CEO REPORT SUBMISSION

Agriculture, Weights & Measures October 2026

The Mendocino County Department of Agriculture plays an important role in protecting the County's agricultural resources, supporting local growers and agricultural businesses, and promoting safe and resilient agricultural operations. This month's report highlights several ongoing efforts, including emergency access through the Ag Pass Program, pesticide license and certificate renewals, and proactive strategies for addressing neglected and abandoned agricultural properties. Together, these efforts support the continuity of agricultural operations, reduce potential wildfire and pest-related risks, and contribute to the long-term health and sustainability of Mendocino County's agricultural economy.

Ag Pass Program — Access for Essential Agricultural Operations

The Restricted Area Access Agriculture Pass ("Ag Pass") Program continues to serve commercial agricultural operations (including cannabis), livestock operations (including beehives), and facilities that board non-livestock animals, such as kennels, stables, and rescue shelters. Developed with the Office of Emergency Services, Sheriff's Office, Cannabis Department, and Animal Care Services, the program allows qualified applicants to enter restricted evacuation areas during or after fires, storms, floods, earthquakes, or other disasters to irrigate, harvest, provide veterinary care, feed, water, or relocate animals, and to give specialized support to emergency responders.

Eligible operators are encouraged to apply or renew now ahead of the remainder of fire season and the winter storm and flood season, for every evacuation zone in which they operate. Applications require a commercial agriculture verification document — a Pesticide Operator ID, business license or registration, or USDA-registered livestock brand — and a government-issued photo ID. Forms are available on the Department of Agriculture website. For assistance, contact Liz McKeon at (707) 234-6811 or mckeone@mendocinocounty.gov.

Pesticide Licenses and Certificates

Private Applicator Certificates for operators with last names beginning R–Z, and Department of Pesticide Regulation licenses for cardholders with last names beginning A–L, expire December 31, 2026. Certificate and license holders should confirm their continuing education hours and license status on the DPR website by entering their license number. Anyone who still needs to take the revised exam should contact the Department at (707) 234-6830 or agcomm@mendocinocounty.gov to schedule a date.

Neglected and Abandoned Vineyards and Other Agricultural Sites

Early harvest, early care. Harvest across Mendocino County's approximately 15,000 acres of vineyards is finishing earlier than usual. That earlier close is the best window to assess conditions and complete post-harvest pruning, early weed control, frequent mowing, and pest monitoring. These practices lower wildfire fuel load, reduce powdery mildew and vine rot, and limit insect vectors such as the glassy-winged sharpshooter, which can transmit Pierce's disease.

Department approach. Neglected or abandoned sites can become fire hazards and reservoirs for pests and pathogens that threaten neighboring operations. The Department follows an education- and cooperation-first protocol, adapted from peer viticultural counties. Sites come to our attention through trapping, routine surveillance, reports from neighboring growers, and GIS review of parcels lacking active permit boundaries. Staff document conditions, research ownership—which may involve foreign LLCs, trusts, probate proceedings, or bank ownership—conduct site visits, and seek a voluntary written mitigation plan and timeline. Mitigation may include pruning, mowing, targeted pesticide applications, mothballing, or vineyard removal. Referral lists of qualified Farm Labor Contractors and Pest Control Businesses are available for owners who cannot do the work themselves.

Formal public-nuisance designation and abatement under Food and Agricultural Code sections 5551, 5553, and 5554 remain a last resort. AB 732 provides additional authority to assess civil penalties when voluntary measures fail to protect the surrounding agricultural neighborhood.

This work follows Board direction from May 2026 and supports these Strategic Plan priorities:

- **Thriving Economy** — protecting the winegrape and agritourism sectors.
- **Prepared and Resilient County** — reducing wildfire risk and supporting agricultural continuity in emergencies.
- **Responsible Stewardship of Natural Resources** — limiting biological threats to public wildlands and native flora from unmanaged agricultural land.

Call to action. With harvest closing early, now is the time to inspect vineyards, address deferred maintenance, and prepare management or mothballing plans for blocks that will not be actively farmed next season. Property owners who need help with resources or planning are encouraged to contact the Department to discuss options and compliance solutions. Early voluntary action protects neighboring operations and helps sustain Mendocino County's standing as one of California's premier and most ecologically diverse wine regions.

Respectfully submitted,

Angela J. Godwin
Agricultural Commissioner and Sealer of Weights & Measures
County of Mendocino