

January 28, 2025.

By Sheila Barry and Christine Murillo Barrick

Alameda County Agriculture Working Housing Need Assessment

Background

A survey was mailed to agriculture operations in Alameda County to assess the housing needs of agricultural workers and land stewards. The survey included questions about current housing provision, interest in on-site or off-site housing, and the potential impact of affordable housing on operations and worker well-being. This data can be used to understand the housing challenges faced by agricultural operations in the county and inform the development of policies and programs to address these challenges.

Methods

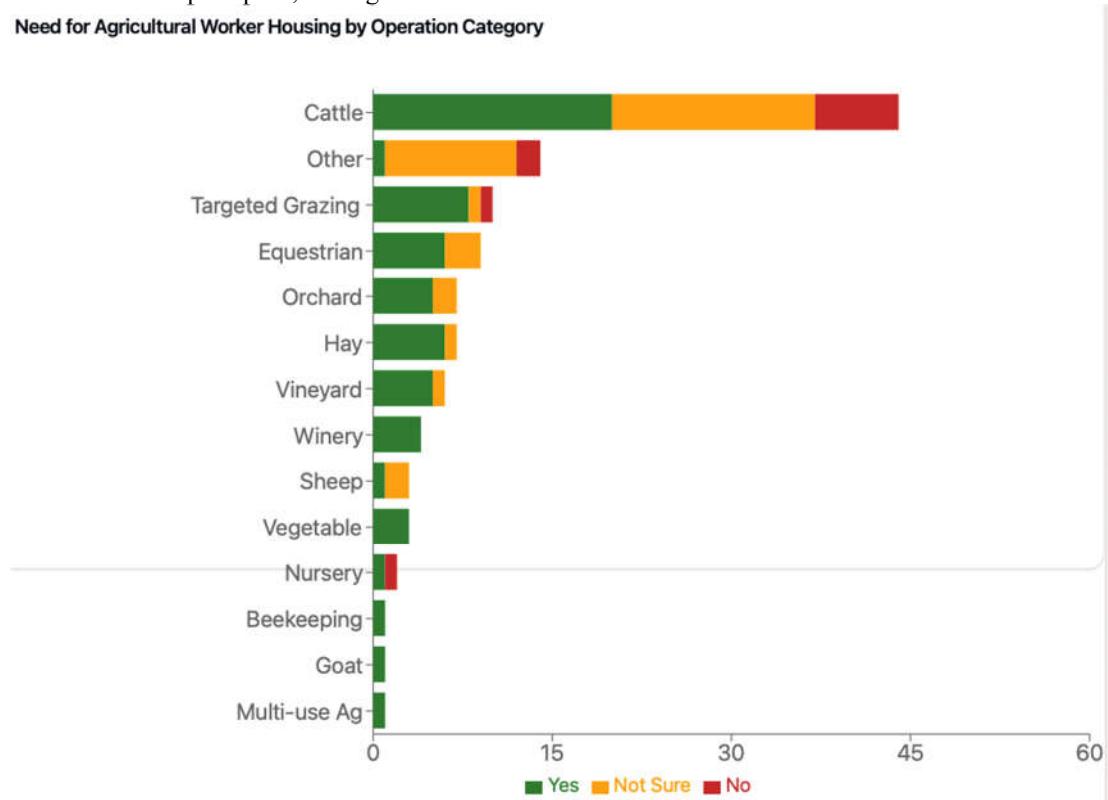
572 surveys were mailed (including duplicate addresses, returned surveys, and operations not in the unincorporated area). Estimate of eligible responses is 322. The survey was preceded by a postcard announcing the survey. The survey was sent with a stamp addressed return envelope. A couple weeks after the survey was sent a reminder post card was sent. **Response rate approximately 30%; 92 responses, 84 were used in analysis.** Seven responses were not in unincorporated Alameda County including Ag processor in San Leandro, Open Space/ Hunting in Livermore, Nursery in Fremont, Nursery in Oakland, Vineyard in Livermore, Botanical Garden in Berkeley, and Garden Retail Store in Berkeley. One response for a second home parcel was also excluded.

Key Overall Findings

Is more housing needed to support agricultural workers and land stewards in Alameda County?

Other includes open space, non-ag lands.

Need for Agricultural Worker Housing by Operation Category



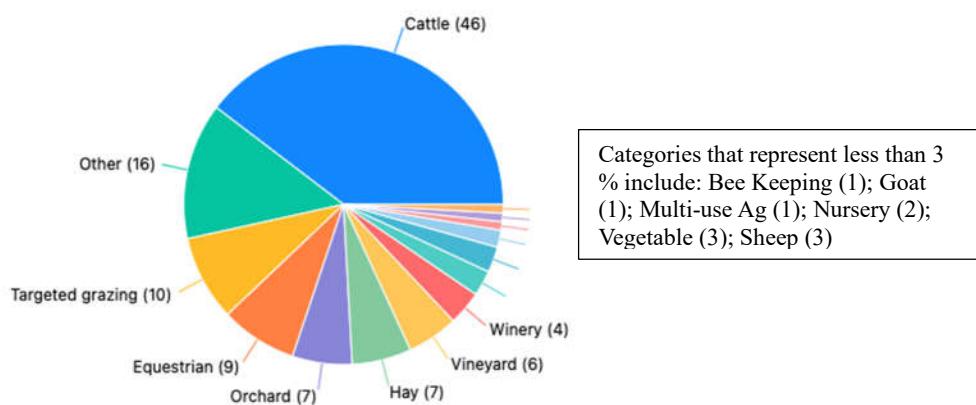
Agricultural Worker Housing Needs Assessment by Operation Category

Operation Type	Operation Profile	Key Considerations	Housing Needs Assessment
Cattle only n=28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avg workers: 1.1, 21% w/workers Permanent workers: 5 operations Seasonal workers: 2 operations Size: 11-200 acres (43%), 201-500 acres (21%), 501-1000 acres (21%) Currently providing housing: 3 operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zoning laws/restrictions (12) Permitting issues (9) Septic concerns (8) Building costs (8) Limited building envelope (5) Potable water (3) 	Low to moderate need with current housing provision at 11%. Low average worker numbers. Preference towards caretaker units or single-family housing onsite.
Mixed Operations with Cattle (e.g. hay, sheep, targeted grazing, vineyard, equestrian) n=18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avg workers: 7.8, 61% w/workers Permanent workers: 9 operations Seasonal workers: 9 operations Size: 11-200 acres (44%) and 201-500 acres (39%) Currently provides housing: 4 operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zoning laws/restrictions (9) Septic issues (8) Permitting (8) Building costs (3) Limited building envelope (2) 	Moderate need with larger average workforce and mix of permanent/seasonal workers. Current housing provision (22%). Preference towards caretaker, ADU, single-family or tiny homes onsite.
Vineyard/Winery and Orchard Operations n=7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avg workers: 10.3, 71% w/workers Permanent workers: 4 operations Seasonal workers: 4 operations Size: Mix of 11-200 acres (60%) and 0-10 acres (40%) Currently provides housing: 0 operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited building envelope (2) Zoning restrictions (2) Building costs (2 responses) Permitting (2) 	Critical need with high average workforce and no current housing provision. Equal split between permanent and seasonal needs. Mixed of interest in offsite, onsite, and temp housing. Interest in caretaker, ADU and trailers(1)
Equestrian Operations n=4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avg workers: 2.25, 75% w/workers Permanent workers: 3 operations Size: Primarily 201-500 acres (50%) Currently provides housing: 3 operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zoning laws/restrictions (2) Permitting (3) Floor area ratio limitations (2) 	Well-addressed current needs (75% provide housing). Interest in temporary and onsite housing
Nursery Operations n=2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avg workers: 21 Permanent workers: 2 operations Size: Split between 0-10 and 11-200 acres Currently provides housing: 0 operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple infrastructure needs, water availability, zoning, building cost (1) 	Most critical unmet need with highest worker density (21 workers avg) and no current housing provision. Nursery respondents are split about the need for housing
Targeted grazing, goat, beekeeping, sheep n=8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avg workers: 0 Currently provides housing: 0 operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zoning laws/restrictions (4) Permitting issues (3) Septic concerns (2) Building costs (4) Potable water (3) 	Limited need and limited interest.
Other, Open Space and Land Management n=16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avg workers 0.13, 6% w/workers Currently provides housing: 1 operation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zoning laws/restrictions (5) Permitting issues (3) Septic concerns (4) Building costs (2) Limited building envelope (1) Potable water (2) Access (2) 	Limited need and limited interest.

Operation Type	Operation Profile	Key Considerations	Housing Needs Assessment
Multi-Use Ag n=2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avg workers 20, 100% Permanent workers 2 operations Seasonal workers 1 operation Currently provides housing: 2 operation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Floor area, potable water, zoning, permits, septic 	Moderate need and interest.

Results

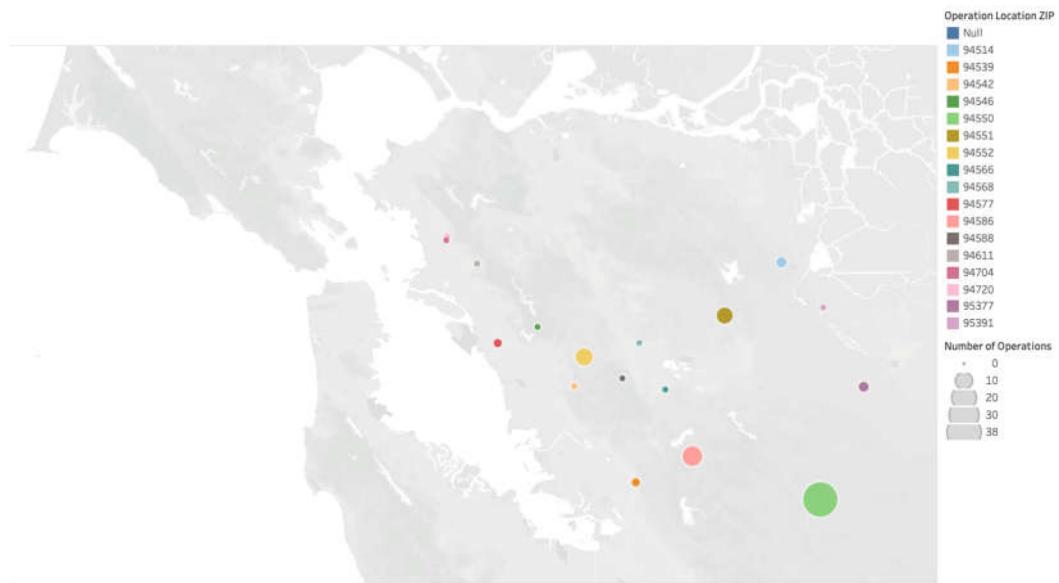
Number of Responses by Operation Category



Operations by Category and Size in Alameda County from Responses

Category	0-10 acres	11-200 acres	201-500 acres	501-1000 acres	2000+ acres	Undefined	Total
Cattle	1	20	13	7	2	3	46
Other	2	12	1	0	0	1	16
Targeted grazing	1	6	2	0	0	1	10
Equestrian	1	5	2	0	1	0	9
Orchard	1	4	2	0	0	0	7
Hay	0	2	3	1	0	1	7
Vineyard	2	4	0	0	0	0	6
Winery	0	4	0	0	0	0	4
Sheep	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Vegetable	0	1	1	0	0	1	3
Nursery	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Multi-use Ag	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Goat	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Beekeeping	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

