

Ground broken on farm worker housing development

Mutual Housing California broke ground Thursday on a long-awaited affordable housing development in Woodland for farm workers and their families.

Work on the community started in 2010 with research on the need for such a specific type of housing. The nonprofit purchased the land in August of that year.

When completed in March 2015, Mutual Housing at Spring Lake will be the first permanent, year-round housing in Yolo County for agricultural workers and also the first Mutual Housing community for these workers.

“Developing a community for agricultural workers has been a long-term goal of ours,” said Rachel Iskow, Mutual Housing’s chief executive officer.

In Yolo County, more than 5,000 agricultural workers in fields, packing houses and processing plants need housing.

California is the second most expensive state in the nation for rentals. To afford a typical two-bedroom apartment in Yolo County, a person must earn \$20.18 an hour, or nearly \$43,280 annually.

More than half of Yolo County renters (54 percent) cannot afford to pay rent for a typical apartment without working more than one job, according to the Washington, D.C.-based National Low-Income Housing Coalition’s “Out of Reach 2013,” <http://nlihc.org/oor/2013/CA>.

“Rural areas don’t have adequate housing for families, especially agricultural workers, some of whom are doubling up in order to cope,” Iskow said.

The development on the corner of Pioneer Avenue and Farmers Central Road will have 62 apartments and townhomes.

One apartment will be reserved for an on-site manager. The other 61 will be set aside for families earning between 30 and 50 percent of the area median income.



When built, Mutual Housing at Spring Lake will offer affordable housing to farm workers and their families.

Rendering courtesy of Kuchman Architects PC/LN Productions

Mutual Housing California develops housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at mutualhousing.com.

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USDA rental subsidies will be available for these units to make monthly rents affordable.

The development also will be one of the first zero-net-energy communities in Northern California for agricultural workers and their families.

With zero net energy, the community is expected to produce as much energy as it uses with solar energy systems for the residential and common areas, including staff offices and laundry rooms as well as community rooms for financial education, leadership training and other workshops.

Energy-efficiency, such as high-rated insulation, also has been worked into the design.

“California is making rapid progress in green building, but agricultural workers have been shut out of that in the past,” said Iskow. “We are helping to remedy that lack.”

The new community will have open areas, a children’s play area with basketball hoop and a community garden.

A community building also will have offices, a computer learning lab and a community room for classes, meetings and social events as well as offices.

Mutual Housing and local partners will coordinate and offer English as a second language, financial education, home-buyer preparation and college planning workshops at the center.

The organization also does leadership development and mentoring for youth and adults.

“Through our programs, residents will be able to not just participate in creating a sustainable community, but also actually lead that effort,” said Iskow.

Sacramento-based Kuchman Architects, PC, designed the community. Arcata, CA-based Redwood Energy was a consultant on the energy efficiency. Chico-based Sunseri Construction, Inc., is the general contractor.

Funding for the multifamily development is from the city of Woodland, the USDA Rural Development Housing Service,

the state of California Department of Housing and Community Development Joe Serna Jr. Farmworker Housing Grant Program, California State Treasurer Bill Lockyer, the California State Treasurer Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program, NeighborWorks America, the Yocha Dehe Community Fund, the Bank of America Foundation, Roseville Bank of Commerce, Dignity Health, Comerica Bank, U.S. Bank, Union Bank of California, Insperity and Mechanics Bank.

NeighborWorks Capital, Wells Fargo Bank and Citibank are lending funds for the project.

Founded in 1988, Mutual Housing California develops and operates rental housing for modest-income households. The communities have nearly 3,000 residents, nearly half of whom are children.

Through Mutual Housing’s focus on leadership, the nonprofit also provides training and mentoring as well as educational programs, community-building activities and services for residents and neighbors.