.gov

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