

## Combining Agricultural Commissioner's Office with Weights and Measures

The County Services and Special Districts Committee investigated whether or not combining Weights and Measures with the Agricultural Commissioner's Office would be economically beneficial to the citizens of Ventura County.

### Background

Although combining Weights and Measures with the Agricultural Commissioner's Office is possible, many factors must be accomplished prior to such consolidation. During the course of this investigation, it was determined that Ventura County was one of only two of the 58 counties in the State in which Weights and Measures was separate from the Agricultural Commissioner's office. Several times in the past, the Agricultural Commissioner has requested that Weights and Measures be consolidated into the Agriculture Commissioner's Office. This has been rejected for various reasons. It became apparent during the course of this investigation that the salary of the Agricultural Inspectors was the primary reason that the two departments have not merged. Agricultural Inspectors are paid considerably less than their counterparts in Weights and Measures. Thus the issue becomes what it would cost the taxpayers of the County to provide pay parity to the Agricultural Inspectors. A brief history of previous consolidation efforts will be provided, then the bulk of this report will focus on the pay parity issue.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) is organized such that both State Agriculture and Weights and Measures are both part of a single State organization. Discussions with CDFA officials have indicated that it is more efficient if the counties are organized in a similar manner, i.e., a single organization.

The seals that are displayed on gas pumps and scales in supermarkets read *"State of California, Department of Food and Agriculture, Division of Measurement Standards, County of Ventura, Dan Riley, Director."* The seals in Ventura County mislead the public into believing that County Weights and Measures is part of County Agriculture.

In California counties, the Agricultural Commissioner and Weights and Measures are organized in one of three ways:

1. Same organization with a single Agricultural Commissioner/ Sealer of Weights and Measures, or
2. Same organization with a separate Agricultural Commissioner and a subordinate Sealer of Weights and Measures, or
3. Separate organizations with a separate Agricultural Commissioner and separate Sealer of Weights and Measures.

By far, the most common structure is the first. Several counties fall into the second category and only two counties, Ventura and Kern, fall into the third category. It has been argued by some that Agriculture and Weights and Measures are combined in most counties for one of the following two reasons:

1. The two were completely separate and independent organizations and true administrative savings were achieved through a merger, or
2. The local Board of Supervisors was dissatisfied with the operation of at least one of the departments and combined them to resolve these operational problems.

The main reason that the counties of the State are organized the way that they are is because Agriculture and Weights and Measures are combined at the State level under CDFA. The CDFA has regulatory responsibility for both functions and there is some commonality of function.

The study of consolidation of Agriculture and Weights and Measures in Ventura County goes back as far as 1987. It has been studied several times since then at the request of the Agricultural Commissioner. Some of the benefits of consolidation, as provided by the Agricultural Commissioner, are as follows:

1. Improved efficiency of both departments because of ability of cross-certification (licensing). Agricultural Inspectors are eligible to take the Weights and Measures licensing examinations because of the minimum educational requirements imposed on the Agriculture Inspectors. A Weights and Measures Inspector may take the Agriculture licensing examinations provided they have a Bachelor's Degree in agriculture or biological sciences. Many of the County Agriculture Inspectors have some of the licenses required to perform Weights and Measures functions. The Agricultural Inspectors cannot be utilized to support Weights and Measures because Weights and Measures is part of the Resource Management Agency (RMA) and outside their own department's area of responsibility.

2. Consistent with the Chief Administrative Officer's (CAO) efforts to cut costs and streamline county operations, savings would come from:
  - a. Personnel deletions (no longer applicable because funding cuts, over the past several years, has reduced staff)
  - b. Reclassifications, and
  - c. Salary adjustments.
3. Reduced overhead when facilities, equipment and support staff are shared.
4. Reduced administrative and management costs.
5. Greater efficiency due to shared work sites such as retail markets, nurseries, seed outlets and dairies.
6. Organizational structure relates more to the CDFA structure.
7. Expanded manpower pool - Agricultural Inspectors are already licensed to perform Weights and Measures inspections.
8. Elimination of two separate inspections (agriculture and weights and measures) at various fruit stands and markets.
9. Immediate strengthening of Weights and Measures function with the addition of qualified personnel from the staff of the Agricultural Commissioner's Office.

