

Navigating Regulations with your Agricultural Ombuds(man?)

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EcoFarm Conference

Vince Trotter, Agricultural Ombudsman, UCCE Marin County

How boring is this going to be?

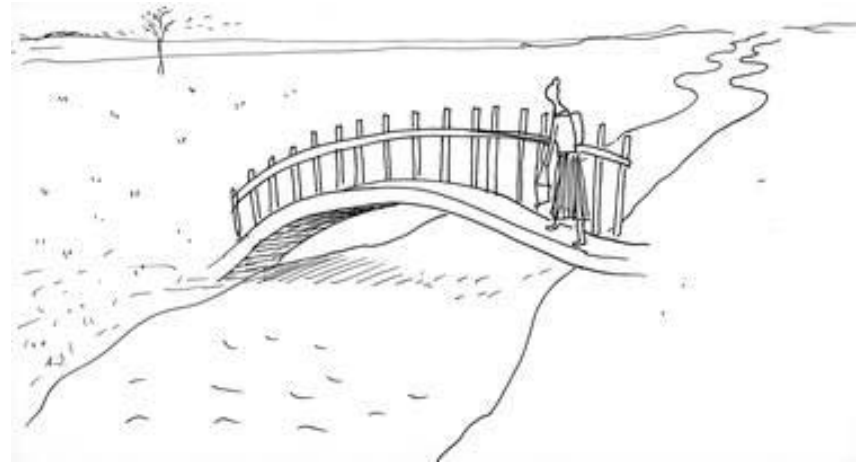
(fair question)

1. What is an Ag Ombuds (broadly)
2. Who am I (specifically)?
3. What do I do?
4. How might you get one of your own?

Ag Ombuds in simple terms

1. All Ombuds serve as a bridge

- Resolving complaints
- Investigating failures
- Mediating conflict
- Facilitating understanding



Agricultural Ombuds bridge the divide between the farming community and the regulatory community

Who is the regulatory community?



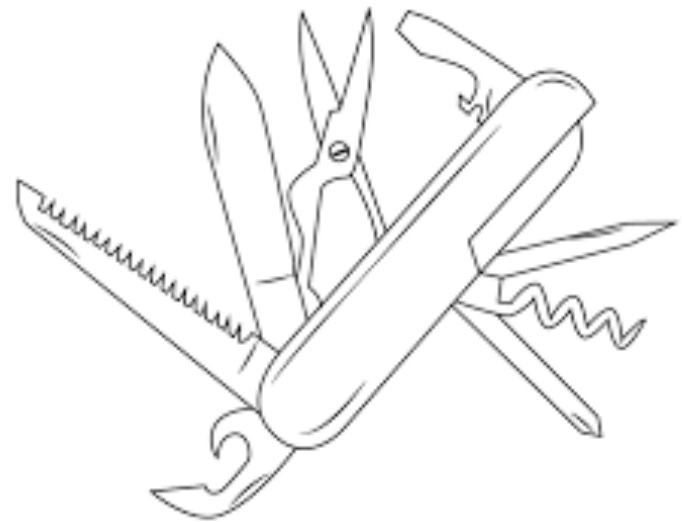
Federal

State

Local
(region, county, city)

I am also...

1. Sustainable Ag Coordinator
2. A farmer
3. A (former) educator
4. A (former) facilitator
5. A (former) small business advocate



I work on...

1. Changes to existing operations
(infrastructure, practices, enterprises)
2. New operations
 - Help newcomers
 - Promote opportunities
3. General understanding of rules
(catch, publicize, explain new regulations)



My mission is to...

- Promote **Economic Development** in rural communities
- Keep ag land in agriculture
- Smooth permitting process for everyone

Other benefits include:

- *Voice for producers within regulatory arena*
- *Improved compliance*
- *Reduced conflict between public agencies and farmers*
- *Improved morale within ag community*

As Ag Ombuds, I try to be...

