



AB 1503 – Agricultural Apprenticeship Programs: Farm Labor Contractor Exemption

**SUMMARY**

Under California Labor Code, any person or organization who recruits, solicits, supplies, or hires workers on behalf of an employer engaged in the growing or producing of farm products is considered to be a farm labor contractor.

AB 1503 would create an exemption from the definition of a “farm labor contractor” for California nonprofit organizations administering an accredited agricultural apprenticeship program. This is necessary to allow California nonprofit organizations that administer the curriculum, farm assignments, hiring and letting go paperwork, and payment of a student agricultural apprentice to do so without being qualified as farm labor contractors.

**BACKGROUND**

Agricultural apprenticeship programs are critical to developing the next generation of farmers, farm managers, and agricultural workers. Participating in an agricultural apprenticeship will prepare aspiring farmers with sufficient hands-on experience, management training, and business skills to obtain a job with an established farm, or start their own farm upon completion.

The existing California Farm Academy Apprenticeship Program is a collaboration between the Center for Land-Based Learning (CLBL) in Yolo County and Soil Born Farms (SBF) in Sacramento County. Both CLBL and Soil Born have been running farmer training and informal apprenticeship programs for over 6 years. CLBL is currently working closely with the Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS) to establish the first multi-farm accredited agricultural apprenticeship program in California. The formal accreditation process to standardize the program statewide is nearly complete.

The farm apprenticeship is multi-faceted, in order to provide comprehensive and standardized training for participants. Apprentices first complete a 7-month beginning farmer training program. This is the first year of the apprenticeship, which requires 200 classroom hours. They will then complete industry trainings and advanced workshops in their second year to complete the additional 50 coursework hours required to obtain their certification. All of these 250 total classroom hours are in addition to the hands-on experience.

On the farm, the California Farm Academy Apprenticeship Program is designed to encompass at least two growing seasons. Apprentices must complete 3,000 hours of on-the-job training to receive the apprenticeship completion certificate. For this reason, the program relies heavily on established farmers who are qualified and willing to provide mentorship

and employment. To ensure apprentices receive comprehensive farm training, the program requires that trainees must complete a certain number of hours of particular work processes (soil management, irrigation, direct marketing, etc.). In order to meet all of the hours required in each of the training categories, apprentices may have to transfer between multiple farms that offer these different experiences.

**PROBLEM**

In order to minimize administrative burdens on the participating mentor-farmers and incentivize their partnership, the Center for Land Based Learning would like to administer the apprenticeship program – manage all of the paperwork, process applications, complete hire/let go documents, distribute paychecks, etc.

Allowing a nonprofit oversight body (like CLBL) to hold administrative responsibility would allow more flexibility in the program. Apprentices would be able to transfer between farms without burdening the farmers with excessive paperwork. In addition, if an administering nonprofit organization receives funding from multiple sources to support the program and provide apprentice wage subsidies (public, nonprofit, private), it makes sense for the nonprofit to administer wages. Under this structure, apprentices will be able to concentrate on what they are learning, and farmers will be able to focus on their work and training in the field.

**THIS BILL**

In order to encourage the widespread establishment of registered agricultural apprenticeships in the state, AB 1503 will narrowly exempt nonprofit organizations administering an accredited agricultural apprenticeship program from the farm labor contractor definition.

This bill will remove a barrier to the expansion of accredited farmer training programs in the state. As our agricultural industry grows and farming practices change, it is important that the state support the development of qualified and well-taught future farmers.

**SUPPORT**

Center for Land Based Learning

**CONTACT**

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