

SENATE THIRD READING

SB 493 (Becker)

As Amended June 25, 2025

Majority vote

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.

Major Provisions

- 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 three 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.

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 10 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 10 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.

Arguments in Support

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.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file

FISCAL COMMENTS

Costs of an unknown amount, potentially in excess of \$150,000, for CDFA to conduct a salary survey of other state, regional, and local positions in similar industries and other relevant labor pools every three years and determine the required salary ranges and compensation for secretary-managers (General Fund or special fund such as the Fair and Exposition Fund). The bill requires the fair industry to pay for the costs of these surveys and provides that the secretary is to conduct the surveys only if it receives funds from the fair industry to do so. Therefore, this committee assumes CDFA will receive funding from industry adequate to cover CDFA's costs, and in advance.

CDFA notes it will not know the initial cost of the survey until it obtains an estimate from or contract with the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR) or a third party. For context, the department is currently developing a survey with an outside contractor to analyze veterinarian salaries. CDFA notes development of this survey, which is in its third year with an estimated cost of \$70,000, provides a low-end estimate for the amount the department will likely need to raise from the fair industry before it can implement the requirements of this bill.

CalHR anticipates it will incur General Fund costs of an unknown amount if it must contract with CDFA on the surveys. Cost drivers include, among other things, purchasing private sector compensation data from multiple sources and conducting a salary analysis for comparable positions at convention centers, arenas, and hotels.

Given the manner in which state funding for fairs is structured (see below), district agricultural association budgets will most likely bear the cost of higher salaries and merit increases for their secretary-managers.

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 38-0-2

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ABS, ABST OR NV: Limón, Reyes

ASM AGRICULTURE: 8-0-0

YES: Soria, Alanis, Aguiar-Curry, Connolly, Jeff Gonzalez, Hadwick, Irwin, Ransom

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Jeff Gonzalez, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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