

Catalyzing Collaboration:

- *Lessons Learned Fighting COVID-19 In Farmworker Communities*

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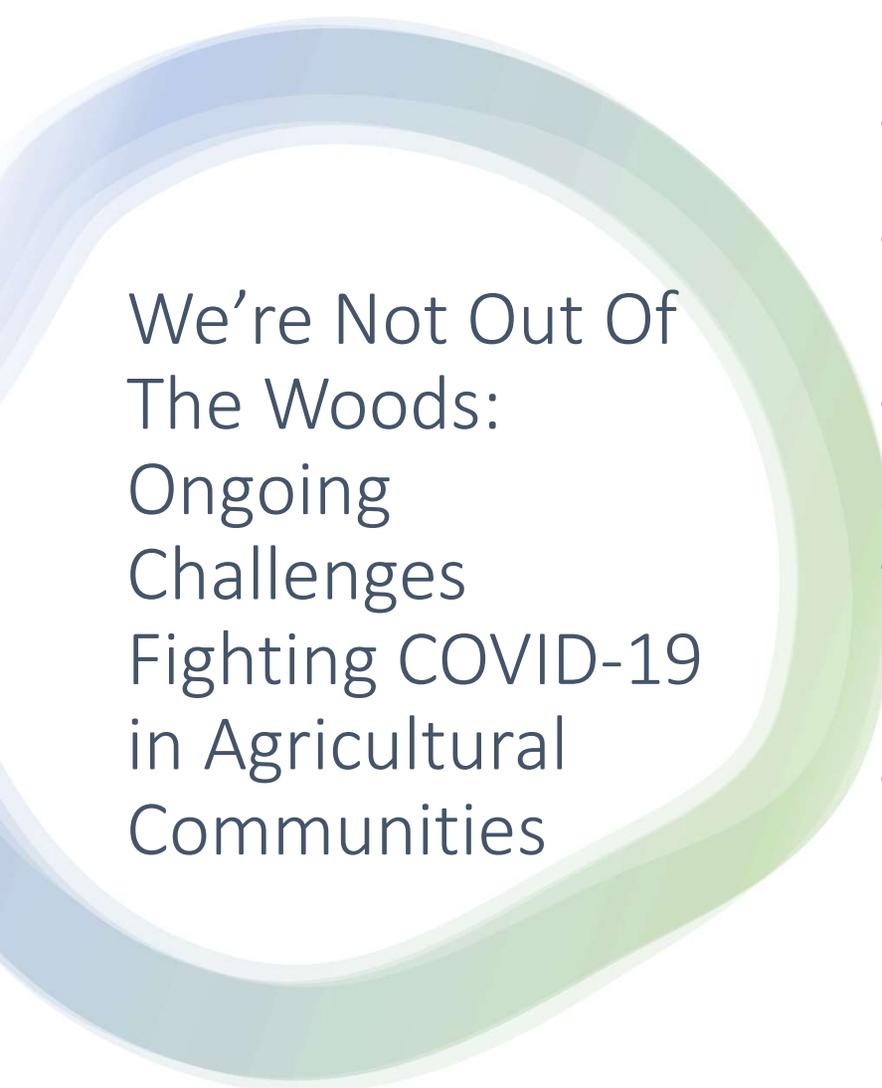
- *Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders Convening*
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Adversity Provided Opportunity For Building Local Strategic Response To The COVID-19 Crisis

- Public health system lack of preparedness meant that networks of stakeholders (agricultural employers and FW advocates who had sometimes been at odds) needed to work together to drive effective response
- Initial lack of national and state resources accelerated discussion among local stakeholders and led to collaborative practical steps and building initiatives.
- Newly-emerging problems as the pandemic spread built awareness of the value of “on the ground” observations and innovative, proactive problem-solving. Good efforts needed to be refined and were.
- Efforts to address immediate, real-world problems (e.g. quarantine/isolation for FW’s living in crowded housing, worksite vaccination) that emerged provided a better foundation for meaningful strategic action than generic “vision frameworks”

Some Specific Challenges In Responding Effectively To The COVID-19 "Community Crisis"

- Local public health systems--chronically underfunded and bureaucratically siloed in most rural areas--kept on with business-as-usual, very slow to reach out to community groups. Reporting was pro forma--not actionable. So stakeholders had to "play it by ear".
- Broad flexibility in federal funding to local government and lack of accountability for relevant outcomes resulted in diversion of \$ to pet projects with marginal utility at best (e.g. fixing up county jails, new phone systems). Hard to collaborate without transparency!
- State and local public health agencies' role was sometimes to protect the status quo (e.g. non-disclosure of information on workplace outbreaks of COVID-19) or undermined by county government (e.g. political gutting of public health officer orders)
- Even the best local public health departments needed community advocacy and partnerships to respond effectively. Where there were forward-thinking public health officials and local engagement (e.g. Ventura, Fresno, Riverside counties) response was faster, broader, and better.
- Community-based activist engagement (advocacy about key issues, monitoring unsolved problems) and broad community partnerships (provision of services, volunteer work) to move less-responsive local health departments toward what ultimately became successful collaborative responses.



