



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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PRESS RELEASE

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FINES ISSUED OVER 2017 PESTICIDE EXPOSURE

The County of Santa Cruz on Friday announced fines and violations over a June 2017 pesticide exposure incident that sickened numerous local farmworkers, including eight requiring professional medical care.

On the morning of June 29, 2017, a pesticide application by an unlicensed contractor drifted onto an adjacent farm, with 15 of 24 farmworker employees experiencing physical symptoms of pesticide exposure. The investigation found several violations under the Food and Agricultural Code and Title 3 of the California Code of Regulations, including but not limited to failing to perform pest control in a careful and effective manner and operating a pest control business without a license.

The County issued a \$56,000 fine against Watsonville-based Los Amigos Harvesting. It is the largest fine ever issued by the Santa Cruz County Agricultural Commissioner.

"This was a complex investigation involving dozens of interviews, medical and regulatory records and environmental testing," Agricultural Commissioner Juan Hidalgo said.

"Protecting the health and safety of farmworkers is paramount. The actions taken by the pesticide applicator that led to individuals becoming ill were careless and negligent. The fines announced today reflect how seriously we take these cases and accentuate the importance of complying with agricultural laws and regulations to protect farmworkers."

Operating at a farm owned by Garrett Farms, Los Amigos applied the pesticides Pristine Fungicide, Rally 40WSP, DiPel DF and Widespread Max. Impacted farmworkers supplied by Gonzales-based FMG Farm Contractor, Inc. were stationed on an adjacent raspberry field, which was operated by Coastal Berry - North. The investigation found the pesticides drifted onto the adjacent field, sickening workers there.

The Agricultural Commissioner also fined FMG Farm Contractor \$1,250 for failing to seek prompt medical attention on behalf of employees potentially exposed to pesticides.