

COUNTY OF MENDOCINO

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Angela J. Godwin, Agricultural Commissioner and Sealer of Weights & Measures
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CEO REPORT SUBMISSION

September 2026

Ag Pass Program – Ensuring Access for Essential Agricultural Operations

The Mendocino County Restricted Area Access Agriculture Pass (“Ag Pass”) Program continues to serve as a critical tool for commercial operations involving agriculture (including cannabis), livestock (including beehives), and boarding for non-livestock animals (e.g. kennels, stables, and rescue shelters). Developed in partnership with the Office of Emergency Services, Sheriff’s Office, Cannabis Department, and Animal Care Services, the program enables qualified applicants to access restricted evacuation areas during or following fires, storms, floods, earthquakes, or other disasters to perform essential and urgent agricultural activities such as irrigating, harvesting, administering veterinary care, feeding, watering, or relocating animals, and providing specialized support and information to emergency response personnel.

Eligible operators are encouraged to apply or renew their Ag Pass credentials in advance of the fire and flood seasons, or any other potential emergencies, for all evacuation zones they operate in. Applications for Ag Pass require a commercial agriculture verification document (such as a Pesticide Operator-ID, business license or registration, or USDA registered livestock brands) as well as a government-issued photo ID. Up-to-date information and application forms are available on the Department of Agriculture website. Maintaining up-to-date and valid Ag Passes strengthens countywide disaster resilience and supports the continuity of Mendocino’s agricultural economy.

Pesticide Licenses and Certificates

Fall is on the horizon, which means it is time for pesticide license renewal. Private Applicator Certificates (PACs) for operators with last names beginning R–Z will expire on December 31, 2026. Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) cardholders with last names beginning A–L will also expire on December 31, 2026. Ahead of these expirations, ensure you have completed the required continuing education hours needed for renewal. You can look up your current accruals and license status by entering your license number on the DPR website. If you still need to take the revised exam, contact the Mendocino County Department of Agriculture to schedule an exam date.

Best Practices for Addressing Neglected and Abandoned Vineyards and other Agricultural Sites

Early Harvest Creates Opportunity for Proactive Care

This year, the harvest across Mendocino County’s approximately 15,000 acres of vineyards is proceeding earlier than usual, giving growers and landowners a critical headstart to assess vineyard conditions, implement post-harvest cultural practices, and plan strategies for the coming season. Implementing well-timed pruning, early weed control, frequent mowing, and continuous pest monitoring serves as a critical defense for vineyard health. These interventions decrease wildfire fuel load; reduce the incidence of diseases, such as powdery mildew and vine rot; and limit insect vectors, such as the Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter (GWSS), which can transmit Pierce’s Disease.

Department Approach to Neglected and Abandoned Vineyards

Neglected or Abandoned Vineyard sites can create fire hazards and serve as reservoirs for pests and pathogens that threaten the surrounding agricultural community with devastating blights. The Department follows an education- and cooperation-first protocol, modified from established practices in peer viticultural counties. Neglected or abandoned agricultural sites come to our attention through

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trapping, routine surveillance, reports from neighboring growers, and GIS review of parcels lacking active permit boundaries.

When a neglected or abandoned site is identified, department staff document conditions, research ownership (often involving foreign LLCs, trusts, probate, or bank ownership), conduct site visits, and initiate direct outreach. Preferred outcomes prioritize voluntary, written mitigation plans and timelines. Mitigation efforts may include pruning, mowing, targeted pesticide applications, mothballing, or complete vineyard removal. To assist owners unable to perform the mitigation work themselves, the Department maintains referral lists of qualified Farm Labor Contractors (FLC) and Pest Control Businesses (PCB).

Formal public nuisance designation and abatement under Food and Agricultural Code §§ 5551, 5553, and 5554 remain a last resort. These formal enforcement processes are resource-intensive, require County Counsel involvement, and can take months or years to resolve. Accordingly, the Department evaluates each neglected or abandoned agricultural site individually and allocates limited staff resources based on the degree of neglect, documented pests or diseases, and proximity to neighboring agricultural operations. AB 732 provides additional authority to administer civil penalties, which can support compliance efforts when voluntary measures fail to protect the broader agricultural neighborhood.

These program efforts align directly with Board direction provided in May 2026 and supports the following Strategic Plan priorities:

- *Thriving Economy*: Protecting the winegrape and agritourism sectors that contribute significantly to local economic value.
- *Prepared and Resilient County*: Reducing wildfire risk and ensuring agricultural continuity during emergencies.
- *Responsible Stewardship of Natural Resources*: Safeguarding public wildlands and native flora from biological blights originating on unmanaged agricultural lands.

Call to Action for Growers and Landowners

As this year's winegrape harvest comes to an early close, now is the optimal time to inspect vineyards, address deferred maintenance, and develop management or mothballing plans for blocks that will not be actively farmed next season. Property owners facing challenges with resources or planning are encouraged to contact the Mendocino County Department of Agriculture to discuss available options and compliance solutions. Taking early, voluntary action protects neighboring operations, reduces the need for formal enforcement, and helps sustain Mendocino County's reputation as one of California's premier and most ecologically diverse wine regions.

Respectfully submitted,

Angela J. Godwin

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