



Farr's Laborer Housing Payday

Lobbying effort will enable farmworker families to own homes

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After several years of lobbying, Rep. Sam Farr last week presented the U.S. Department of Agriculture with a proposal to award \$1.7 million in matching funds to Salinas to build worker-owned housing. Monterey County has some of the most expensive housing in the country, and farmworkers frequently are priced out of the market. Because of this, Salinas officials approached Farr, D-Carmel four years ago with proposal to build housing that farmworkers would own rather than rent. The city already has committed \$1 million of its own to the project, the county has set aside \$500,000 and the state has given \$500,000. City officials wanted Farr to add some federal dollars to the project.

The initial thought was to go through the federal department of Housing and Urban Development, but HUD does not have the authority to provide housing for farmworkers. Four years ago, USDA was also unable to help: Salinas did not qualify for grants because it is not considered a rural community and because the city also wanted to house workers employed in the packaged salad industry. To solve those problems, Farr worked to amend USDA regulations.

This was accomplished last year, and Farr, who also sits on the House Appropriations Committee, was able to get additional money for the grant into the federal budget. Farr's meeting with a USDA undersecretary last Wednesday brought the housing project closer being

The money will be used to buy land and build approximately 50 homes on two or three sites in Salinas. Housing will be limited to farmworker families, and there will be restrictions on resale's in order to ensure the housing will remain affordable, said Dave Mora, city manager. A day care center also will be constructed at one of the sites, and Farr already has secured a \$350,000 grant for it, Mora said. The homes will be built in urban areas so that the homes will be close to services such as schools, and so that agricultural land will be preserved, Farr said. "Ag land is ag land and the more you pave it over, the fewer opportunities you have to provide ag jobs," Farr said. "If you chip away at this long enough, you have nothing left •

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