1. Creative
2. Empathetic
3. Neutral
4. Confidential
5. Diplomatic



A day in the life

- Phone call w/ rancher re: ag worker housing project – explain county’s demands, break down fee schedule, steer toward fee waivers/relief
- Communicate with group of county staff working on improving ag worker housing permit process
- Distribute RFP for collaborative county-wide assessment of housing needs
- Link university researcher with local farm for field trials
- Investigate FDA rules around approving new forage supplement for use with livestock

A day in the life

- Set up meetings with two regional water boards around potential new slaughter plant
- Research insurance requirements for new ranch enterprise, look for insurance provider that can answer rancher's questions
- Schedule site visit to ranch building a new barn
- Connect rancher with SBDC advisor
- Plan workshop content related to food safety rules and use of biological soil amendments

A day in the life

- Recruit expert on farmer co-ops to speak with group of ranchers exploring a joint enterprise
- Organize tour of local dairy for group of organic certifiers
- Field inquiry from random public citizen wanting to know about Marin agriculture
- Connect a farmer with resources for finding new land
- Explain Healthy Soils Program to a rancher
- Prepare for EcoFarm workshop

When I get back...

- Visit ranch, explain pond measurement/reporting rules, help rancher translate data from pond recorder
- Conduct outreach to entire ag community re: upcoming deadlines for state water board reports
- Help rancher find relief funds following outbreak of mycoplasma, appeal FSA denial
- Help rancher understand permit process for vineyard establishment
- Track down new meat processor, draw them into rancher group

When I get back...

- Plan 2 talks:
 - Poultry producers – on-farm slaughter
 - Farm business management workshop – environmental regulations
- Touch base with long-standing projects:
 - New ranch road/stream crossing
 - Remodel of ag worker housing
 - Daylighting illegal ranch pond
 - New (old) potato variety
 - Dairy using byproduct for vodka

When I get back...

- Check on new legislation for ranch slaughter
- Update factsheets
- Do more outreach on new website (growninmarin.org)
- FIND NEW ENTERPRISE IDEAS!

Not all AO's are the same

1. Different “host”
2. Different funding stream
3. Different job description
4. Different needs within the ag community
5. Different network of allies

...but there are similarities

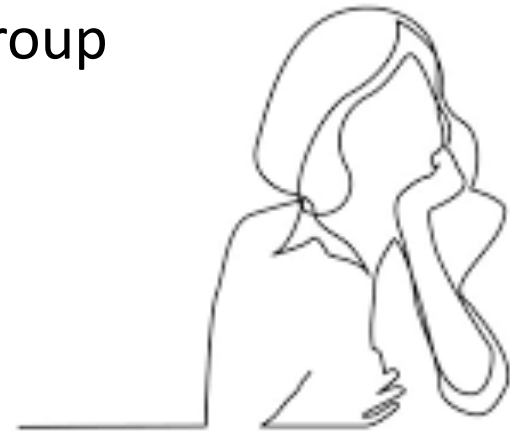
The birth of an Ag Ombuds

1. Catalyzing event
2. Argument is made
3. Champions and allies are recruited
4. Stakeholders are engaged
5. Campaign is mounted



Step 1

1. Catalyzing event with county Supervisor(s)
 - “Ag summit” (convening of farmers)
 - General Plan update
 - Direct appeal from stakeholder group



Step 2

2. Establish convincing arguments– *the benefits*

- Economic development
- Keep ag land in agriculture
 - Stable land tenure, stave off development, climate benefits of working landscapes
- Help pre-application = better applications
- Insight for regulators into agriculture
- Improved compliance
- Better relationships, morale for all



Step 3

3. Recruit Champions & Allies

- County Supervisor(s)
- Management within key county departments
 - Planning, Building & Safety, EHS
- Ag Commissioner



Step 4

4. Mobilize stakeholders

- Farmers
- Farm Bureau
- CAFF, RCD, NRCS, UCCE
- Local Food Policy Council
- Farmers market associations
- Land trusts
- Economic Development (EDB, SBDC)
- County staff



Step 5

5. Mount the campaign

- Time (2-4 years)
- May unfold in phases
- Be persistent, be strategic



Prepare for the evolution...

Changes will affect how AO does their job

- Host entity may change
- Focus/needs of community may change
- Staff turnover (AO and regulators)

Longevity is correlated with success



How boring was it?

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Vince Trotter

UCCE Marin County

vtrotter@ucanr.edu, 415-473-4204

www.growninmarin.org