

# BizFed Bounce Back



*BizFed members share stories of resilience.*

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*In the face of COVID19, BizFed members bounce back with perseverance, creativity and resourcefulness.*

## DEMAND FOR VITAMIN C KEEPS BUSINESS BOOMING

Coronavirus has stopped most aspects of American life right now, but it hasn't stopped our need for Vitamin-C.

Or at least that's to what Rudy Mendoza, the executive director of the California Ag Labor Association, is attributing the increase in demand that's kept the citrus industry going through this tough time.

CALA is a non-profit membership organization that provides resources to help its nearly 100 members that represent thousands of employees stay in compliance with state and federal regulations, including training, audit preparation, food safety and COVID-19 protocols.

"Vitamin C," Mendoza said. "Folks are understanding we need to eat more oranges with this whole COVID-19 mess. We're fortunate to be part of the essential food supply. We have people working every day, and that's a good thing. That's a huge turn from where we were three weeks ago."

### Labor And Trade Issues

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic that's shutdown much of the economy, ag was staring down another dismal year caused by federal trade policy.

"We weren't moving enough of our product because of trade embargos,"

Mendoza said.

Labor shortages were also hurting the industry, as domestic workers became harder to come by as many were lost to other industries.

"Long term, we need to answer the labor shortage situation," Mendoza said. "We need to look at streamlining the H2A guest worker program and ease the bureaucracy. If we don't work on a long term solution now, It's going to get worse."

### COVID-19 Issues

Though business is strong right now, Mendoza is concerned about the effect of COVID-19-related mandates on the ag industry; laws like the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which requires employers to provide sick leave and expanded family leave through the end of the year.

"I understand that it's necessary during this crisis," Mendoza said. "However, our members are fearful they won't be able to afford it long term. We're trying to educate our members so that they're prepared."

### Workers Comp Costs

Besides labor costs, workers comp insurance is one of the biggest expenses facing ag. Many injuries could have been prevented--which is where Cal Ag Labor Association's member training comes in handy--and fraud is



*Rudy Mendoza - Executive Director, Cal Ag Labor Association*

always a concern.

"Workers comp is a good thing, but it's not a level playing field," Mendoza said. "It's very expensive and has become unaffordable for even those employers who have worked very hard to maintain a low injury rate. Why do their premiums keep rising?"

### Best Advice

Mendoza also happens to be the mayor of Woodlake. His strategy for COVID-19 is the same there as it is at CALA: Provide people with basic, useful information.

"I get a ton of information every day," Mendoza said of the onslaught of emails he receives daily. "So what I have done is I've utilized multiple communication methods to try to provide people with basic information that's useful."



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