

CWGA Update

Labor remains our most critical issue.

The California Wool Growers Association which represents Sheep and Goat producers in CA filed suit against the State of California and its imposition of AB 1066 on Sheep and Goat herders. We did not prevail in Superior Court but are headed to the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals likely not heard until 2023. We are confident that the law as written does NOT apply overtime to these monthly salary wages and that the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) took it upon itself to interpret it otherwise. It is our position that the DIR is operating out of scope in interpreting the law.

To complicate the issue:

New and Compounding Labor Challenges: More recently, within the last 2 months, the State Wage Agency in California, the Employment Development Department (EDD), has STOPPED approving work petitions, for any laborers whose work will be with GOATS at all, under the same job classification and wage structure as for those who work with SHEEP. Although, they have been approving these work petitions as such for DECADES in California. This is CRITICAL.

They are saying that goat herders do not qualify under that section of the regulations for the monthly salary as for those who work with sheep. The EDD is saying that they need to be paid minimum wage for 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week. That equates to about \$14,000/month plus room and board. Think about that for a moment. That is over \$170,000 per year for 1 ranch employee all because they work with a goat!. It can't work!

As ranchers know, sheep and goats are often mixed, the work required to manage is the same. In California, many ranchers have increased their numbers of goats in an effort to contribute to the fire suppression benefits of grazing for wildfire prevention. In many areas of the State, goats can tolerate and even thrive in masticating some of the most treacherous brushy hillsides and canyons where many sheep will not, let alone humans or heavy machinery. In doing so, all of these livestock are creating life saving fuel breaks. Unfortunately, isolated lawmakers and bureaucrats make no effort to value PREVENTION. Instead they'd rather wait for the next catastrophe and gain some political ground for their next election or appointment. In the meantime, nobody wins. These jobs will not be filled because ranchers cannot pay that wage, the State of CA loses an undervalued and almost silent life saving wildfire prevention tool, homeowners lose homes, insurance companies lose billions, our own citizens lose their lives to wildfire and the abundance of health related issues that arise as a result of the chronic air pollution that California is CREATING. It would be good to find out what the **net** carbon reduction in California has been over the last 5 years. Most of the statistics that are reported do NOT take into consideration the output from wildfire. Without that piece of data, it's smoke and mirrors, fake news.

HERDER SOLUTION: We need for the EDD to revert to their own prior interpretation of the regulation that treated herders of goats the same as herders of sheep. They did so because there is no difference.

There is currently one action in place by a Rancher of goats and sheep who is desperate to get their petitions approved for workers for grazing season. It is expected to be heard by an Administrative Law Judge.

Thank you!

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