




**DATE:** February 11, 2021

**TO:** San Joaquin County Growers/Processors Serviced by Simms Station

**FROM:** Tim Pelican, Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer 

**SUBJECT:** Satellite Office Closure

You are receiving this letter because our records show that you are currently receiving services from our Simms Station office located at 17620 E. Hwy 120, Ripon California. To provide a brief history of when the Simms Office was opened in 1998, the main Agricultural Commissioner's Office was located on Hazelton Ave. near Downtown Stockton. The purchase of Simms Station in 1998 was made to consolidate three other offices located in Tracy, Manteca and Escalon. In 2008 our main office was moved into its current location at the Robert J Cabral Agricultural Center on 2101 East Earhart Stockton, and the office that was located on Hazelton Ave. near Downtown Stockton was closed.

This past year has helped make the decision that this office no longer meets the needs of the Department, and is not efficient use of County funds.

Though this has not been an easy decision to make, there has been a buildup of multiple issues that have helped ensure to the Department that this is the correct path to take regarding this office closure. The number one concern is the safety of our staff and clients. In the past 10 years, there have been over 70 accidents that have taken place at the intersection in front of Simms Station; several of them have been fatal. As we have seen an increase in traffic over the last few years, several of those accidents have been near misses to the building itself; three of those have been within the past six months with the building only being saved from direct hits from either the large boulders placed in front of the building and in one case hitting a tree which has since been removed.

Other factors include the structure itself and accessibility to utilities. Currently, the office is badly in need of upgrading including plumbing and wiring, however since there is asbestos in the walls that makes any interior upgrades cost prohibitive. There is also a glaring need for a new septic system. We have also been informed that AT&T no longer plans to service the phone lines in the area, which regularly go down, and the availability of wireless service at this location is inadequate for our needs.

While this may appear to be a reduction of services, I can assure you that over the last few years changes that we have made in our business model will ensure that disruptions in service would be minimal. Currently, all scheduled appointments are centralized through our office in Stockton and have been for at least the last several years particularly for phytosanitary certificates. This year we began offering on-site delivery of Pesticide Permits making office visits unnecessary. We will still have district Biologists

assigned to serve the area currently serviced by Simms but they will now be staffed out of our Stockton office.

Over the last year, the Animal Services Department moved out of the Robert Cabral Agricultural Center, which allows us to place our staff working out of Simms at the Ag Center providing them with a safer, more efficient work environment. Many changes have taken place in the 22 years since Simms Station was purchased in 1998. The County's use of electronic platforms to complete our day-to-day business has changed dramatically, nearly all of our business performed on paper then is now done electronically. For instance, nearly 80% of pesticide use reports are now submitted online, and all pesticide permits are issued and stored online making permits available to pesticide dealers and Pest Control Advisors by e-mail. All appointments can now be made electronically through our website and phone calls to the office are many times not needed. All of our Biologists are now equipped with traveling offices in their vehicles, they have the capability to issue nearly any type of document or permit from their vehicle.

As the Department moves forward, I just want to make sure it is known that this decision was not taken lightly. I have spent the last two years gathering information on workloads and costs of keeping the Simms office open, including proposed costs on upgrades where feasible. It has become apparent that in order to provide a safe and effective workplace it will unfortunately be time to move on from this facility.

The Department is going to propose closing the Simms Office on June 30, 2021. We will be taking an item to the Board of Supervisors most likely sometime in March to inform them of our intentions. I welcome receiving your input and concerns as we move forward towards this endeavor.