



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF
FOOD & AGRICULTURE

Karen Ross, Secretary

December 1, 2017

In the best of years, California's fairgrounds are alight with not just fairs but festivals, gatherings and events of every stripe. From the simplest reception to the grandest gala, our facilities are central to our agricultural and multi-cultural communities.

Alas, in some of our communities, 2017 was not "the best of years." Fires, in particular, were a focal point this past season and will remain so for many months as we recover and rebuild. As it turns out, though, our fairgrounds and our fair employees were just as central to their communities through these trying times as they are otherwise.

From Santa Rosa to Southern California, families fled and rescuers responded to a series of fires that was, in many respects, unprecedented. At one point, 17 of our California fairgrounds simultaneously served as emergency shelters, fire camps or both. Evacuees included approximately 2,000 people and 1,700 animals including all manner of livestock and pets – even a tortoise.

Our fairs mean so much more to their communities than just a celebratory week or two or three, once a year. Through our fairs and our fairgrounds, our agricultural communities have an opportunity to put our best foot forward. In my travels this year, both to annual fairs and through neighborhoods ravaged by wildfire, I've seen that firsthand.

In the best of years we would close with a sense of satisfaction and an optimistic look ahead at the exhibits and events to come. This year, though, we first must feel the weight of lives lost and a harvest marred by flame and ash. But we also remember the essential role that our fairgrounds, our workers and our farmers and ranchers have played in response and rescue and recovery. As you look ahead to the 2018 fair season, please accept my thanks for your service this past year, and for your continued readiness.

Yours truly,

Karen Ross
Secretary

