

## Introduction

Healthy Davis Together (HDT) is a joint project between the City of Davis, California and the University of California, Davis, that aims to control and prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) and facilitate a coordinated and gradual return to regular city activities. **From the outset of the program, one of HDT's most prominent priorities was to ensure equitable access to resources and health care amongst Yolo County's vulnerable populations.**

As a part of this effort, HDT convened and partnered directly with Yolo County, community-based organizations, and ÓRALE—an NIH-funded research project—to support Yolo County's large population of agricultural workers. **Through a novel public-private-non-profit collaboration, these organizations supported agricultural workers with an array of culturally competent services, including isolation, food and income-replacement support, COVID-19 testing, COVID-19 vaccinations, and strategic communications.**

Yolo County's approximately 7,000 agricultural workers have long been a critically underserved population. Many of the County's agricultural workers are migrant workers, temporarily moving into the County each growing season. The workers are largely non-English speakers, often lack adequate health care and food security, and many are undocumented—to name just a few of the number of drivers that create poorer health outcomes for this population. Nevertheless, agricultural workers constitute approximately 4% of Yolo County's GDP and continuously provide critical resources to the community.<sup>1</sup> Over the past several years, County, University, and community leaders have begun to develop strong leadership in advocating for agricultural workers, which provided a solid foundation from which to grow support when the pandemic began.

Additionally, HDT and a Yolo County Supervisor played a convening role in connecting Yolo County agricultural workforce leadership, the Yolo Farm Bureau, Yolo County Housing leadership, and the ÓRALE program to share learnings, connections, and resources. These connections allowed all programs to reach more agricultural workers.

**The following outlines how this public-private-non-profit collaboration provided critical supports to the community, and offers lessons learned.**



<sup>1</sup> Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner. Yolo County Agricultural Crop Report 2018, (2019). Yolo County [https://yoloagenda.yolocounty.org/docs/2019/BOS/20190723\\_2002/8913\\_8913%20-%20CROP%20REPORT%202018%20BOARD.pdf](https://yoloagenda.yolocounty.org/docs/2019/BOS/20190723_2002/8913_8913%20-%20CROP%20REPORT%202018%20BOARD.pdf)

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by County, Metro, and Other Areas. (2018). ALFRED Archival Economic Data. [https://alfred.stlouisfed.org/series?seid=GDPALL06113&utm\\_source=series\\_page&utm\\_medium=relatedcontent&utm\\_term=related\\_resources&utm\\_campaign=alfred](https://alfred.stlouisfed.org/series?seid=GDPALL06113&utm_source=series_page&utm_medium=relatedcontent&utm_term=related_resources&utm_campaign=alfred)

## Quarantine and Isolation Services + Wage Support

Beginning as early as October 2020, Yolo County worked with California’s Housing for the Harvest program to provide free hotel rooms to agricultural workers who were required to isolate or quarantine as a result of a positive COVID-19 test or known exposure. Statewide, uptake of the Housing for the Harvest program was fairly low, largely due to cultural aversion to staying in hotels, living away from family, and concerns about missing work.

In response, the state reallocated portions of the Housing for Harvest funding to provide partial wage replacement for agricultural workers choosing to isolate either in their own homes or in hotels. Beginning in Spring 2021, HDT supplemented this funding to allow Yolo County to provide agricultural workers with 100% wage replacement of ~\$1500 for a 14-day quarantine in their own homes or \$2000 for quarantine in a hotel room. Through this program, the County also provides free groceries, laundry services, free transportation, and free wellness checks to all agricultural workers in need of quarantine or isolation.

Usage rates of the program increased significantly as a result of both the accommodation to allow for in-home quarantine and full wage replacement. To help agricultural workers take advantage of this program, HDT, ÓRALE, and County case workers provided information about the County’s programs to workers when calling them to convey their positive result. In a few cases, County workers even called the workers’ employers directly—with permission from the worker—to explain the worker’s positive test result and ask them to allow the worker to quarantine for 14 days.



