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Sonoma County's Ag, Wine and Health Communities Lead Cooperative Effort to Vaccinate Essential Workers

Nearly 70% of County's Estimated 12,500 Ag and Production Workers Have Been Vaccinated

SANTA ROSA, Calif. (February 24, 2021) – As efforts to vaccinate essential agricultural and production workers struggle to proceed throughout California and the nation, Sonoma County's farmers, vintners and health communities have been successfully partnering to get thousands of COVID-19 vaccination doses to these essential workers throughout the region.

Now entering its 5th week of operation, the program has already vaccinated and scheduled vaccination appointments for more than 8,300 essential workers from Sonoma County's agriculture, vineyard, food, and winery sectors. The target for essential ag and production workers receiving vaccination in Sonoma County is 12,500. The vaccination program and collaboration will continue for the foreseeable future.

"This effort in Sonoma County should be the model for the nation in how to organize and vaccinate essential ag and production workers," said Dr. Jason Cunningham, Chief Executive Officer at West County Health Centers. He added, "We have succeeded because of the tremendous collaboration throughout the community from people and organizations who share one focus to quickly and efficiently immunize our essential food and agricultural workers to reduce their risk of becoming ill."

The program is a cooperative effort involving the Sonoma County Winegrowers, the Sonoma County Vintners, the Sonoma County Farm Bureau, local community health centers including the West County Health Center, the Sonoma Valley Health Center, the Alliance Medical Center, the Alexander Valley Health Care, and the Sonoma County Medical Association. Each agricultural group has a specific responsibility: the Winegrowers work with the local winegrape farmers; the Vintners work with local wineries; and the Sonoma County Farm Bureau works with non-wine related farmers and ag processors. Farmers, vintners, and processors have been receiving regular updates from their representative organization to provide the number of people they employ, where they reside or work in the county and their transportation needs.

Each week, Community Health Centers throughout Sonoma County commit a certain number of vaccines to vaccinate essential ag and production workers against the Coronavirus pandemic. Every day, it is up to the industry partners to coordinate with the ag and production employers to organize and schedule appointments for the workers and ensure that all the vaccines are being utilized. Each of the ag partner organizations is contributing staff, providing translators,

and donating additional resources to make this effort successful. In addition, the Sonoma County Medical Association and its vast network of local volunteers dedicated two full days to vaccinating vineyard workers and wine production workers at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds, successfully administering the first doses of the COVID-19 Moderna vaccine to over 1,200 people.

Multiple vaccination sites are utilized through this collaboration in the county. The agricultural organizations coordinate weekly and, sometimes, daily with the community health centers to determine how many vaccines will be available that week and at what location. With that information, the agricultural organizations work with their ag and production partners to schedule appointments to ensure the greatest number of essential workers are vaccinated each day.

However, for any vaccination program to succeed, there is one essential element: a person's trust in the vaccine and the institutions that administer it. This model specifically relies on the partnerships among the ag and production associations and the healthcare community and the trust that employees have with their agricultural employers. In addition, agricultural organizations have conducted outreach and education to essential workers. All communication and education are offered in both Spanish and English so everyone can make informed decisions about getting vaccinated.

"We are succeeding in reaching our vaccination goal because of the outstanding coordination and trust that exist amongst all parties involved. There is a unique relationship the county trade associations have with each other, local businesses and farms and, in turn, the trust that exists between the ag employer and their employees," said Karissa Kruse, President of the Sonoma County Winegrowers. She added, "While there has been a lot of news about problems throughout the country in vaccinating essential workers, here in Sonoma County, we created a broad coalition to develop a plan that would work to ensure that our ag and production workers get vaccinated as soon as possible. This model of bringing healthcare providers together with local businesses and farms should not be used just here for this pandemic, but as a model for supporting the health of our local communities moving forward."

As witnessed throughout the United States, the logistical challenges to distributing the vaccines are enormous and complex. Adding to that in California are the continued revisions to the state's rollout plan, confusing messaging to millions of workers regarding priority vaccination groups and an undersupply of doses statewide. The result has been a mixed effort to inoculate high-risk workers employed at farms, restaurants, and grocery stores.

"From the beginning, our focus has been on creating accessible clinics at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds to support the vaccination efforts of the current eligible tier of community

members and mobilizing our volunteer network of local doctors and nurses,” said Wendy Young, Executive Director, Sonoma County Medical Association. She added, “The Sonoma County Medical Association is pleased to have been able to have an active role in vaccinating our community and partnering with the local agricultural and wine communities to vaccinate Sonoma County's essential ag and production workers in this phase. This level of collaboration is special, and we look forward to continuing this innovative partnership until all who want the vaccine have it and our community can open its doors again!”

A new study out of the University of California, San Francisco found that Latinx Californians experienced a 36% increase in mortality during the pandemic as compared to historical periods, with a 59% increase among Latinx food/agriculture workers. The state’s current vaccination Phase 1B includes people 65 and older and essential workers in education, emergency services, food, and agriculture workers as eligible for shots. In Los Angeles County and other counties in California, essential ag workers will not be eligible to get vaccinated until March 1.

“As an employer, it is my responsibility to do everything I can to protect the health and safety of my employees. I was really worried after reading and hearing the news from throughout the country of the many delays and problems in vaccinating essential workers,” said Bret Munselle, of Munselle Vineyards. He added, “But, witnessing how efficient the local collaboration has made securing appointments and providing on-site education for our employees was really impressive and a great relief to me. Everyone in Sonoma County should be proud of this partnership and its success.”

In addition to organizing the vaccine rollout for essential ag workers, the Sonoma County Vintners Foundation donated iPads and funding to each of the participating Community Health Centers to provide much needed technology for coordinating the logistics of vaccine program. The Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation also donated funding to each of the healthcare community organizations involved to help cover day-to-day expenses related to the program. The collaboration will continue and is accessible for all ag and production workers who live in Sonoma County.

To learn more about the vaccine program, contact your respective partner at:

Sonoma County Winegrowers:	https://sonomawinegrape.org/
Sonoma County Vintners:	https://sonomawine.com/
Sonoma County Farm Bureau:	https://sonomafb.org/
West County Health Centers:	https://www.wchealth.org/
Alliance Medical Center:	https://alliancemed.org/
Sonoma Valley Community Health Center:	https://svchc.org/
Alexander Valley Healthcare:	https://alexandervalleyhealthcare.org/
Sonoma County Medical Association:	http://www.nbcms.org/home.aspx

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