

Date of Hearing: July 2, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Esmeralda Soria, Chair

SB 493 (Becker) – As Amended June 25, 2025

SENATE VOTE: 38-0

SUBJECT: District agricultural associations: secretary-managers: compensation

SUMMARY: This bill renames fair managers as secretary-managers of district agricultural associations and transfers pay-setting authority to the Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA). It requires the Secretary to establish a single salary range, conduct a salary survey every three years, and ensure pay stays within existing limits until the first survey. This bill states the salary survey shall only be conducted if the secretary receives funds from the fair industry, including, but not limited to, trade associations, district agricultural associations, and county event centers,. It requires, until the first survey is complete, the compensation for a secretary-manager to remain within certain existing ranges, regardless of their classification. Finally, it states the maximum salary cannot exceed the highest comparable position's salary, except for cost-of-living adjustments, merit increases, or additional pay for managing multiple districts. Specifically, *this bill*:

- 1) Renames fair managers to be secretary-managers of district agricultural associations.
- 2) Transfers the duty to fix compensation for a secretary-manager to the secretary of the department.
- 3) Requires the secretary to set a single salary range for the compensation of a secretary-manager and, in determining the salary range, on or before January 1, 2027, and every 3 years thereafter, conduct a salary survey of other state, regional and local positions in similar industries and other relevant labor pools.
- 4) States the salary survey shall only be conducted if the secretary receives non-state funds from the fair industry, including, but not limited to, trade associations, district agricultural associations, and county event centers, for that purpose.
- 5) Requires, until the first survey is completed, the compensation for a secretary-manager to remain within certain existing ranges, regardless of fair classification.
- 6) Prohibits, after the first survey, the maximum salary limit of the salary range for a secretary-manager from exceeding the highest salary for a position comparable to a secretary-manager, as determined, by the most recent survey, except for specifically required cost-of-living increases, authorized merit increases and increases for secretary-managers managing multiple districts.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes what may be considered when determining the basis of compensation to fair managers of fairs that are classified under the Food and Agricultural Code (Food and Agricultural Code (FAC) 4508).

- 2) States the department may classify, and shall consider, at least once every five years, whether to classify or reclassify, fairs. The department may request advice and recommendations from boards of directors of fairs for this purpose. In making classifications, the department may also consider the following (FAC 4507):
- a) The type and class of agricultural, including livestock, industrial, and natural resources that are exhibited, and the amount of premiums that are paid in accordance with the approved premium list of the fair.
 - b) Whether the fair is regional in nature, offers a special feature for agriculture, livestock, or industry, or is a sectional fair limiting exhibits to the region in which the fair is held, and any other characteristics and factors that the department deems necessary.
 - c) The ratio of attendance at the fair to the population of the area that is served by it.
 - d) The efficiency of management, including operational procedures, revenue from sources other than the state, quality of exhibits, and community interest in the fair.
 - e) The extent and nature of interim utilization of fair property as promoted by the fair management.
 - f) The need of the fair for money from state sources.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: There are 54 statutory District Agriculture Associations (DAAs), of which 52 are active, and 41 operate on state owned lands. They hold various activities on their sites, such as fairs, day care operations, fund raising and commercial events. DAAs in some areas provide the only event space for the local community. DAA budgets run from several hundred thousand dollars to over ten million dollars. Only a few DAAs are self-sustaining, most are not.

California's fairs operate under the guidelines of CDFA's Division of Fairs and Expositions. Collectively they host events that are attended by nearly ten million Californians and tourists annually. The network of California fairs is an economic, social, and cultural institution that enriches the lives of Californians from every background and walk of life and seeks to connect urban populations that may have little contact with farms, ranches, and agribusinesses with California's agricultural heritage.

CDFA is responsible for maintaining separate job descriptions for each Fair Manager but lacks the authority to independently set compensation, leaving Fair Managers under-compensated relative to the scope of their duties. This makes the current compensation framework is inadequate. Currently, CDFA reviews job descriptions and considers fair classifications when apportioning state funds. However, it does not have the power to determine appropriate compensation levels. This disconnect has resulted in compensation that fails to attract or retain top talent for these demanding positions

According to the author, California's fairgrounds are not just venues for entertainment and a storied part of our agricultural history; they are critical infrastructure that serves as the backbone of our state's emergency response network. However, there is a loophole in state law that prevents some fair employees from receiving competitive salaries and benefits that

commensurate with the work they perform as compared to other similar positions, thus limiting recruitment and retention opportunities. This bill ensures that the Secretary-Managers, who are responsible for maintaining these venues and responding to disasters, receive fair and competitive compensation. By implementing periodic salary reviews and recognizing the challenges of managing multiple fairgrounds, this bill will help retain experienced professionals who play a vital role in serving our communities.

Supporters state the need for this legislation is based on the crucial role that California's fairgrounds play in our state's emergency response infrastructure and that secretary-managers are tasked with overseeing these critical facilities, ensuring they are operational and ready for emergency deployment 24/7, 365 days a year.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

California Emergency Response and Resiliency Venues and Fairgrounds (CERRVF) (Sponsor)

Antelope Valley Fair Association

Big Fresno Fair, 21st DAA

California Fairs Alliance

Cow Palace, 1-a DAA

Desert Empire Fairgrounds and Event Center, 53rd DAA

Gold Country Fairgrounds and Event Center, 20th DAA

Kern County Fair & Event Center, 15th DAA

Kings County Fairgrounds, 24a DAA

Napa Valley Exposition, 25th DAA

Pickering Events LLC

Redwood Acres Fairgrounds, 9th DAA

Riverside County Fairgrounds

Sacramento County Fair

San Bernardino County Fairgrounds, 28th DAA

San Mateo County Event Center and Fairgrounds

Solano County Fair Association

Tulare County Fairgrounds, DAA

Ventura County Fairgrounds

Opposition

None on file

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