## Testing

Because agricultural workers naturally live and work in more rural areas and had less access to COVID-19 testing resources than urban residents, providing farmworkers convenient access to COVID-19 testing quickly became a priority throughout the County. For the first several months of the pandemic, testing was available to agricultural workers primarily through County testing sites or County pop-up testing at farms which could provide a 5-day turnaround on test results. In November 2020, HDT opened its first testing center in Davis, utilizing free saliva PCR tests with a 24-48-hour results turnaround and made testing available to those living or working in Davis and to agricultural workers throughout the County.



Around the same time, ÓRALE, an NIH funded grant project led by UC Davis researchers, sought to reduce access barriers by bringing testing closer to agricultural workers’ homes and places of work. ÓRALE partnered with local community-based organizations to offer BinaxNOW rapid antigen tests, either onsite at local community organizations or at migrant centers. Local community organizations graciously provided their sites and their staff to support these efforts, but most importantly, they provided their connections and trusted relationships with local agricultural workers. ÓRALE’s program allows for, but does not require, appointments for testing and can provide printed verifiable test results within 15 minutes, negating the need for access to internet, an email address, or text messaging to receive results.

HDT partnered with ÓRALE to provide additional funding for staff and resources, and the HDT mobile testing team also operates weekly at a Yolo County Migrant Center. The partnership allowed ÓRALE to maximize the number of days, sites, and hours available for testing throughout Yolo County. In May 2021, ÓRALE tested approximately 100 agricultural workers per week, with intentions to continue expanding the program's availability and reach throughout Yolo County. Convenience and availability are particularly important to encouraging regular testing even as the community is increasingly vaccinated and overall testing demand decreases.

HDT, ÓRALE and Yolo County staff met regularly to share lessons learned, brainstorm solutions, and strategize on how to improve COVID-related support for agricultural workers. For example, they suggested protocols to make appointments and communicate results without the use of email or mobile phones, and shared anecdotal feedback to optimize testing site logistics (like location and hours) to improve access for agricultural workers. When rumors began to circulate that identification might be required to get tested, the group quickly convened to push back against the recommendation and distribute communications that clarified to the public that identification is not necessary.

## Vaccinations

As COVID-19 vaccines became available, Yolo County led efforts to vaccinate the County's agricultural workers. As a result of their work, supported by HDT, ÓRALE and other community partners, 83% of agricultural workers in Yolo County were vaccinated by May 2021.<sup>2</sup>

The work to vaccinate agricultural workers began with strong advocacy from local leaders to include agricultural workers in the first tiers of vaccination eligibility. This helped ensure agricultural workers could receive the vaccine just after the first tier of healthcare workers. Unfortunately, the demand for vaccines among eligible populations was much higher than the supply, and agricultural workers with limited access to internet struggled to secure appointments. The County, in turn, moved quickly to reduce barriers by delivering vaccines directly to agricultural workers.

Yolo County partnered with large growers in the community and local community organizations to bring vaccines directly to agricultural workers at their places of work and near their homes. Instead of requiring individuals to make appointments online or by phone, the County scheduled mass vaccination days at each of the major farms in the County and asked growers to communicate the date and time to their workers.

This effort was successful in large part due to the support of Yolo County farmers, who provided access to their land, allowed workers flexibility to get vaccinated during paid work hours, and promoted vaccination communications. County officials and local community organizations similarly used their personal connections to outreach directly to agricultural workers in the community, even canvassing door to door to inform workers of their eligibility and opportunity to get vaccinated. HDT provided additional staffing and financial support to maximize opportunities for vaccination.

Because of Yolo County's high proportion of migrant farmworkers, achieving a high rate of vaccinations for year-round agricultural workers was critical to



<sup>2</sup> Yolo County. (2021, May 2) *Coronavirus Vaccine*. Yolo County.

<https://www.yolocounty.org/government/general-government-departments/health-human-services/adults/communicable-disease-investigation-and-control/novel-coronavirus-2019/coronavirus-vaccine>

ensure they did not experience mass transmission or an outbreak upon the arrival of migrant farmworkers, who largely arrive from out-of-state or out-of-country. When the migrant workers arrived, positivity rates in the community did increase and a COVID-19 variant was identified by HDT within the population, but local immunity and previously established Migrant Center testing and vaccination programs mitigated the overall impact to the community. Early outreach efforts to vaccinate agricultural workers also proved successful in helping reduce vaccine hesitancy among the agricultural community, who became increasingly willing to receive the vaccine as they saw family and friends get vaccinated.



The symbiotic relationship between the County, HDT, ÓRALE, and other local community partners also allowed quick troubleshooting of any problems. For example, when an agricultural worker arrived for their vaccination while experiencing symptoms for COVID-19, the County vaccination team called HDT staff directly to help the worker access the results to their COVID-19 test taken a few days prior. The ability to simply pick up the phone to resolve issues quickly could have been the difference between that worker being vaccinated in real time, as opposed to having to reschedule and potentially lose their most convenient opportunity to receive a vaccine.

## Communications

Throughout the pandemic, strategic communications have been critical to ensure that individuals had all the information they needed to remain healthy and respond appropriately should they become sick. As with many chronically underserved populations, the key to effective outreach to agricultural workers has been engaging trusted messengers to amplify communications. Fortunately, many Yolo County organizations and elected officials already had positive, close relationships with agricultural workers, that were foundational to sharing critical public health information. They used these connections to distribute physical communications (e.g., flyers, postcards) at community meeting spaces and at workplaces.

Additionally, a large emphasis was placed on safe, distanced, in-person interaction to share information about disease transmission, the importance of testing, and the efficacy of vaccines. Some representatives even went door-to-door to provide public health information. One-on-one conversations allowed partners to directly understand the needs, concerns, and priorities of agricultural workers, which in turn informed public health activities and communications.

Novel collaboration between HDT, Yolo County, ÓRALE and other community-based organizations enabled them to share consolidated, consistent messaging with agricultural workers. A key example of this is the consolidated flyer advertising all of the various COVID-19 testing options available to Yolo County agricultural workers through each of these organizations. Advertising all sites on one flyer through various channels helped ensure that a maximum number of residents could access this information. HDT, Yolo County, ÓRALE, and others have continued to convene to align on next steps and recommendations as the pandemic progresses and federal, state, or local guidance changes.

Additionally, close coordination and co-advertising allowed each organization to focus their communications efforts—Yolo County focused on vaccination outreach, ÓRALE focused on testing, and HDT filled in gaps where needed.

## Conclusion

Throughout the course of the pandemic, close collaboration between local groups and the leveraging of personal relationships has proven critical to the support of the agricultural community. Grassroots relationships provided the foundation for culturally competent care, trust in community leaders, and supportive relationships between key stakeholders to complement and bolster one another's efforts. Ensuring the representation of Latinos in all of these spaces was also crucial to establishing a baseline cultural competency and for internally advocating for the needs of the agricultural worker community.

The pandemic highlighted both the criticality of Yolo County's farmworkers to the local economy and the need to address disparities faced by agricultural workers in the region. As the pandemic begins to subside, we are hopeful that the deep connections forged between Yolo County, HDT representatives, ÓRALE, local community organizations, and community members will provide a substantial foundation for expanded social services support and a more robust public health infrastructure.

In communities outside of Yolo County, we are confident that efforts to support agricultural workers both throughout and beyond the pandemic can be advocated for and executed by community organizations and support structures that already exist for vulnerable populations, as long as they are connected and willing to support one another. County or other elected officials with close connections to their community and who can confer accountability, like the Yolo County Supervisor who assisted HDT, can act as natural conveners of these organizations and support structures in order to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

HDT would like to acknowledge Tom Nesbitt, Robb Davis, Pauline Delange Martinez, as well as Esmeralda Garza, Roberto Paniagua-Urrutia, Aimee Sisson, Jenny Tan, Frank Schneegas, Antonio De Loera, and their colleagues at Yolo County, Glenda Espinal, Irva Hertz-Picciotto, Sergio Aguilar-Gaxiola, and their UC Davis ÓRALE colleagues, members of community-based organizations Lideres Campensinas, the Health Education Council, Rise, Inc., Radio Bilingue, the Yolo Interfaith Immigration Network, ÓRALE's partner organizations, and Spanish language media organizations such as Univision and Telemundo for their outstanding leadership in support of Yolo County's agricultural workers and their input on this document.