There are many obstacles to consolidating these two organizations. They include:

1. No one in the Agricultural Commissioner's Office has Sealer or Deputy Sealer papers and therefore could not act as County Sealer of Weights and Measures.
2. The current Sealer of this County has other responsibilities with Resource Management Agency. One of those responsibilities is the Code Enforcement Coordinator for RMA, which is not a function that could be transferred to the Agriculture Department. Some other division head in RMA would have to perform those duties if consolidation were to take place.
3. Inspector pay parity.

Pay parity appears to be the biggest issue. The lack of pay parity has a negative effect on recruitment, retention, and morale within the Agricultural Commissioner's Office here in Ventura County.

In 1996, Ventura County Agriculture ranked 2nd in farm earnings of the 5 coastal Southern California counties (Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego), 11th of the 58 State counties, and 14th out of 3,175 counties nationally with a total gross value of over \$851 million in agricultural products. In 1997 the gross value of agriculture in the county rose to \$942 million. The top 15 agricultural producing counties in the State are shown in Table 1.

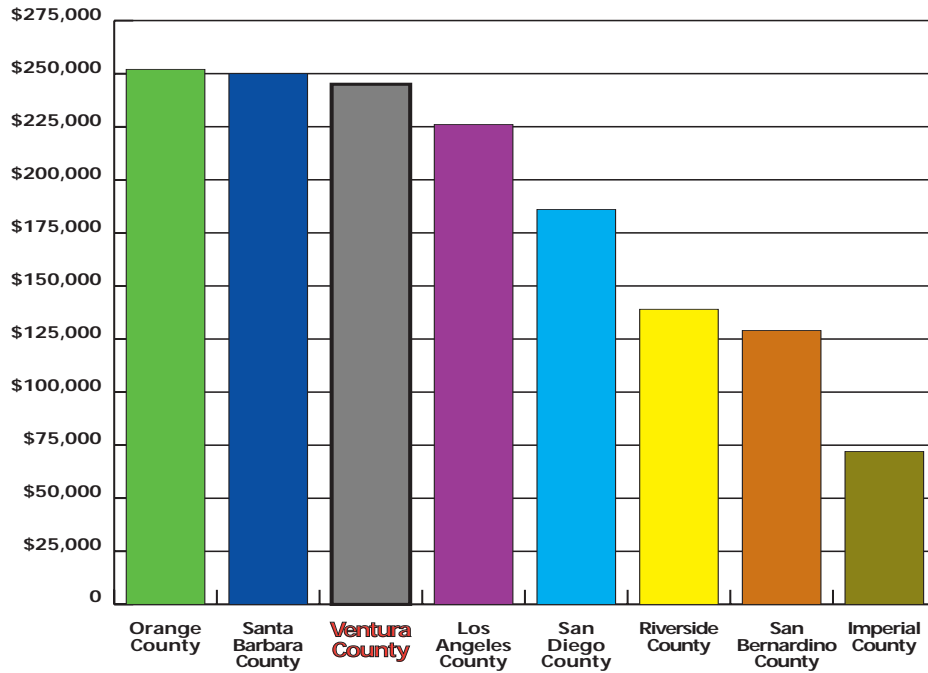
RANKING	COUNTY
1	Fresno County
2	Tulare County
3	Monterey County
4	Kern County
5	San Joaquin County
6	Merced County
7	Riverside County
8	Stanislaus County
9	San Diego County
10	Imperial County
<b>11</b>	<b>Ventura County</b>
12	Kings County
13	San Bernardino County
14	Madera County
15	Santa Barbara County

**Table 1-Top 15 Agricultural Producing Counties in California**

COUNTY	MEDIAN VALUE SINGLE FAMILY HOME	MEDIAN RENT
Orange	\$252,700	\$728
Santa Barbara	\$250,000	\$606
<b>Ventura</b>	<b>\$245,300</b>	<b>\$695</b>
Los Angeles	\$226,400	\$570
San Diego	\$186,700	\$564
Riverside	\$139,100	\$502
San Bernardino	\$129,200	\$489
Imperial	\$ 72,500	\$313

**Table 2-Median Value of a Single Family Home and Median Rent in 8 Southern California Counties.** Data from "California Cities, Towns, and Counties, Basic Data Profiles For All Municipalities and Counties" by Edith R. Horner, Information Publications (1996).

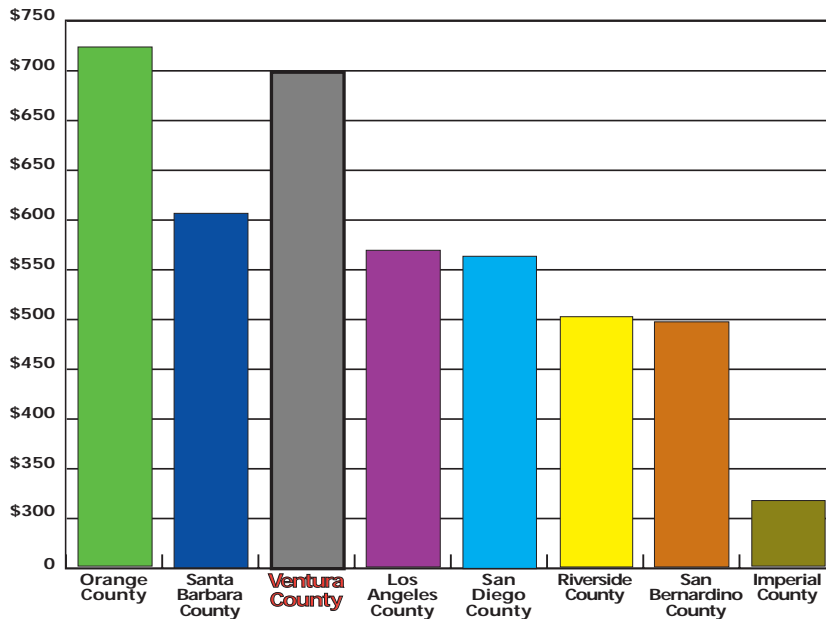
### Median Value of a Single Family Home



**Figure 1 - Median Value of a Single Family Home .**

As can be seen by looking at Figure 1, Ventura County housing costs rank 3rd of the eight counties, and Figure 2 shows that Ventura County ranks 2nd in rent costs. This data will become significant later in this report.

### Median Rent



**Figure 2- Median Rent**

POSITION TITLE	BEGINNING SALARY	ENDING SALARY	MINIMUM EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS
Agriculture Inspector I	\$22,961	\$26,550	Bachelor degree in Agriculture or Biological Science. Inspector requires one of 5 different agriculture licenses. Senior Inspector requires all 5 licenses.
Agriculture Inspector II	\$23,409	\$27,068	
Agriculture Inspector III	\$24,641	\$28,501	
Agriculture Inspector IV	\$27,778	\$27,778	
Sr Agriculture Inspector	\$27,778	\$38,825	
Weights & Measures Inspector I	\$27,890	\$39,047	Min. of AS degree in Measurement Science with a Weights & Measures option granted by a Calif. Community College & 1 yr. experience. Also 1 of 3 different licenses. Inspector III requires all 3 licenses.
Weights & Measures Inspector II	\$30,623	\$42,925	
Weights & Measures Inspector III	\$32,863	\$46,087	
Environmental Health Specialist I	\$28,649	\$40,093	BA degree in Environmental Health Science or related field & eligibility to take license exam for Environmental Health Specialist at level I. Inspector III requires 5 or more yrs. experience & State registration as Environ. Health Specialist.
Environmental Health Specialist II	\$31,650	\$44,188	
Environmental Health Specialist III	\$35,141	\$49,296	
Environmental Health Specialist IV	\$37,873	\$53,142	
Building Inspector I	\$30,220	\$42,332	Based on experience in building construction and/or inspection. One yr. experience with govt. agency as building inspector or plan examiner. Also must possess one or more ICBO inspector certificates.
Building Inspector II	\$31,698	\$44,457	
Building Inspector III	\$33,267	\$46,655	
Building Inspector IV	\$35,238	\$49,421	

