

Half Moon Bay Review

POST, farms work together to build much-needed housing

Clay Lambert | June 6, 2018

Before the “affordable housing crisis” was talk in polite company, it was everyday reality for California’s farmworkers. Nowhere is that problem more acute than here on the San Mateo County coast, where most of the people who provide food for Silicon Valley are largely priced out of even the least expensive housing available.

The Peninsula Open Space Trust has made some small dents in the problem and should be congratulated for doing something, even if it’s not nearly enough. Importantly, the Peninsula’s preeminent open space organization is providing expertise navigating the regulatory hurdles for farmers who want to provide for a permanent workforce. Perhaps these projects will grow along with the Brussels sprouts and artichokes that are key economic drivers on the coast.

On Monday, POST announced the completion of a project called “Red House” at Cloverdale Coastal Ranches. The project included the rehabilitation of an existing house on the property and was done with financial assistance from San Mateo County’s Agricultural Workforce Housing Program, which is funded by the half-cent sales tax extension known as Measure K. That program provides “forgivable loans” for projects like this that continue to be housing for agricultural workers.

In addition, POST has placed four mobile homes, each with three bedrooms, on land it leases to Blue House Farm on the South Coast. That will provide decent housing for a dozen more people. At least two more projects are in the works.

While housing is not part of POST’s mission, it does align with its Farmland Future Initiative. The open space trust is raising \$25 million to finance land protection and infrastructure improvements that agricultural interests hope will help turn the tide of a long-standing loss of farmland in the Bay Area. POST calculates that, since 1980, the nine contiguous counties have lost more than 200,000 acres of productive farmland — including 35 percent of what was once San Mateo County farmland.

These successes are small in light of the need. A 2016 study suggested San Mateo County needed at least 1,020 more housing units for farmworkers and their families. It also found that the county’s small farmers were in no position to provide that housing, particularly in light of the extra burden placed on development in the coastal zone. As a result, the county’s Environmental Health Department reports “it is rare for employee housing inspections to find no deficiencies.”

We can and must do better if California plans on continuing to be the nation’s salad bowl. And we simply owe it to the men and women who work so hard so that we can eat so well.

<https://bit.ly/2xQRduu>