

Countywide Services

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New Agricultural Inspector Compensated with Kibble

The newest inspector with the Sacramento County Agricultural Commissioner's Office expects only treats for his work – and lots of praise. Dozer, a three year old, 68 pound Labrador mix, takes his new job as an agriculture pest detector very seriously.



Since arriving on January 9, Dozer has accompanied his handler, Jennifer Berger, to various parcel facilities on the look-out for agricultural pests. Incoming parcels containing fruits, vegetables, plants and soil may harbor pests that could harm Sacramento County's 350 million dollar agricultural industry and the environment. In California, all shipments containing any plant material are required by state law to be conspicuously labeled with identity and origin of contents – though not all are. Dozer's job is to find those unmarked parcels.

Dozer alerts Berger to suspicious packages by scratching at them. "He relishes this "game" of sniffing out anything that may be agricultural in nature. Whether running along a loaded conveyor belt or investigating a loaded delivery truck, it's all play to him," said Berger.

Dozer is one of 13 agricultural detection dogs used by Agricultural Commissioner Offices from Sacramento to San Diego. He is the third dog to be assigned to Sacramento County. The dog teams, sponsored by the California Department of Food and Agriculture and funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), have intercepted many significant pests which could cost millions of dollars to eradicate if not detected.

All the dogs used in the program come from rescue groups or animal shelters, and are generally Labrador retriever mixed breeds. The dogs are chosen for their good temperament, energy level, and must undergo basic training at the USDA National Detector Dog Training Center in Georgia before being assigned to a handler. The dog and handler then become a team which must be certified for proficiency by the USDA.

After training together for only two weeks, Dozer and Berger passed the annual certification test with a perfect score. Though Berger was obviously proud of the accomplishment, Dozer was unfazed.

For more information about the Agriculture Detector Dog Program and Dozer, visit the CDFA website: <http://plantingseedsblog.cdfa.ca.gov/wordpress/?p=1154>.

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