

WORKPLACE AND COMMUNITIES



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INTRODUCTION - SUSTAINABILITY AND WORKPLACE AND COMMUNITIES

Almond farms and handling facilities are important as workplaces and as integral parts of the community. Accordingly, their activities affect workforces, neighbors, and the greater community. Awareness of this multifaceted role leads to more sustainable, profitable businesses. Two areas of grower and handler practices are covered in this module: 1) practices for ensuring an equitable, safe, healthful and satisfying workplace; and 2) practices for effectively managing neighbor and community relationships.

The effective management of the workforce is an important element of a sustainable business. Implementing equitable policies and practices for hiring, developing, managing and rewarding employees will result in a trained, motivated and healthy workforce that helps drive business efficiency, innovation and productivity. A significant regulatory structure exists in California for many aspects relevant to the workforce and workplace. The practices advocated in this module provide the basis for understanding additional tactics that lead to a more satisfying and productive workplace, and thus, enhance the business' bottom line.

Effectively managing neighbor and community relationships is increasingly important for almond growers and handlers. The reasons include expanding human populations and shifts from urban to rural areas, a heightened public awareness about environmental effects, increasing conflicts over land and use of resources, and misunderstandings about the practices and benefits associated with almond production.

Being a good neighbor and community member is second nature for most individuals and businesses within the California almond community. Many have excellent relationships with their neighbors and strongly contribute to their communities. Nevertheless, it is smart business to proactively identify and resolve potential issues, and have procedures in place for negotiating concerns and conflicts that may occur. Recommended practices, detailed here, include ensuring that the farm or facility is orderly and attractive, altering practices (as feasible) to minimize impacts, and ensuring effective neighbor and community communication and collaboration.

Because workplace and community practices for almond farming are generally implemented at the whole-farm (not individual orchard/block) level, the practices relevant to orchards in this module should be assessed for the whole farm. Practices pertinent to almond hulling/shelling or processing facilities should be assessed at the facility level. The appropriate person(s) from your farm or facility responsible for managing the workplace and relationships with neighbors and communities should complete the assessment for this module. If your operation has a management team, it may be useful to complete the assessment together.

Workplace – Employee Staffing and Development

Staffing and recruiting

A fair, legal process for hiring and retaining talented and dedicated employees who work effectively as a team is a win-win, achieving employee satisfaction and business strategy. Having a strategic staffing, recruiting and retention plan and process helps ensure almond growing and handling operations have the optimal number of employees and skills to accomplish the business strategy. The cost for replacing an employee can exceed their annual salary when costs are totaled for recruiting a new employee, downtime, potential overtime or temporary employees, interviewing, orienting, training, etc.

When potential or current employees do not effectively speak or comprehend English; interviewing, training and other human resource interactions should be conducted in the employee's primary language or with an interpreter present.

1	How many employees were in your business? <input type="checkbox"/> 0 (Skip to question 28.) <input type="checkbox"/> 1 to 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 10 <input type="checkbox"/> 11 to 20 <input type="checkbox"/> 21 or more					
	For this farm or facility, the following practices related to employee staffing and development were used:	Not familiar with this	I haven't tried it	I have tried it	My current practice	Not applicable
EQUITABLE STAFFING						
2	A documented long-term staffing plan has been developed and updated as needed, and is based on expected farm expansion or facility growth, and sustainability* strategies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3	The average and range of compensation levels per position within the almond industry and/or by location were checked to ensure compensation packages were competitive and minimized employee attrition because of salary issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4	A standardized process for recruiting has been documented and used to meet regulations (child labor, anti-discrimination, employment eligibility, immigration status, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5	A standardized process has also been used to establish interview questions per position based on skills and competencies; exchange information about business policies, culture and job expectations; and establish an objective system to evaluate candidates.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6	Other: _____				<input type="checkbox"/>	

Resources for Staffing and Recruiting Laws and Practices

Employment Laws and Forms:
<http://www.hr.laws.com>

Antidiscrimination Guidelines for Employee Selection:
<http://www.uniformguidelines.com>

Interview Questions and Hiring Practices:
<http://www.eeoc.gov>; <http://www.dfeh.ca.gov/res/docs/publications/dfeh-161.pdf>

California Farm Labor Contractors Licenses Database:
<http://www.dir.ca.gov/databases/dlseir/farmlic.html>

Employee Orientation Programs Are Important

An employee orientation program helps ensure that new hires become familiar with the business and its policies. Some elements to include within the first week of employment (ideally first day) are listed below.