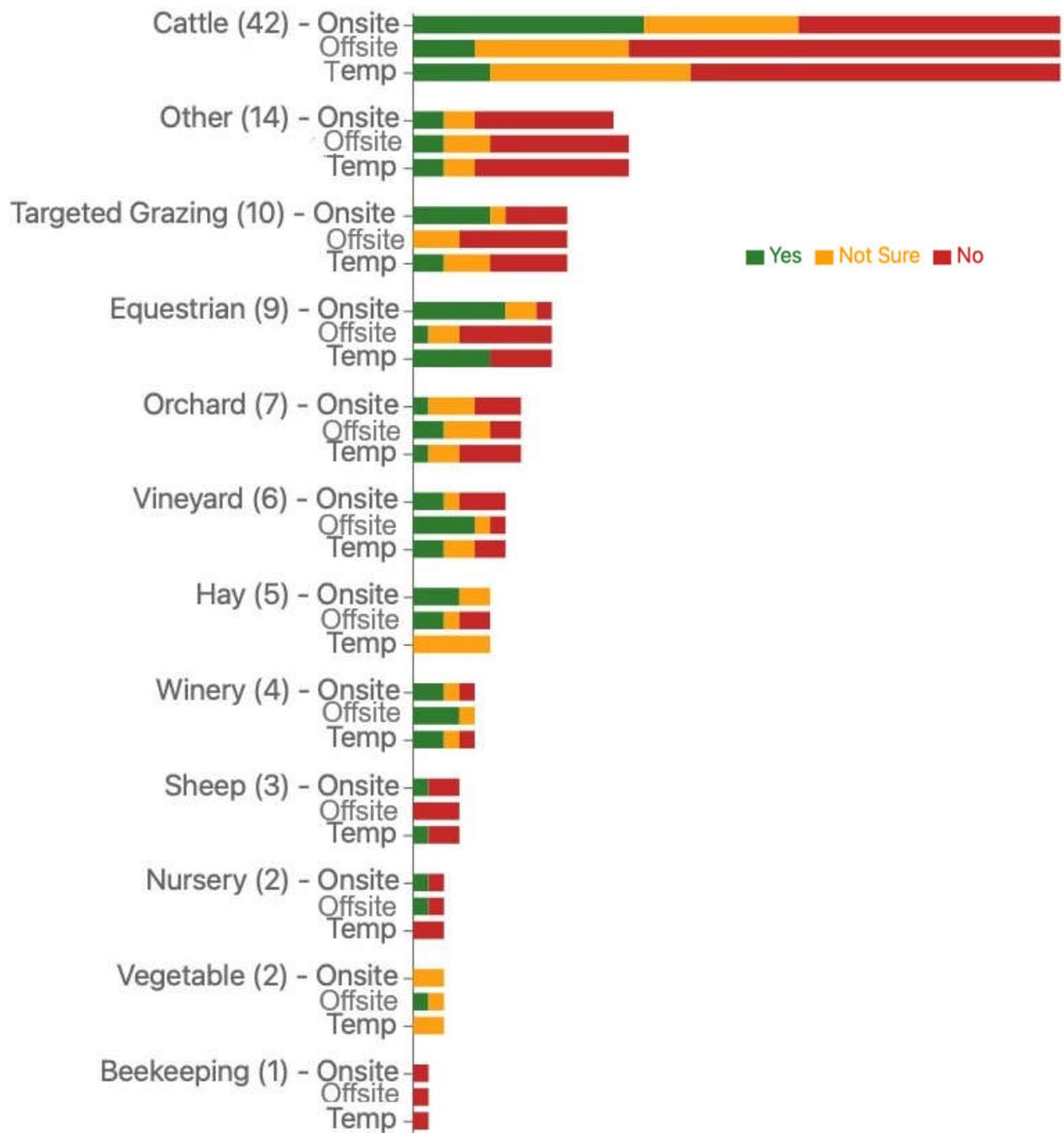
Distribution of Responses to Ag/ Land Steward Worker Survey



