

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 9, 2021

Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom,

We commend your decision to prioritize food and farm workers in the State of California's Phase 1B distribution plan for the COVID-19 vaccine. As you continue leading the state's vaccination efforts, we write to you requesting that you ensure equity of distribution includes fairness for all full-time and part-time residents and that you conduct a robust educational campaign to ensure these essential workers feel secure in seeking out and accepting the vaccine.

California's 800,000 agricultural workers are an essential workforce responsible for sustaining California's \$50 billion agricultural industry and the production of America's fresh food supply.¹ Employment in California agriculture is highly cyclical, with more than 254,000 migrant, seasonal, or migrant food-processing workers traversing the state each year.² At the county level, the seasonal workforce may double during harvest, however on an individual farm, the harvest to winter worker ratio may be as high as 100 to 1.³ Due to the unique composition of the communities in our districts, we encourage a farmworker-specific component in any vaccination plan that rises to the challenges of enumerating our migrant agricultural workforce to ensure they are accounted for.

We applaud the steps you have taken to partner with Blue Shield of California and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to expand the efficient and equitable distribution of vaccines across the state. We also commend your role in advising the private partners of the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program for COVID-19, including CVS and Walgreens, on the unique needs of our great state. We will continue to advocate at the federal level for an increase in vaccine doses being sent out to states. As you continue the important task of making decisions and advising on the equitable distribution of vaccines and mobile clinics to counties, we urge you to include our migrant food and farm workers in your allocation plans.

¹ <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/statistics/>

² https://www.edd.ca.gov/jobs_and_training/migrant_and_seasonal_farm_worker_outreach_program.htm#:~:text=The%20Migrant%20and%20Seasonal%20Farmworker,includin%20more%20than%20254%2C000%20MSFWs.

³ [https://www.jstor.org/stable/26758669?seq=1.](https://www.jstor.org/stable/26758669?seq=1)

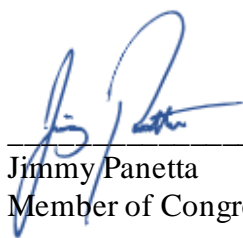
Over the past several months, we worked across the aisle to secure substantial funding in H.R. 133 for agricultural worker safety. Since that bill was signed into law in late December 2020, we have been advocating for at least \$1 billion in U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) funds for COVID-19 mitigations in agricultural communities. As we continue to work in a bipartisan fashion to ensure USDA prioritizes agricultural worker safety, we look to you to take steps to conduct both linguistically accessible and culturally appropriate outreach to agricultural communities that have suffered disproportionately from this virus.

While agricultural communities have worked to provide personal protective equipment and take measures to safeguard employees, farmworkers have accounted for a disproportionate share of COVID-19 cases since the onset of the pandemic. Recently, a University of California, Berkeley white paper (published Wednesday, Dec. 2), detailed the outcomes from the first long-term study on the prevalence of, and the risk factors for, COVID-19 infection among California's agricultural laborers.⁴ From mid-July to November 2020, 13% of the 1,091 farmworkers enrolled in the study tested positive for COVID-19. This is 8% higher than California's population as a whole. Further, antibody results from farmworkers who tested negative for active infection revealed that antibody was 19.4% by October.

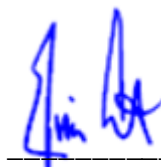
The need for rapid vaccination in these communities is clear. However, we are concerned that, due to previous harmful rhetoric and efforts to create distrust in immigrant communities, there may be added challenges when it comes to ensuring our food and farm workers have the information they need to access vaccine distribution sites and feel safe taking the vaccine.

Unfortunately, with dangerous new strains emerging around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over. The coming weeks will be critical to curb the spread of this virus and we must work together to keep our promises to the agricultural communities in California who have shown up to do their jobs and put food on our tables. We look forward to partnering with you on these efforts.

Sincerely,



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Jim Costa
Member of Congress

⁴ [UCB CSVS white paper12_01_20_final\(berkeley.edu\)](https://ucb.csvs.whitepaper12.01.20.final(berkeley.edu))



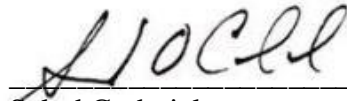
Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



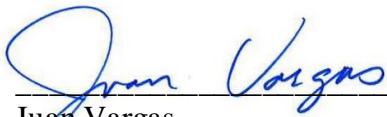
John Garamendi
Member of Congress



Josh Harder
Member of Congress



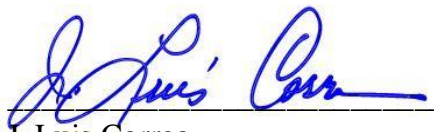
Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress