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## **Labor Committee Approves Bill to Assist Low-Income Family Farmers**

*Senator Yee's bill would aid Hmong farmers in the Central Valley*

SACRAMENTO – The Senate Labor and Industrial Relations Committee approved legislation authored by Senator Leland Yee (D-San Francisco/San Mateo) to assist low-income family farmers. SB 677 would exempt farmers earning less than \$10,000 annually from regulations requiring workers compensation insurance for direct family members who work the land. The bill would require such individuals to have a health insurance policy, most of whom already qualify for healthcare through a state or federal program.

The bill would help many refugee farmers, mostly those of Hmong descent from the Central Valley.

“Family farmers earning less than \$10,000 can barely afford to provide clothes and shelter for their children,” said Yee. “The burdensome requirement of purchasing workers compensation coverage is simply untenable and unfairly results in these family farmers being hit with fines.”

According to the University of California Cooperative Extension, individual Hmong and Hispanic farmers were fined between \$14,000 and \$26,000 in 2008 for not complying with the workers compensation law. After a 2004 enforcement sweep, nearly 50 Hmong farmers stopped working their farms for fear of being fined.

“Because of their support for our country during the Vietnam War, the Hmong people have faced excessive persecution and genocide in southeast Asia,” said Yee. “It is important that we let Hmong refugees start a new life here in California and allow them to support their families through farming.”

Specifically, SB 677 would exempt from workers compensation requirements anyone working on a small farm who is employed by a parent, child, spouse, registered domestic partner, or spouse of the employer's parent or child. If purchased, workers compensation policies currently cost at least five percent of these farmers' incomes and can often run into the thousands of dollars.

There are approximately 81,000 farms in California, however only 7,000 earn less than \$10,000, thus eligible for the exemption. Even fewer are expected to actually enroll. Advocates point out that the need for workers compensation insurance for these family members is unnecessary as they already qualify for government healthcare programs and workplace accidents rarely, if ever, happen on these small pieces of cultivated land.

“SB 677 will help my family and many family farms I work with,” said Michael Yang, Small Farms/ Specialty Crops advisor for the UC Cooperative Extension. “Too many times they have come to me for help. We now finally have hope. Senator Yee truly understands their plight.” “SB 677 is trying to help struggling subsistence farmers and their families stay in business producing fresh produce for local markets,” said Pete Price, from the Community Alliance with Family Farmers. “We’re proud to support Senator Yee’s efforts to help these hard-working farmers.” “SB 677 will really benefit small farmers like my parents who depend on farming to sustain their families,” said Merced City Council Member Noah Lor. SB 677 will next be considered in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

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