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### **ALAMEDA COUNTY A BIG WINNER IN STATEWIDE AWARDS COMPETITION**

A unique and successful Alameda County program known as “Dig Deep Farms & Produce,” was chosen by an independent panel of experts to receive **the California Counties Innovation Award** – the top honor presented by the California State Association of Counties in its annual Challenge Awards program.

Dig Deep Farms is a community driven venture launched by the Alameda County Deputy Sheriffs’ Activities League (DSAL) that employs local residents to grow fresh, organic produce to meet the needs of the community. The program, which cultivates organic produce on an 8-acre plot of County-owned land in unincorporated San Leandro, aims to prevent violence and crime through the creation of jobs, access to healthy food and community revitalization.

“It is extremely gratifying to see some deserved recognition being given to Dig Deep Farms and Produce, a project that exemplifies the innovation, courage and partnerships that we encourage for all County programs in order to meet the changing needs of our communities,” said Susan S. Muranishi, Alameda County Administrator.

In addition to growing its own produce, the Dig Deep Farms team harvests fruit from abundant backyard fruit trees, purchases organic produce from other local farms and then sells and distributes this healthy food in disadvantaged urban areas known as “food deserts” where access to first-rate fresh food is limited. The project also prides itself on providing sustainable employment for a full-time staff of eight and a multitude of part-time workers, many transitioning from the criminal justice system.

“When we first decided to do community gardening as a crime-prevention strategy, there weren’t a lot of law enforcement agencies doing that,” said Sheriff’s Lt. Marty Neideffer, who helped launch the program in 2010 and remains one of its driving forces. “But the fact that this project keeps growing and receiving recognition is a tribute to a County and a Sheriff’s Office that are open to innovation.”

While the Dig Deep project won CSAC’s marquee award for 2014, it was not the only Alameda County to come away with recognition in the annual awards program recognizing the most innovative and cost-effective programs developed by California’s 58 counties. Winning entries in CSAC’s two other big award categories prompted the organization to list Alameda County as one of the three overall top award winners this year.

Alameda County also won a **CSAC Challenge Award** for ongoing efforts, led by the County General Services Agency, to engage 20 other agencies in implementing the County’s Climate Action Plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and otherwise lessen the impact of County operations on the environment by vastly reducing waste and minimizing the use of paper and other resources.

The Alameda County Assessor and the District Attorney’s Office also received **CSAC Merit Awards** for innovative new programs:

- The Assessor’s Office won for its “Canvassing App,” a new mobile technology tool for County staff that reduced by 50 percent the total effort involved in the annual canvassing of business properties.

- The District Attorney's office was recognized for Human Exploitation & Trafficking Watch Community Initiatives, which engage and educate the community about the problem of human trafficking, support the recovery of victims and hold offenders accountable.

Keith Carson, President of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors, said this year's CSAC awards program recognized an impressively broad array of County programs.

"Each award is impressive on its own," he said. "But what makes me most proud is the diverse range of programs here in Alameda County that are being recognized by our statewide peers for being innovative in the way they serve the community."

Neideffer said the big win by Dig Deep Farms is one in which people throughout the 9500-employee County organization can take pride. That's because a multitude of County agencies – the County Administrator, Sheriff, General Services Agency, Social Services Agency, Community Development Agency and more – contributed to launching and sustaining the program over the past four years. "It's a total County effort," he said. "And it's truly a great day to call myself a County employee."