We're Not Out Of The Woods: Ongoing Challenges Fighting COVID-19 in Agricultural Communities

- One-third of US farmworkers are 50+ (CDC stresses need for this age group to be “up to date” on vaccination).
- Level of boosters in agricultural counties below national levels (23% in San Joaquin Valley vs. 38% California statewide).
- Vaccination campaign messaging needs to pivot to stress protection against illness, Long COVID, and death as vaccine breakthrough increase.
- Emphasis on mitigating the economic impact of even “short” to “medium” term Long COVID will help: 3-6 months unable to work at best. Advocacy to assure safety net for undocumented workers not eligible for UI.
- The national “Test To Treat” plan needs to be adapted to work effectively in agricultural communities where more than half the adults are “high risk” and 40% lack health insurance. Paxlovid is highly effective (>80% protection against serious illness) but requires streamlined seamless pathway to treatment).

Moving Forward: Improved Vision of Community Well-Being

- COVID-19 clearly showed the pandemic needs to be understood as a “syndemic”--a multi-faceted bundle of linked problems.
- Effective response requires a “broad spectrum” community-wide network of diverse individuals and organizations working together. But this is fairly easy to build once there’s a commitment to do it.
- Collaborative endeavors always require rapid learning, innovation, and flexibility--revising initial promising approaches that turn out to not work as well as hoped.
- COVID-19 required almost light-speed response. There have been many “bumps in the road”, but the communities with broad, diverse networks have consistently done better. And the outcome data show it! (*See Appendix Slide 1*)
- Holistic vision is a necessary condition for sustaining community well-being in under-resourced agricultural communities. But it’s not enough--advocacy, exploration, and negotiation are key follow-ons.

For Funders: Delight in the Details and Work To Catalyze Collaboration Toward Community Improvement!

COVID-19 has taught us it takes continuous effort to keep pace with developments.

Work hard to enhance your sense of community diversity and what that means for organizational dynamics. Periodic reflection is useful but not sufficient.

Avoid the distraction of crafting impeccable mission statements
Key factors to address will continue to evolve!

Focus on current problems that need to be solved in local communities. At the same time, work hard to identify new ones that will soon emerge and identify novel solutions!

Work just as hard to understand how the national and global context is changing. Lead time will be needed to develop organizational resilience and response.

Support efforts to counter politicization of societal issues.
Public health strategies to counter COVID-19--use of masks, vaccination--have been co-opted by political opportunists.

- Collaboration in confronting COVID-19 in farmworker communities has reinforced awareness that sustainable agriculture requires a sustainable workforce
- Successful collaboration to make COVID-19 testing more accessible to farmworkers, finding ways for workers to successfully isolate/quarantine, on-site vaccination event--all show that working together is a win-win.
- Extend collaboration further--e.g. novel approaches to make the “Test-to-Treat” a reality for farmworkers as well as affluent HH’s.
- Next steps: Broader collaboration to assure the health of workers’ families? Collaboration on childhood immunizations? More employer involvement in building health literacy?
- Efforts to reduce workplace stress, and improve mental health? Innovative employer participation in efforts to overcome seasonal fluctuations in worker employment/earnings? Collaboration in workforce skills development?



Promising New
Opportunities To
Engage and
Collaborate with
Agricultural
Employers



Appendix: Collaboration Does Make A Difference

COUNTY	AGRICULTURAL COUNTY FULL VAX RATE 5-10	FARMWORKER ZIPCODE FULL VAX RATE 5-10	FW ZIPCODE FULL VAX DISPARITY	COUNTY DEATHS PER 100K
HIGH COLLABORATION				
Fresno	62.6%	61.4%	-1.2%	282
Ventura	72.1%	72.0%	-0.1%	176
Monterey	73.2%	71.1%	-2.1%	169
LOW COLLABORATION				
Merced	53.6%	50.1%	-3.5%	304
Stanislaus	58.3%	55.0%	-3.3%	305
Tulare	55.3%	52.1%	-3.2%	319

Benchmark Vaccination Rates among California Counties Contra Costa (High)=83.9%, Tehama (Low)=44.2%

COVID-19 Vaccination Rates and Cumulative Deaths/100K population--Los Angeles Times, May 10, 2022