



Agenda Submittal

Agenda #: 19 **Status:** Regular Calendar
Type: Report **Department:** County Administrator
File #: 20-125 **Contact:** Chris Rogers, 784-6100
Agenda date: 2/25/2020 **Final action:** 2/25/2020
Title: Receive an update on the 2019 Solano County Farmbudsman Program activities

Governing body: Board of Supervisors

District: All

Attachments: 1. A - Farmbudsman Background, 2. B - Presentation, 3. Minute Order

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
2/25/2020	1	Board of Supervisors		

Published Notice Required? Yes ☐ No ☒

Public Hearing Required? Yes ☐ No ☒

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION:

The County Administrator's Office recommends that the Board of Supervisors receive an update on the 2019 Solano County Farmbudsman Program activities.

SUMMARY:

The beginnings of the Farmbudsman program can be traced back to a joint Economic Summit held with Yolo County in November 2011 where the concept of establishing a program to serve existing and future agriculture-related businesses to enhance the value of agriculture and decrease perceived regulatory obstacles was discussed. In 2013, the Farmbudsman program became operational in Solano County with the Board approving an agreement with the Solano Small Business Development Center to administer the program. And, on January 24, 2019, the Board approved a new management agreement with the Workforce Development Board/Solano Business Development Center (WDB/SBDC) to administer the program as the WDB of Solano County became the new host agency for the Solano SBDC.

The objective of the Solano County Farmbudsman Program is to provide consulting or training services to farmers, ranchers and agriculture-related businesses located in, or that will be located in Solano County, to facilitate and expedite the development of promising value-added agriculture projects, to provide regulatory support and advise in complying with the regulatory process, which includes activities related to preserving and enhancing agriculture as a viable industry for its cultural, environmental and economic benefit. Sarah Hawkins is the current Farmbudsman. She will provide the Board with an update on 2019 Farmbudsman program activities, and joining Sarah is Tim Murrill, Director for the Solano Business Development Center.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Funding for this program is included in the County Promotion Department's FY2019/20 Adopted Budget. There is no additional impact the General Fund to receive this report. The current agreement with the WDB/SBDC expires on June 30, 2020.

DISCUSSION:

The County has contracted with the Small Business Development Center since 2013 to administer the Farmbudsman program. Solano Community College first hosted the SBDC in Solano County, but ceased in June 2017. The County then entered into an agreement in July 2017 with Humboldt State University Sponsored Programs Foundation's Northern California (Norcal) SBDC, as a lead SBDC center hosted by Humboldt State University, assumed the administration of the SBDC in Solano County until a new agency could be located as a host.

In August 2018, Norcal SBDC released a solicitation seeking an eligible organization to host the SBDC in Solano County, and in December 2018, the Workforce Development Board (WDB) was awarded the contract. The Farmbudsman position transitioned to the WDB as the new host agency for the Solano SBDC on January 24, 2019. And, on June 11, 2019, the Board approved a new contract with WDB/SBDC to continue administering the Farmbudsman Program through June 30, 2020.

The primary objective of the Farmbudsman program is to facilitate and expedite the development of promising value-added agricultural projects. Measures of success include interactions with clients, and the development and delivery of agriculture-related projects that increase the value and contribution of agriculture in Solano County.

Since the 2018 update to the Board in 2019, the Farmbudsman has continued to work with and develop relationships with the farming and associated community in Solano County. In 2019, the Farmbudsman visited over 20 farms, which both provided some learning opportunities about challenges to specific types of farming, as well as getting to see some very innovative techniques farms are practicing using what would otherwise be considered waste to enhance or even power their farms. Tariffs continue to have ripple effects on farms whether they export or not, as does consolidation of industries, such as the nursery business. Shifts in climate and markets are also affecting long-term crops, such as orchards, where the lead time for production is great, and production is dependent on "normal" rain and cold-hour patterns. Some markets, such as for apples, are becoming trendier, with "older" varieties falling out of favor for newer, patented varieties that have more marketing dollars behind them, such as Cosmic Crisp.

The Farmbudsman Program has continued to work with several long-term clients that take time due to the nature of their product. One of the clients highlighted in 2018 as planning on establishing a headquarters in Solano county, did in fact, establish a headquarters here, and has hired on several staff with the expectation of becoming profitable within the next few months. The Farmbudsman has worked with a microgreens business, an event venue, a row crop farm, and a farm product-based skin care business. As with previous years, the greatest challenge is finding affordable locations to start an agricultural venture, which is not being helped by the current price of land at or above market value in parts of the county, as well as finding the best way to distribute those products once they are ready for buyers. In addition to clients, the Farmbudsman helped with the selection of a new UC sheep and goat specialist for the State that will be housed locally and advised beginning farmers on a variety of animal husbandry and resource questions, sheep shearing, llama care, bee keeping, vineyards, and the creation of hedgerows for beneficial insects and erosion control. In 2019, six full time and 15 part time jobs were created, five business starts, increased sales of \$93,000, and over \$821,000 in capital investments.

In 2019, the Agricultural Advisory Committee and U.C. Cooperative Extension conducted a spring agricultural tour focused on soil, water and agriculture sustainability. The Farmbudsman participated in the planning and attended the April 30, 2019 event. The Farmbudsman continues to attend meetings of the Agricultural Advisory Committee, the Solano Farm Bureau, Sustainable Solano, the Solano Economic Development Task Force, and UC's Seed Central lecture events. In addition to these, the Farmbudsman continues to reach out to local farm-oriented organizations, such as the Solano Land Trust and the Center for Land Based Learning, as well as going to applicable UCANR events, such as the orchard-crops event at UC's Wolfskill Research

Station. In addition to these, the Farmbudsman keeps up on agricultural news through several sources, looking for information and opportunities that may be relevant or of interest to clients.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Board could choose to not receive the program update; however, this is not recommended as the update gives the Board an opportunity to learn about the impact this program is having on the agriculture community in Solano County.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

On a quarterly basis, the Farmbudsman Oversight Committee, consisting of the Solano County Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer of Weights and Measures, the Director of Resource Management, a representative from the County Administrator's Office, and a representative from the Norcal SBDC meets to review program activity and to assist the Farmbudsman in addressing client project objectives.

CAO RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION