

Advocating for an Agricultural Ombuds in your county

Common pattern when securing an Ag Ombuds:

1. Catalyzing event
2. Best rationale is made
3. Champions and allies are recruited
4. Stakeholders are engaged
5. Campaign unfolds

Potential benefits from an Ag Ombuds:

- Economic Development (in rural communities)
- Keep ag land in agriculture
 - Stable land tenure
 - Stave off development
 - Climate benefits of working landscapes
- Help with applications = better applications
- Insight for regulators into needs of ag community
- Improved compliance by ag community
- Better relationships, morale for both ag and regulators

Words of Wisdom (from folks who've been there before):

- Talk with an AO in another county, invite them to speak
 - Capture their impacts, successes for your own argument
- Talk with the analog of your target "Champion" in an AO county, invite them to speak
 - Capture their pride
- Think big:
 - Push for full-time position
 - Don't artificially narrow scope (e.g. just county rules)
 - Allow for policy work/advocacy
- Include county agencies in the lead-up – get them onboard
- Place the position outside of county entities ...but consider carefully the best "host"
 - Who is already engaged with ag?
 - Who already has reputation for neutrality?
 - Who is closely tied to your main argument for the AO? (economic development, ag land preservation, policy/process reform, etc.)
- Define the position according to your greatest need
- Identify your gate-keepers early, work on them as well
 - County CAO
 - Those whose budget will be affected
- Build the network of support for the AO
 - Orient county staff, build relationships between them and AO
 - Partner early and often with other non-profits
- Talk money up-front so budgeting doesn't slow the process
- Hire an AO who "speaks both languages" and understands the local ag community
- Hire someone with good, audience-appropriate communication skills
- Find the highest possible good to come from an AO and emphasize it
 - Santa Clara County's AO is part of strategy to fight climate change – maintaining working landscapes
- Explore possible matching funds – USDA grants, e.g. – to launch position, prove value
- If necessary, combine with an existing, already established role
- Emphasize how an AO can collaborate with regulators, reducing their load – don't cast them in an adversarial role
- Anticipate the "evolution"
 - Host/supervising entity may change
 - Needs of the ag community may change
 - Staff turnover (AO as well as regulatory staff)