



Deportation Efforts Generate Concern in Rural California

Border Patrol apprehension activities in January aimed at individuals with pending deportation orders have generated significant social and traditional media attention and concerns in rural California about whether immigration authorities may be focused on agricultural employees.

Initial reports in some social media channels alleged that agricultural employees were being targeted for deportation, and several reports included claims of large numbers of farm employees allegedly detained by authorities. Some social media channels claimed that nearly half of all farm employees were refusing to work.

Farm Bureau received scattered reports of employees declining to work, keeping their children home from school, or avoiding leaving their homes, but no specific verification of farms or ranches where work was significantly hampered has been found.

The California Farm Bureau issued a statement on January 30 expressing support for agricultural employee communities. Additionally, Farm Bureau's affiliated company, Farm Employers Labor Service, has published resources for agricultural employers to assist them in dealing with potential immigration worksite enforcement and to educate their employees (FELS Newsletter subscriber-exclusive content). Staff Contact: Bryan Little; blittle@cfbf.com

Climate Resilience Strategy for California Agriculture

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) is currently developing a Climate Resilience Strategy for California Agriculture. The strategy will consolidate the state's various agricultural climate actions into a single framework, providing both the status of current efforts and a roadmap for future initiatives.

The strategy is currently in the drafting phase with public input ongoing and is anticipated to be released for public comment in Summer 2025.

The Farm Bureau has submitted preliminary written comments, highlighting, among other things, its support for state-funded climate-smart agricultural programs and the need for continued investment in these initiatives. Farm Bureau staff will remain engaged in the development of this strategy and will provide additional input and recommendations to CDFA.

If you wish to submit input on what should be included in the strategy, comments can be submitted to climate@cdfa.ca.gov through February 27, 2025. Staff Contact: Richard Filgas; rfilgas@cfbf.com

Fire Hazard Severity Zone Recommendations Begin for Local Responsibility Areas

The Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) will begin issuing recommendations for the classification of Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZs) in Local Responsibility Areas (LRAs).

Background

Government Code (GC) 51178 mandates that the State Fire Marshal identify moderate, high, and very high FHSZs based on consistent statewide criteria and the expected severity of fire hazards. GC 51179 requires the State Fire Marshal to make recommendations to local agencies for their designation and adoption by ordinance.

Due to resource limitations within OSFM and the impact of recent wildfires in Los Angeles, the agency will distribute these recommendations in four phases over the next six weeks to local jurisdictions in the following areas:

1. Northern California jurisdictions (inland)
2. Northern California jurisdictions (coastal)
3. Central Valley jurisdictions
4. Southern California jurisdictions

Starting this week, OSFM will notify local jurisdictions in Northern California (inland) that may contain moderate, high, very high, or a combination of Fire Hazard Severity Zones within their boundaries. These jurisdictions will receive maps and corresponding data from OSFM's recommendations on Monday, February 10.

Per GC 51179, local agencies have 120 days to designate FHSZs by ordinance. A local agency may, at its discretion, increase the level of FHSZ identified by OSFM or include additional areas within its jurisdiction in its FHSZ ordinance. However, a local agency may not decrease the level of FHSZ identified by OSFM.

Upon adopting an ordinance designating FHSZs, a local agency must provide a copy of the ordinance to the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection within 30 days, per GC 51179(c).

Implications

It is unclear whether these designations will impact California's already fragile insurance market. However, parcels in newly designated risk areas may face non-renewals if they are not already affected. In most instances, insurers are already aware of these risks.

The new designations will also expedite enforcement of the "Zone 0" strategy, which requires homeowners in high fire severity areas to maintain an ember-resistant zone within five feet of their homes to reduce wildfire spread. This effort aligns with the Governor's recent Executive Order, which accelerates the implementation of Zone 0 regulations for structures in high-risk fire zones and the State Responsibility Area.

Additionally, the Governor has directed OSFM to release updated Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps, adding 1.4 million new acres of land to the highest fire severity tiers. This update will affect building codes and local planning requirements statewide.

Staff Contact: Peter Ansel, pansel@cfbf.com



Trade Negotiations Continue Between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico

Trade negotiations between the United States, Canada, and Mexico remain in flux as the new administration moves forward with its campaign commitments regarding tariffs. While initial expectations suggested that tariffs and retaliatory measures would take effect last Tuesday, a tentative agreement has delayed their implementation for at least the next month.

Last year alone, nearly $60 billion in agricultural exports went to Canada and Mexico, and broad tariff measures would have almost certainly led to price increases across multiple commodities and sectors.

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) issued multiple statements last week warning against such measures while also welcoming the temporary pause. In a statement, AFBF President Zippy Duvall emphasized the negative impact of tariffs on farmers and ranchers, stating: "Tariffs and tariff retaliation often hit farmers and ranchers hard, making it more difficult for them to pay their bills and grow the food America's families rely on." During President Trump's first administration, a market support program had to be created to assist producers who lost millions due to similar trade policies. Given California's heavy reliance on international markets to move its agricultural commodities, the California Farm Bureau (CAFB) has also urged caution on tariff policies that could further strain an already struggling industry.

We will continue to keep members informed as developments unfold. Contact: Matthew Viohl: mviohl@cfbf.com

BLM, USDA Forest Service Announce 2025 Grazing Fees

Federal land management agencies have announced that the federal grazing fee for 2025 will remain at $1.35 per animal unit month (AUM) for public lands administered by both the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service.

The newly calculated grazing fee will take effect on March 1, 2025, and will apply to nearly 18,000 grazing permits and leases administered by BLM and nearly 6,250 permits administered by the Forest Service.

The formula used to calculate the grazing fee was established by Congress in the 1978 Public Rangelands Improvement Act and has remained in use under a 1986 presidential executive order.

To view the BLM press release announcement on the 2025 fee, click here. For additional information, permit holders and lessees are advised to contact their local BLM or Forest Service office. Staff Contact: Erin Huston; ehuston@cfbf.com

Fix Our Forests Act Passes in the House

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the CAFB-supported legislation, the Fix Our Forests Act (H.R. 471).

The bill, which passed in a bipartisan 279-141 vote, aims to:

- Streamline and expedite the environmental review process for forest management projects
- Promote improved wildfire mitigation practices
- Limit frivolous lawsuits designed to delay critical forest projects
- Implement additional policies and programs to support rural communities

The legislation now heads to the Senate for consideration.

CAFB submitted a support letter as well. Staff Contact: Erin Huston; ehuston@cfbf.com