



STANISLAUS COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AND WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

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DATE: August 30, 2004

TO: Patty Hill Thomas, Interim Chief Executive Officer

FROM: Dennis Gudgel, Agricultural Commissioner
Sealer of Weights and Measures 

SUBJ: RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY CASE NO. 04-24A 2003-2004
STANISLAUS COUNTY AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER
AND SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Please see the attached response to the above referenced Grand Jury investigation. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 525.4779. Thank you.

**RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY CASE NO. 04-24A 2003-2004
STANISLAUS COUNTY AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER
& SEALER OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES**

The following is the department response to the above-referenced Grand Jury Investigation.

As stated in the report, the **Reason for Investigation** was “A complaint was received by the Grand Jury regarding the lack of a response from the Sealer of Weights and Measures following the submission of a citizen complaint.”

Findings

Following the investigation, the Grand Jury report cited two **Findings** which will be addressed by the department:

1. There are currently 27 staff members.
2. The department had a complaint process but lacked tracking.

Response to Findings

1. At the time of the investigation and the Grand Jury’s initial visit to our department in January of 2004, there were 27 full-time staff. Since then, our department has added three employees for a current total of 30 full-time staff members.
2. The department agrees that at the time of the investigation, the departmental complaint system lacked a formal structure, documentation, and a tracking mechanism for follow-up to ensure that all complaints had been properly responded to. The written complaint policy was brief and lacked detail. While the department was in the process of developing a more comprehensive complaint procedure, it had not been well communicated to staff and was not fully implemented. A computerized complaint system had begun development approximately two months prior to this investigation, however no systematic procedures were yet in place.

As a result of the department’s complaint process inadequacies which were brought to light by the Grand Jury, the department “mapped” the existing complaint process, with all its inherent flaws, in an effort to improve the process. It was noted that there was no consistent procedure used to receive and document complaints. Among other issues, there was no centralized log, there was a lack of oversight of the process, no formal procedures were documented and there was a lack of staff training in the process. These problems had the potential impact of a possible delay or no response to the complainant, inconsistency of response, and the possible loss of information due to the absence of a tracking system.

To rectify the complaint process deficiencies, the department updated the Department Policy Manual on 11/18/03 with a detailed complaint procedure. Two important standards of the new procedure are that complainants shall be contacted within one day of the department receiving the complaint; and all complaint investigations shall

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be complete within 30 days. The computerized complaint tracking system was implemented in December of 2003. By January 2004, the new system and procedures was fully communicated to staff via several training sessions to ensure that the procedures were consistently adhered to. Oversight has been built into the complaint procedure and the computerized tracking system so that no complaints can “fall through the cracks”. A consistent procedure is now utilized by staff when recording and responding to complaints. All complaints are tracked in the computerized system and are assigned a complaint number. There is a centralized complaint log, in which both the hard copy of the original complaint and the computerized system are reconciled. Incomplete complaints are reviewed on a weekly basis by department management staff.

As a result, the published **Conclusions** of this Grand Jury investigation read, “ The complaint process was revised and implemented.”

Recommendations

1. Ensure that the Complaint Procedure continues to be implemented on a continuous basis.
2. Continue to ensure supervisory review of tracking system to ensure that complaints are being resolved.

Response to Recommendations

1. The complaint procedure is reviewed and discussed at monthly staff meetings. Incomplete complaints are reviewed on a weekly basis by department management staff. Staff and supervisors are reminded regularly of the important of responding to and completing complaints on a timely basis. All staff are aware that response to complaints received by the department are considered a high priority. Modifications and improvements are periodically made to the system as necessary, and communicated to staff. Regular communication to all staff is an important tool in maintaining a consistent department complaint system.
2. The Assistant Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer is responsible for printing out complaint status reports on a weekly basis. These reports are reviewed and delegated to supervisory staff to ensure completion within stated standards. Completed complaints are reviewed for accuracy and adherence to standards. Finally, complaints received by the department are reconciled to complaints entered into the computerized system. When procedures are correctly followed, the department's revised complaint system provides a valuable tracking tool to analyze complaint data, trends, and department and complainant responses.