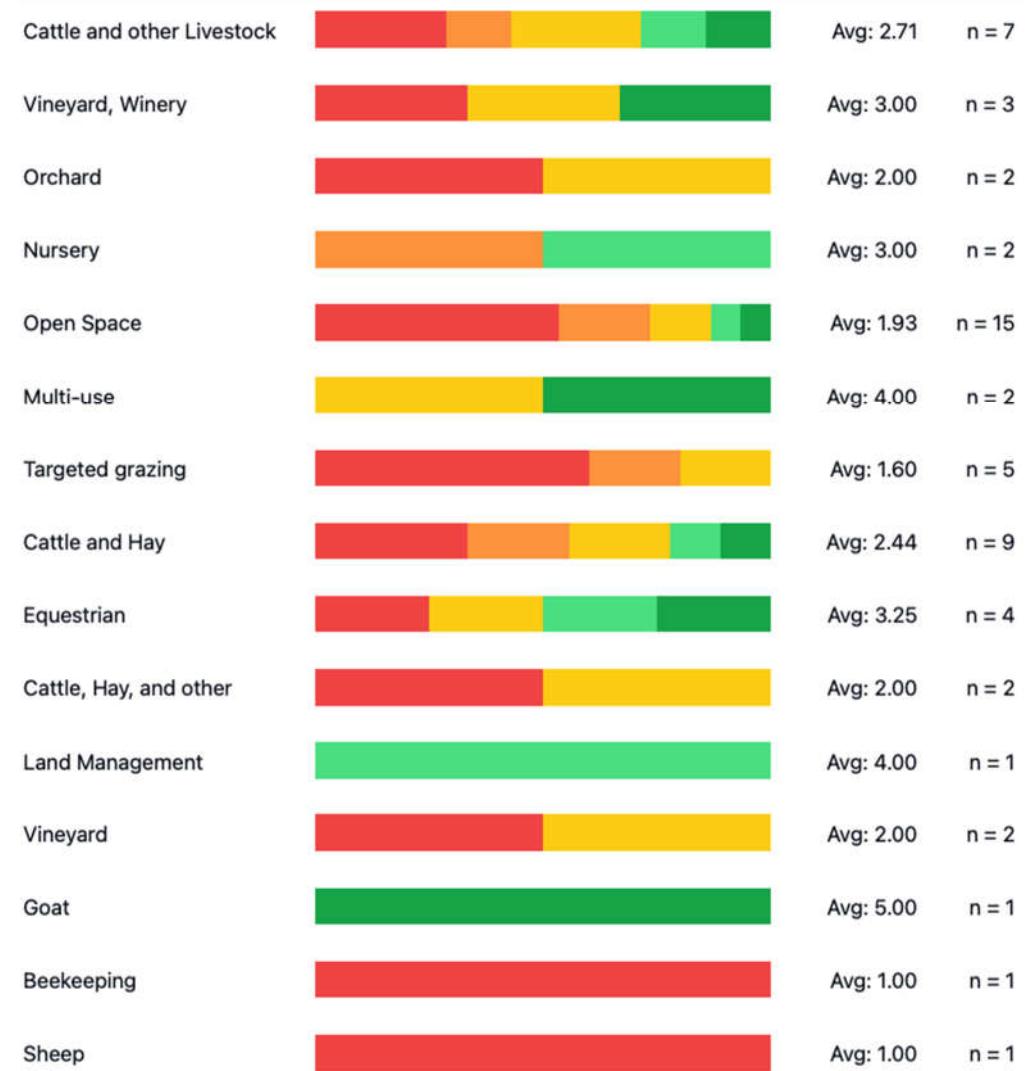
Number of Agriculture and Land Steward workers in Alameda County by Operation Category from Responses

