



ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL

AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

CATHY V. NEVILLE
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER/SEALER

AMY COOPER
DIRECTOR

County?

August 28, 2009

The Honorable Gary Nadler
Presiding Judge
Sonoma County Superior Court
Hand Delivery

Re: **Response to 2008-2009 Grand Jury Report**

Dear Judge Nadler,

Enclosed please find the Agricultural Commissioner's response to the Grand Jury Final Report for 2008-2009.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Cathy V. Neville
Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer

GRAND JURY

SEP 28 2009

RECEIVED

Enc.

- C: Board of Supervisors
Chris Thomas, Acting County Administrator
Janice Atkinson, County Clerk
Amy Cooper, Animal Care and Control Director

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Agricultural Commissioner/Animal Care and Control 2008-2009 Grand Jury Response

Findings

F-2 The AC&C does not adequately provide access to information in Spanish through its telephone system, literature or website. As a result they are not effectively addressing the need to further educate and inform the Hispanic population regarding the services available.

Response: We agree with this finding. Animal Care and Control's efforts on this issue are described in response to Recommendation 1 (R1), below.

F-3 The AC&C does not have a full time dispatcher working with its field staff officers, who respond to calls from throughout the County. Instead, staff members fill in as needed, and the Sheriff's department and/or other law enforcement agencies handle dispatch during off hours. This can leave the field officer in a vulnerable position, as the dispatcher must effectively transmit information, and also provide necessary backup to the officer, should the situation warrant it.

Response: We agree with this finding. Animal Care and Control's efforts on this issue are described in response to Recommendation 2 (R2), below.

F-4 The AC&C uses inmate labor from the Sonoma County Adult Detention facility as part of their housekeeping staff. The quality of this labor has proven to be unreliable and disruptive. It requires additional supervision for training and security issues.

Response: We agree with this finding. Animal Care and Control's efforts on this issue are described in response to Recommendation 3 (R3), below.

F-6 The Mobile Animal Center (MAC) was purchased with donated funds prior to the independent audit. The MAC is not cost effective for its original intended use, which was to perform spay/neuter surgeries in the mobile unit throughout the community. Once the unit was put into operation, it was determined that it did not provide adequate space for the animals to recover. However, it is still being used in other ways and by other agencies.

Response: We partially agree with this finding. We plan to study alternative staffing and funding models in an attempt to make the MAC cost effective. As a literal and figurative vehicle for reaching out to underserved populations - Hispanic and low-income - we would like to further study the MAC's potential. Animal Care and Control's efforts on this issue are described in response to Recommendation 4 (R4), below.

Recommendations

R-1 The Agricultural Commissioner should make sure that AC&C implements a working operational telephone system and website in Spanish. They should also generate informational literature in Spanish and make it available throughout the County.

Response: This recommendation has been partially implemented. Full implementation will be based upon available resources and in light of other priorities.

The Animal Care and Control phone tree is now recorded in both English and Spanish. Numerous pamphlets are also now available in Spanish including, but not limited to, pamphlets on rabies, spay/neuter and rabbits. We will continue to make additional literature available in Spanish as personnel and the budget allow. Over the next 1 – 2 years, and dependent upon fiscal support, we will work toward making key sections of our web page available in Spanish.

R-2 AC&C should staff a full time Dispatcher at the Shelter or implement a part time arrangement of multiple personnel dedicated to this position of critical importance.

Response: This recommendation will be implemented based upon available resources and in light of other priorities.

Due to budgetary constraints, a dedicated, full-time dispatcher is not possible at this time. We are currently staffing dispatch with a scheduled rotation of animal control officers and a back up of administrative staff (as needed), 8:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. The City of Santa Rosa Police Department dispatch takes after hours calls from the public within their city limits and contacts our staff by cell/home phone. The Sonoma County Sheriff Department dispatch handles all other after hours calls and contacts our staff by vehicle/portable radio and/or cell/home phone.

This recommendation will continue to be evaluated on an annual basis, and the dispatcher position possibly filled, as resources are available.

R-3 The Agricultural Commissioner should eliminate the use of inmate labor as recommended by the 3-Year Quick Start and Action Plan.

Response: This recommendation has been partially implemented. Full implementation will be based upon available resources and in light of other priorities.

The Department and Division have already reduced the number of inmates from 12 to 6. To ensure that cleaning, animal feeding and caretaking tasks are

completed prior to the daily shelter opening, three Animal Care Assistants have been hired to assist with these functions. With the hiring of a full time Director of Animal Care and Control, we will look to further reduce reliance on inmate labor. As funding becomes available, we will hire additional Animal Care Assistants and continue the complete phase out of the inmate program at the shelter. Phase out of inmate labor will be contemplated annually during the budget development process. Other changes that do not require additional funding will be considered over the next year.

R-4 AC&C should assess the cost effectiveness of operating and leasing the MAC. If this is not fiscally prudent, it should consider divesting itself of the MAC.

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis, which will be complete in the next six months.

Over the next six months we will be assessing the amounts charged for leasing the MAC and how those revenues might be increased, and the costs associated with ownership of the MAC. A key element of this analysis will be surveying shelters with somewhat similar demographics and animal numbers to see if/how they make their MAC cost effective. We will also investigate possible grant funding for this program.