- Review of company mission, vision and values (including commitment to sustainability*)
- Overview of company organizational structure, policies and benefits
- Distribution, review and signing of employee handbook and other required documents
- Tour of operations and introductions to other employees

Orientation programs also may include the following practices.

- *Mentoring or buddy system:* Matching new employees with experienced staff can help train and assist new hires until they acclimate to the new surroundings and understand and properly perform the job requirements and their responsibilities.
- *Peer meetings:* Peer meetings allow employees hired within a similar time frame to meet with appropriate staff or managers who convey company updates and address issues and questions. Peer meetings also benefit employees and the company through improved working relationships.
- *Rotational work assignments:* Rotating new employees among jobs or departments during their first weeks or months enables them to gain a broader perspective of operations.

Employee handbooks

Based on company size and needs, employee handbooks can vary from a few stapled pages to binders or books or private online networks.

For information about handbook content, examples and legal considerations, see:

<http://www.fels.net>

<http://www.bizmanualz.com>

<http://www.hr-guide.com/>

<https://www.sba.gov/content/employee-handbooks>

<http://www.hrit.com/employee-handbook/california-employee-handbook.htm>

		Not familiar with this	I haven't tried it	I have tried it	My current practice	Not applicable
For this farm or facility, the following practices related to employee staffing and development were used:						
EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT						
7	An orientation program has been provided for new employees. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No. (Skip to question 9.)					
8	The orientation program includes an employee handbook (see educational box).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Employees were provided the opportunity to enhance their workplace knowledge, skills and competencies through in-house or external company-sponsored training or education.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
10	A process has been established and was used to train and develop employees for career advancement opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Other: _____				<input type="checkbox"/>	

Workplace – Business Culture and Staff Relations

Employee satisfaction impacts performance

Policies and practices that improve workplace relationships among employees, and between employees and management, often increase employee satisfaction and company performance.

Means to improve relationships and thus employee satisfaction include employee recognition programs. Consider implementing a program and an annual event(s) to recognize employees significantly contributing to the business via work ethic, safety performance, sustainability* practices, length of service, teamwork, community contribution, etc.

Other practices that improve employee satisfaction include team-building activities (e.g., company-sponsored trips to sporting events), and directly soliciting employee ideas for business improvements.

Consider an annual employee satisfaction survey as part of a process to evaluate and further improve employee satisfaction. Broadly share results and develop, execute and communicate progress for actions addressing the most pressing concerns.

For this farm or facility, the following practices related to business culture and staff relations were used:

		Not familiar with this	I haven't tried it	I have tried it	My current practice	Not applicable
BUSINESS CULTURE AND STAFF RELATIONS						
12	A documented process was used to evaluate and improve employee satisfaction.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
13	A documented program was used to recognize employees (e.g., safety, operational, community or environmental contributions; and/or years of service).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
14	A team-building activity was held and included all employees.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
15	A process was used to receive, evaluate, respond to and apply employee suggestions for improving company practices, the work environment and other aspects of the business.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
16	A meeting of top management was held to exchange and apply ideas for improving the quality of life for employees and their families.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
17	An employee meeting was held to review and discuss business goals and exchange ideas for revisions and improvements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
18	A documented grievance process (e.g., detailed in an employee handbook) was followed and grievances have been recorded and processed in a timely manner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
19	Other: _____				<input type="checkbox"/>	

Workplace – Employee Health and Safety

For this farm or facility, the following practices related to employee health and safety were used:

		Not familiar with this	I haven't tried it	I have tried it	My current practice	Not applicable
EMPLOYEE WELLNESS						
20	The farm or facility offered or sponsored lifestyle improvement programs (stress management, weight management, financial planning, smoking cessation, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
21	The farm or facility encouraged or provided opportunities to improve physical fitness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
22	The farm or facility offered a health care plan.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
23	The farm or facility offered health screenings, medical exams, vaccinations and flu shots on-site and/or through health care plans.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
24	Healthier food and beverage options and nutritional information were provided in on-site cafeterias and/or canteens.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25	Other: _____				<input type="checkbox"/>	

Benefits of Employee Wellness Programs

Employee health and wellness programs benefit both employees and businesses. Historically, the primary business case associated with these programs has been health care cost savings. Increasingly, employers also realize the importance of these programs for improving employee morale and productivity.

In 2015, Optum, Inc. and the National Business Group on Health surveyed 275 employers to determine their reasons for investing in employee health and wellness programs (https://www.optum.com/content/dam/optum/resources/whitePapers/Beyond_ROI_health-wellness-investment.pdf).

Top reasons based on value of investment opportunity (from highest to lowest):

- Manage/reduce disability claims
- Improve employee job satisfaction
- Impact business performance metrics and profitability
- Improve employee daily health decisions at work
- Attract or retain talented employees
- Reduce the number of sick days
- Reduce presenteeism
- Improve employee morale

Injury and illness prevention

According to law, California employers must provide a safe and healthful workplace for employees. This includes establishing, implementing and maintaining a written Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP; Title 8 [section 3203] California Code of Regulations).

IIPP elements include assignment of the responsibility for safety; systems for ensuring employee compliance with safety procedures; communication with employees and methods for involving them in safety-related activities; hazard assessment/inspection; investigations of occupational injuries, illnesses and accidents; correction of hazards; safety and health training; and recordkeeping and documentation.

For a guide and template for developing an IIPP for agriculture, and other occupational safety and health information, see <https://www.dir.ca.gov/chswc/WOSHTEP/iipp/>.

For more information about tools, training requirements and resources related to an IIPP, see the Cal/OSHA Safety & Health website: <https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/etools/09-031/index.htm>.

For this farm or facility, the following practices related to employee health and safety were used:

		Not familiar with this	I haven't tried it	I have tried it	My current practice	Not applicable
SAFETY TRAINING (EMPLOYEES)						
26	Safety training was done according to Cal/OSHA regulations, i.e., for new employees, as well as for employees beginning new job assignments or using new processes, procedures, substances or equipment that pose hazards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
27	Employee participation in safety training was recorded, tracked and reviewed to ensure requirements were met, which enhances employee safety, satisfaction and performance, and limits business risk.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
SAFETY TRAINING (NON-EMPLOYEES) AND PERFORMANCE						
28	If labor was contracted, appropriate verification was completed to ensure that the labor company trained its workers according to regulations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29	If a service provider(s) was contracted, appropriate verification was completed to ensure that the service provider(s) trained its workers according to regulations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30	Safety failure statistics such as frequencies of procedural violations, equipment malfunctions and accidents have been documented, tracked and retained for a minimum of two years; and causes for safety failures were determined and documented, and appropriate actions were taken to prevent future incidents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31	Management reviewed published information about workplace safety to identify opportunities to improve safety for employees and/or contracted workers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32	Other: _____				<input type="checkbox"/>	

Communities – Neighbor and Community Relations

For this farm or facility, the following practices were used to manage neighbor and community relationships:

		Not familiar with this	I haven't tried it	I have tried it	My current practice	Not applicable
NEIGHBOR AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS						
33	The following existing and potential neighbor and community issues were evaluated on an ongoing basis and appropriate actions were taken:					
a	pesticide and other chemical use (e.g., timing applications to minimize drift) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
b	dust (e.g., upgrading equipment to capture dust or timing harvest to minimize dust creation) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
c	traffic (e.g., not blocking roads) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
d	noise (e.g., avoiding early morning or late evening operations) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
e	light (e.g., ensuring outside lighting is diffused) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
f	erosion (e.g., minimizing runoff) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
g	odor (e.g., minimizing or eliminating sources) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
h	Other: _____					
34	Practices for maintaining the property's appearance were used to ensure goodwill and prevent/minimize neighbor and community concerns and complaints.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
35	Production practices were altered as needed to prevent/minimize neighbor concerns and complaints.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
36	Neighbors were provided with appropriate business contact information for questions, comments or concerns.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Appearance matters