Operation Category	Permanent Workers			Seasonal Workers		
	Farm/Field	Processing	Other	Farm/Field	Processing	Other
Cattle	23	0	3	3	2	0
Cattle and other Livestock	17	0	0	7	0	0
Vineyard, Winery	23	0	0	16	0	0
Orchard	18	0	0	15	0	0
Nursery	42	0	0	0	0	0
Open Space	0	0	0	0	0	0
Multi-use	41	0	15	0	18	0
Targeted grazing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cattle and Hay	48	2	0	11	20	6
Equestrian	9	0	0	0	0	0
Cattle, Hay, and other	16	0	0	15	0	0
Land Management	2	0	0	0	0	0
Vineyard	10	0	0	10	0	0
Goat	0	0	0	0	0	0
Beekeeping	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheep	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	249	2	18	77	40	6
Total		269			123	

Benefit of Housing (Onsite, Offsite, Temporary) by Operation Type from Responses



Interest in developing affordable housing onsite



Interest Level Scale:

■ Level 1 ■ Level 2 ■ Level 3 ■ Level 4 ■ Level 5

Key Considerations for Developing Housing by Operation Category

Operation Category	Key Considerations (number of responses)
Cattle (n=46)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning laws/restrictions (14) • Permitting/Building permits (12) • Septic requirements (10) • Building cost (8) • Limited building envelope (6) • Limited floor area ratio (3) • Potable water availability (3)
Vineyard (n=6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning laws/restrictions (3) • Limited building envelope (2) • Building cost (2) • Permitting (2) • Septic (2)
Orchard (n=6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning laws/restrictions (3) • Permitting (3) • Septic (2) • Building cost (1) • Potable water availability (1)
Other (Open Space) (n=17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Septic (6) • Permitting (4) • Access issues (4) • Potable water availability (4) • Zoning laws/restrictions (6) • Building cost (3)
Hay farming (n=5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning laws/restrictions (4) • Septic (3) • Permitting (3) • Building cost (1) • Limited building envelope (1)
Equestrian (n=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning laws/restrictions (2) • Permitting (3) • Limited floor area ratio (2) • Building cost (1) • Septic (1)

Additional Challenges by operation category

Vineyard/Winery

- High housing costs relative to wages in East Bay
- Location and financing concerns- east of Greenville Rd

Cattle

- Ag Zoning, FAR, and Measure D restrictions
- High permit and compliance costs
- Expensive power hookup fees
- Need for fewer building restrictions

Equestrian

- Need legal workers
- County obstacles in replacing existing structures
- Need for affordable on-ranch housing options

Nursery

- Measure D limits on building housing

Multi-use Ag

- Broader concerns about agriculture decline in county
- Need for reduced agency requirements

Other Property Issues

- Access problems. Propane can't be delivered due to road conditions.
- No street address, no utilities
- Cost-prohibitive building code compliance
- Crime concerns
- Landlocked properties

Specific Regulatory Issues

- 100 Acre law impact on rural landowners
- Fish and wildlife permit for bridge across Arroyo Mocho
- County official interactions

Some categories (Orchard, Beekeeping, some Targeted grazing) did not report challenges.

If additional affordable housing was available in Alameda County how might it affect operations and health and well-being of workers?

Expected Effects on Operations:

- Vineyard/Winery operations consistently report positive effects
- Mixed results for cattle operations, with about half expecting positive effects and half expecting no change
- Most specialized operations (Nursery, Goat, Beekeeping) anticipate positive effects
- Mixed-use operations (e.g., Cattle + Equestrian, Orchard + Cattle) generally expect positive effects

Expected Effects on Health and Well-being:

- Majority of respondents across categories expect positive effects on worker health and well-being
- Very few reported negative effects (only one response)
- Some operations, particularly in Cattle and Targeted Grazing, expect no change
- Operations with more workers (Vineyard/Winery, Nursery) consistently report expected positive health impacts

Key trends show that operations with more workers or diverse agricultural activities tend to anticipate more positive effects from affordable housing access.