

OP ED – AB 1871

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California is the heart of our nation's food and agricultural innovations, from popularizing farmers' markets and organic agriculture in the 1970's and 1980's to a renewed focus in recent years on fresh produce and local foods. As California goes, so goes the nation, right? With more than 800 farmers markets now operating in the Golden State, it is fair to say that California represents "ground zero" in the ever-evolving policy and operations issues that farmers' markets face in the United States.

Given this, the significance of Governor Jerry Brown signing AB 1871 into law last Friday cannot be overstated. AB 1871 is arguably the most important piece of legislation affecting California farmers' markets since they were authorized back in 1977. As many of the stories regarding AB 1871 have pointed out, this new law provides increased funding to the Farmers' Market Program of the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to help enforce regulations that protect farmers and consumers from fraud. It also requires new signage that will help educate our customers on where the crops are grown and by whom.

What most articles on the new law have missed is that in addition to the increased funding through AB 1871, CDFA now has a new and better model for how it enforces those regulations. Last spring, CDFA conducted a Cross County Enforcement Pilot Project, designed to improve how CDFA works with counties to conduct inspections. The model ensured that all farm inspections would take place no more than 48 hours after the market stall inspection was completed. This is important because, in order to effectively enforce the rules, CDFA must coordinate agricultural inspectors in the county where the market is located, as well as in the county where the farm is located. If these inspections are not conducted in a coordinated fashion, within a short time period, it becomes very difficult to prove that fraud is happening.

The pilot project was highly successful and CDFA should be applauded for its results, which showed that nearly all of the inspections were completed within the agreed upon 48-hour timeframe. These are the type of enforcement activities that market operators and farmers want. In an April 2013 report conducted by the Ecology Center as part of the development of the California Alliance of Farmers' Markets, nearly all farmers' market operators strongly agreed that enforcement strategies should focus on coordinated, timely inspections of a farm's land and its farmers' market stall. The pilot was crucial because it demonstrated what farmers' market managers and farmers have long known: that data driven, targeted, coordinated inspections work.

When AB 1871 is enacted in January, CDFA's budget is expected to quadruple to \$1.3 million. While there are no guarantees that the model put forward in the Cross County Enforcement Pilot Project will be implemented for all enforcement activities, the Pilot's results speak for themselves. With this significant influx of new dollars rolling in, CDFA will be well poised to build upon the highly successful Cross County Enforcement Pilot Project and to conduct the type of

inspections that have been shown to catch the small number of individuals who take advantage of the system.

The Alliance of California Farmers Markets believes that the successful 2014 Cross County Enforcement Pilot Project represents a new way of doing things, a way to bring integrity and a sense of balance to farmers' markets across California. We stand ready to collaborate with state and county inspectors to ensure that the state's new enforcement dollars are spent wisely and efficiently in our shared pursuit of protections that will benefit both California's hard working farmers and it's loyal farmers' market shoppers.