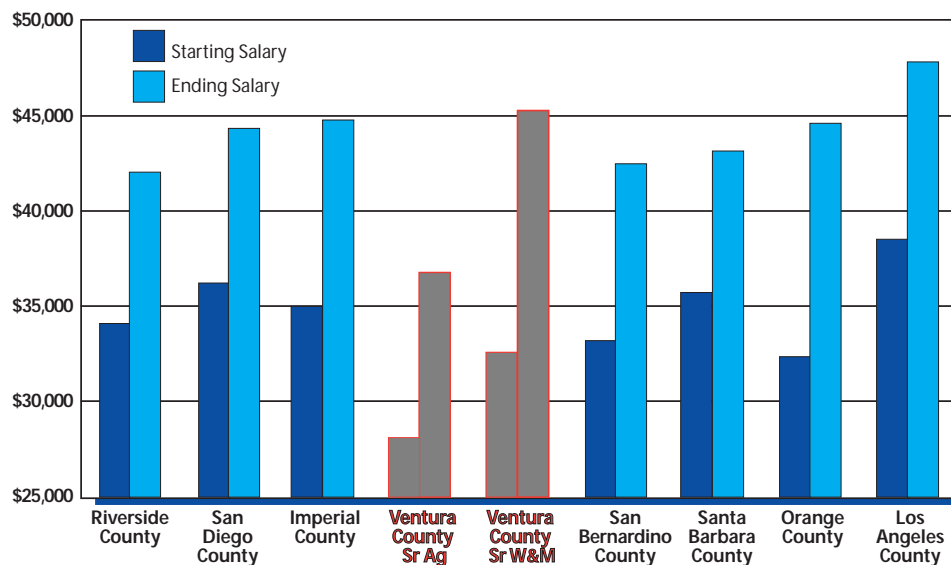
**Table 3 - Annual salary of Agricultural Inspectors, Weights and Measures Inspectors, Environmental Health Specialists, and Building Inspectors in Ventura County as of November 1998.**

Agricultural Inspectors and Environmental Health Specialists have similar educational requirements, a Bachelor's Degree. Minimum State requirement for Weights and Measures Inspector is an AS degree. There are no minimum educational requirements for Building Inspectors.

COUNTY	RANK	SEPARATE OR COMBINED	BEGINNING SALARY	ENDING SALARY
Riverside	7th	Combined	\$34,128	\$42,288
San Diego	9th	Combined	\$36,300	\$44,112
Imperial	10th	Combined	\$35,196	\$44,952
<b>Ventura</b>	<b>11th</b>	<b>Separate (Sr. Ag.)</b>	<b>\$27,780</b>	<b>\$36,984</b>
		<b>(Senior W &amp; M)</b>	<b>\$32,856</b>	<b>\$46,080</b>
San Bernardino	13th	Combined	\$33,276	\$42,516
Santa Barbara	15th	Combined	\$35,952	\$43,896
Orange	25th	Combined	\$32,424	\$44,556
Los Angeles	27th	Combined	\$38,604	\$47,832

**Table 4 - A comparison of annual salaries of Senior Agriculture Inspectors and Senior Weights & Measures Inspectors of 8 Southern California counties ranked in order of the value of agriculture production**

### Salaries of Senior Agriculture/Weights & Measures Inspectors



**Figure 3 - Comparison of Salary Range of Senior Agriculture/Weights and Measures Inspectors**

Note that in every County except Ventura, Senior Agricultural Inspectors and Senior Weights and Measures Inspectors receive the same pay as their functions have been combined into a single organization. In Figure 3, it can be seen that Los Angeles Senior Agriculture/Weights and Measures Inspectors are the highest paid even though they rank 27th in agriculture production in the State. Ventura County Senior Weights and Measures Inspectors are the 2nd highest paid and Ventura County Senior Agriculture Inspectors are the lowest paid of all groups. Although Figure 3 only shows the salaries for senior inspectors, the disparity in salary exists at all levels for Agricultural Inspectors.

With the median housing costs in Ventura County being very high as compared to San Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial Counties (Figure 1) and the salary of Agriculture Inspectors being so low (Figure 3), it becomes apparent why morale is low among the Agriculture Inspectors and why many of them leave to a higher paying agricultural job in another county.

The current cadre of Ventura County Agriculture Inspectors and supervisors are an aging group. Many are approaching retirement age. Entry level inspectors, for the most part, hire in, receive training to get one or more of the required licenses, and then move on to another county where either the cost of living is lower or the salaries are higher. This loss of qualified personnel due to retirements and transfers will eventually put the Agriculture Department in jeopardy of not being able to perform State and Federal mandated inspections.

The law provides for Agriculture to write up violations of Agriculture law either as a “1614” action which is a violation concerning pesticides or a “394” for structural pest control violations. The State Department of Pesticide Regulations for Agricultural Civil Penalties which is part of CDFA collects data from all counties on proposed fines levied by each county. For fiscal year 1995-1996, the latest published report currently available, dated 6/13/97, indicates that Ventura County had proposed zero dollars in the way of fines for violations. Listed below, in Table 5, are the eight Southern California counties ranked by agricultural output in the State versus the amount of proposed fines each county had in the referenced report. The lack of proposed fines for agriculture violations may mean that there have been no violations in this county, or that our agriculture inspectors don’t find or don’t care about violations, or that agricultural management is not reporting violations to the State.

COUNTY	STATE RANK OF AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION	PROPOSED FINE
Riverside	7th	\$6,800
San Diego	9th	\$12,900
Imperial	10th	\$11,900
<b>Ventura</b>	<b>11th</b>	<b>\$0</b>
San Bernardino	13th	\$12,025
Santa Barbara	15th	\$8,450
Orange	25th	\$9,200
Los Angeles	27th	\$25,300

**Table 5 - Eight Southern California counties ranked by agricultural output in the State versus the amount of proposed fines**

Table 5 above might lead one to believe that there may be some reportable violations in this county that are not being pursued.



Several interviews with agriculture people were conducted as well as tours of both of the agriculture facilities (Santa Paula headquarters and Camarillo District). Many steps must be taken before a consolidation should be considered. First, someone in the Agricultural Commissioner's Office should obtain Deputy Sealer papers. Salary adjustments would need to be made to the Agricultural Commissioner's Office to provide parity to the inspectors and to make the Ventura County Agriculture more competitive in the marketplace and more like the other Southern California counties.

## Findings

Our findings, based on research, interviews, tours and observations are as follows:

- Agriculture Inspectors in Ventura County are underpaid.
- Agricultural Commissioner's Office either does not write-up or follow-up on pesticide or structural pest control violations.
- Storage/Warehouse Facility at Santa Paula:
  - a. Personal items stored in facility (camper shell for pickup truck).
  - b. 1950 vintage wooden tank sprayer truck has no current function other than for display at fairs, parades, etc. and must be sent to maintenance twice a year.
  - c. Materials from homeless shelter currently stored in warehouse.
  - d. Warehouse very dirty and unorganized (fruit fly yeast tablets on floor).
- Camarillo District office does not have any support staff to provide for typing/filing or any other overall support to the inspectors/supervisors working out of that office.
- Camarillo District office does not have an answering machine or voice mail to receive phone calls when the inspectors and supervisors are out in the field.
- Camarillo District office does not have personal computers/printers for their inspectors/supervisors to use to prepare documents/reports, to have access to the internet to stay abreast of agricultural matters/laws, or to have e-mail accounts to communicate with County, State, or Federal officials on agricultural matters. The only working computer in the office is a dedicated computer that is connected to Purdue University to obtain USDA Federal export requirements. Their only copier is very old and has to be manually fed for each sheet to be copied.
- The Agricultural Commissioner and his deputies do not visit the Camarillo District office often enough to see what problems and concerns exist.

## Conclusions

- There is a pay disparity issue concerning Agriculture Inspectors. Ventura County Agriculture Inspectors are paid considerably less than their counterparts in Weights and Measures and less than Agriculture Inspectors in other Southern California Counties.
- This is not the right time to have Agriculture and Weights and Measures merge. Although not a recommendation for this report, perhaps, sometime in the future, an independent, unbiased committee could study the feasibility of consolidation.
- Agriculture's Camarillo District office is poorly staffed and equipped to perform its job.
- Ventura County Agriculture is very lax in their following through of reported pesticide or structural pest control violations.

## Recommendations

1. Perform thorough pay parity study, comparing Ventura County Agriculture Inspectors salary/benefits to that of other county inspectors with similar educational/experience and licensing requirements (such as Environmental Health Specialists). The parity study would include comparisons of the salary/benefits of Ventura County Agriculture Inspectors with Agriculture Inspectors of other Southern California Counties. Adjust pay accordingly. [CAO and Human Resources Department (HRD)]
2. Become more proactive to look for and follow-up on pesticide and/or structural pest control violations reported by Agriculture inspectors to assure our citizens that our agricultural products and environment are safe and conform to State laws. Ensure that any violations proceed to either a fining action or a hearing rather than letting violations sit on a desk without any action. (Agricultural Commissioner)
3. Determine shortfall in both personnel and funding needed by the Agriculture Commissioner's Office to perform State and Federal mandated agricultural inspections. Estimate/forecast when Agriculture will be unable to perform mandated functions due to vacancies and pending retirements and report findings to CAO. (Agricultural Commissioner)
4. Clean up storage/warehouse facility at Santa Paula. Contact CAL-OSHA to have them inspect facility and make appropriate recommendations. (Agricultural Commissioner)

5. Take action to have homeless shelter materials and personal items removed from storage/warehouse facility in Santa Paula. (Agricultural Commissioner)
6. Dispose of the 1950 vintage wooden tank sprayer truck currently at Santa Paula or provide justification for retaining and maintaining the truck. (Agricultural Commissioner)
7. Agricultural Commissioner's Office to supply one of their support staff or recruit for a new staff person to support the Camarillo District office to answer phones, type reports, file documents and other supporting functions. (CAO, Agricultural Commissioner, and HRD)
8. Find a way to bring the Agriculture Commissioner's District Office into the 20th Century by providing standard office equipment such as an answering machine, an automatic copy machine, and desktop computers/printers so that the inspectors/supervisors at the Camarillo District office can be more effective and efficient. Provide county licensed software, intranet/internet access, and e-mail accounts. Hand-me-down county computers is one way to get started and get some tools into the hands of those people that can put them to good use. [CAO, Agricultural Commissioner and Information Systems Department (ISD)]
9. Agricultural Commissioner and his deputies should visit their District office monthly instead of 2 or 3 times a year to communicate with their people outside of the Santa Paula office. (Agricultural Commissioner)
10. Relocate the Agriculture headquarters in Santa Paula to a location more central and accessible to the citizens and farmer/growers of the county. (CAO)

## Responses Required

Chief Administrative Officer  
(recommendations 1, 7, 8 and 10)

Human Resources Department  
(recommendations 1 and 7)

Agricultural Commissioner  
(recommendations 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9)

Information Systems Department  
(recommendation 8)