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## **ORANGE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE GETS ITS FIRST DETECTION DOG FOR INSPECTION PROGRAM**

**The addition of this detection dog will greatly enhance shipment inspections that protect Orange County agricultural industry and the local environment.**

ORANGE, CA – Orange County's Agricultural Commissioner's office within OC Public Works recently added a four-legged colleague to its inspection team.

Orange County was selected as the next county in California to receive a "detection dog," which is used to protect the local agricultural industry and the environment by helping inspect incoming plant shipments. The program enhances the Agricultural Commissioner team's effectiveness at intercepting harmful plant pests coming from areas outside of Orange County – pests that could be detrimental to the county's agricultural industry and economy.

Bear, a 2-year-old male Labrador Retriever, and his handler, inspector Vanessa Ochoa, made history as the Agricultural Commissioner office's first canine team that is leading the County's new Detection Dog Team program.



"Launching our new detection dog program is a very exciting milestone and is another effective tool we have to ensure we deliver effective, industry-leading inspection services," said Jose Arriaga, Orange County Agricultural Commissioner and Sealer of Weights and Measures. "Ultimately, this program serves as a tremendous benefit for consumers."

Detection dogs are capable of detecting shipments of concealed agricultural commodities, such as nursery stock and fruit, that can be vectors for pests and diseases. With a detection dog alerting its handler to the presence of such shipments, the Agricultural Commissioner office's licensed inspectors can more thoroughly capture and screen agricultural shipments to better safeguard Orange County's agricultural industry from the threat of non-native and injurious pests of concern.

Vanessa and her new canine partner underwent an 8-week training program in Georgia, receiving their certification through the USDA National Detector Dog Training Center. Vanessa and Bear worked together to build their teamwork and skills in detecting a variety of agricultural commodity packages transported via conveyor belts, delivery trucks, airlines and postal carts.

In 2023, the Orange County Agricultural Commissioner's office inspected over 37,600 Incoming plant shipments at shipping distribution centers and plant nurseries throughout the county, issuing 364 Notice of Rejections and intercepting 209 pests. Over 580 plant shipments were also inspected and certified for export through the United States and other countries to ensure products were free of exotic pests and diseases. Agriculture continues to be a leading industry in Orange County, which on average has a production value of approximately \$90 million.



The opportunity to launch the Orange County's dog inspection team was made possible with funding from federal Farm Bill (approximately \$250K/year), in partnership with the CA Department of Food and Agriculture and CA Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association.

Orange County joins 11 other counties throughout the state that have detection dog programs, including Los Angeles, San Diego and San Bernardino Counties.

Orange County's Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer of Weights and Measures office promotes environmental quality, protects consumers and sustains business competitiveness through education, regulation and regional programs.

The Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer of Weights and Measures office is within the OC Environmental Resources service area of Orange County Public Works (OCPW). For more information about the Agricultural Commissioner's office, visit <https://ocerac.ocpublicworks.com>. For more information about OCPW, visit [www.OCPublicWorks.com](http://www.OCPublicWorks.com) or follow us on social media using #OCPublicWorks on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

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