



**California Special
Districts Association**
Districts Stronger Together



August 12, 2026

The Hon. Gavin Newsom, Governor
State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Hon. John Laird, Chair
California Senate Budget Committee
1020 N Street, Room 502
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Hon. Robert Rivas, Speaker
California Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 8330
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Hon. Monique Limon,
President pro Tempore
1021 O Street, Suite 8518
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Hon. Jesse Gabriel, Chair
California Assembly Budget Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom, Speaker Rivas, President pro Tempore Limon, Assembly Budget Committee Chair Gabriel, and Senate Budget Committee Chair Laird:

On behalf of the undersigned agricultural, environmental, local government, firefighting, climate, and environmental justice organizations, we write to request your support for maintaining wage parity for sheep and goat herders in California, which is necessary to maintain the wildfire risk reduction services goats provide throughout the state.

The Legislature passed SB 143 in 2023, including Section 20, which amended Labor Code Section 2695.4 to clarify that the same minimum monthly wage and labor protections for sheep herders should apply to goat herders and herders caring for both types of animals. However, SB 143 also included a sunset provision that terminated this parity on July 1, 2026 and directed the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) to report to the Legislature by January 1, 2026 on the employment of sheep and goat herders.

The [DIR report](#) was published on March 30, 2026, and finds that **“Stakeholders [ranchers, herders, and worker advocates] agreed that the same alternative minimum monthly wage should apply to sheep and goat herders** because the workers and work are similar and often overlap.”

We request the legislature and administration work together to maintain sheep and goat herder wage parity and worker protections by restoring the language applicable to goat herders that expired on July 1, 2026. Failure to do so will result in the sale or slaughter of tens of thousands of sheep and goats and the loss of the weed abatement and wildfire fuels reductions services they provide in California.

Additional Background

For the prior quarter century, California wage-and-hour law allowed livestock producers to pay a minimum monthly wage for herders because counting their hours as if they were working twenty four hours a day, seven days a week would have resulted in uneconomically high compensation for these employees, rendering sheep and goat production in California economically impractical. The Legislature recognized that herders work intermittently throughout the day and accordingly provided for the minimum monthly wage.

When AB 1066 (Gonzalez, 2016), legislation requiring payment of daily and weekly overtime to agricultural employees, was phasing in, DIR realized that existing regulations (Section 4(e) of Wage Order 14) included specific reference to sheep but not goats. DIR interpreted this omission to mean that goat herders were not covered by the same minimum monthly wage as sheep herders. DIR's interpretation created an outcome where goat herders would have to be paid nearly four times the \$4938 minimum monthly wage for sheep herders.

Had the Legislature not provided parity for minimum monthly wages for sheep and goat herders through SB 143 in 2023, their employers would have faced an unworkable situation. Both sheep and goats would have become unavailable for the increasingly popular practice of prescribed grazing for wildfire fuels reduction (as an alternative to pesticides and fossil-fuel powered machinery). This would have become economically impossible as no homeowners' association, fire safe council, local park, or utility could afford to pay for grazing services at the prices high wages for goat herders would require.

Since SB 143 was passed in 2023, the legislature and administration have recognized the benefits of prescribed grazing in multiple ways. In 2024, the administration published [nature-based climate solutions targets](#), which included prescribed grazing. Later that year, the legislature unanimously passed and the Governor signed [SB 675](#) (Limón), which required prescribed grazing to be incorporated into the state's wildfire resilience strategy. In 2025, the Task Force established a Prescribed Grazing Work Group, which published a brief on [expanding prescribed grazing for wildfire resilience in California](#).

The Department of Industrial Relations delivered its required report on March 30, 2026, which found no significant abuse or mistreatment of sheep and goat herders. It also did not document any objections from herders or farmworker advocates for continuation of wage parity for sheep and goat herders. Unfortunately, the late timing of the delivery of the report left the Legislature little time to deal with the July 1, 2026 sunset on wage parity and the goat herder language expired as of that date.

We urge you to act expeditiously to ensure ongoing parity between the wages of sheep and goat herders, and the continuing availability of sheep and goats for wildfire fuels reduction, by restoring the language applicable to goat herders that expired on July 1, 2026.

Thank you,

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Policy Director
California Climate and Agriculture Network

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Legislative Advocate
California State Association of Counties

Staci Heaton
Senior Policy Advocate
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Star Creek Land Stewards

Paul Abess
Shareholder
Capra Environmental Services, Corp.

Alissa Cope and Carson Helton
Sage Environmental Group
Goat Grazing

Brian Allen & Daniel Allen
Owners
Green Goat Landscapers

Tim Arrowsmith
Owner
Blue Tent Farm dba Western Grazers

James Burns
Marinview Community Association Board
Mill Valley, California

Cole Bush
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Shepherdess Land and Livestock Co. &
Grazing School of the West

Natasha Hunt
Alcalde Ranch
Coalinga, California

Wendy Millet
Ranch Director
TomKat Ranch

James Kasper
Private Landowner in Marin County

Clayton Hodges
Owner
Paradise Grazing Company

John Campbell
Construction Project Manager
San Domenico School

Ryan Indart
President and CEO
Indart Group, Inc.

Patti Wick
2017 Tubbs Fire Survivor
Santa Rosa, CA

Cc: The Hon. Karen Ross, Secretary, Department of Food and Agriculture
The Hon. Stewart Knox, Secretary, Labor & Workforce Development Agency
The Hon. David J. Tangipa, Vice Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
The Hon. Roger Niello, Vice Chair, Senate Budget Committee