“The appearance of your farm plays an important role in determining what neighbors and others think about you and your farm operation. Non-farmers too easily can believe the farm’s appearance is a reflection of the farmer’s professionalism, competence and concern about controlling problems. A farm that is known as a neighborhood eyesore will have less goodwill in the community and get less public sympathy if problems arise.”

From: Finding Common Ground – Good Neighbor Relations Advice and Tips from Farmers by Penn State Agricultural Research and Cooperative Extension, 2008.

Dealing with neighbor questions and concerns

Conflicts with neighbors cannot always be prevented. Having a process to receive and respond to questions and concerns by neighbors and the community is advocated. For larger organizations, it may be wise to select someone skilled in public relations and conflict resolution to handle these interactions. As part of the process, consider incorporating lessons for preventing and dealing with neighbor issues into employee safety and training programs. Ensuring that employees know how to simply and calmly respond, and to whom they should direct further correspondence can prevent problems from escalating.

For this farm or facility, the following practices were used to manage neighbor and community relationships:

		Not familiar with this	I haven't tried it	I have tried it	My current practice	Not applicable
NEIGHBOR AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS						
37	The farm or facility sought and executed friendly dialogue with neighbors, schools, surrounding businesses, etc. to maintain/improve relationships and understandings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
38	The farm or facility has hosted or participated in activities (e.g., orchard tours, open houses, seminars, public forums, service organizations and/or with news media) to educate and build trust with neighbors and the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
39	The farm or facility prepared and/or distributed written, printed or electronic information (e.g., postcards, brochures, newsletters and/or via the business website) to educate and build trust with neighbors and the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
40	A documented process has been established and appropriate employees have been trained to receive and respond to questions, comments and concerns about farm or facility operations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
41	Other: _____				<input type="checkbox"/>	

The Power of Education

Conflicts with neighbors and the community often result from misunderstandings about farming. Consider developing a factual story that responds to neighbor and community interests, describes key farming activities (what, when and why), and emphasizes the values you share about environmental quality and the welfare of workers and the community.

Invite neighbors across the fence for casual conversation, and to tell your story and show what you do. Consider hosting or participating in activities for sharing your story and building mutual trust. Also, consider preparing and distributing easy to understand educational material that highlights aspects of almond production and the sustainable practices being used. As one farmer stated about reaching out to non-agricultural neighbors, "Our worst failure will be our silence."

Communities — Support and Improvement

For this farm or facility, the following practices were used to support and improve communities:

		Not familiar with this	I haven't tried it	I have tried it	My current practice	Not applicable
SUPPORT AND IMPROVEMENT						
42	A program was in place to encourage employee contributions (money, property and/or time) to charitable organizations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
43	The farm or facility made contributions (e.g., money, products and/or time) to charitable organizations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
44	Members of the farm or facility participated in activities (boards, community organizations and programs, industry organizations, etc.) that contribute to community well-being. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No. (Skip questions 45a-i)					
45	Members of the farm or facility participated in activities that contribute to community well-being in the following areas:					
a	arts and culture <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
b	housing <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
c	industry <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
d	land/environmental planning, protection or restoration <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
e	public health and safety <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
f	school/educational <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
g	transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
h	religion/church <input type="checkbox"/> Yes. <input type="checkbox"/> No.					
i	Other: _____					
46	Other: _____				<input type="checkbox"/>	

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*Sustainable almond farming utilizes production practices that are economically viable and are based upon scientific research, common sense and a respect for the environment, neighbors and employees. The result is a plentiful, nutritious and safe food product.

**For more information,
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