



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Apps for Ag Hackathon

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recognizes the importance of eliminating the barriers between rural Veterans and the services they have earned and deserve. On July 28-30, 2017, the VA Office of Enterprise Integration and the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR) convened a 48-hour collaborative event at the Urban Hive in Sacramento, California, to encourage the development of innovative solutions to spark entrepreneurship and bring together the seemingly disparate worlds of software development, commercial farming, and Veterans. The event, which featured more than 40 application developers and entrepreneurs, challenged participants to leverage open data and trained the teams on [open source data \(https://www.data.va.gov\)](https://www.data.va.gov) available across both Veteran and Agriculture domains. VA Open Data team members acted as mentors and judges.

Mr. Gabe Youtsey, Chief Innovation Officer for UCANR, commented: "The Apps for Ag hackathon was exciting because of collaboration with VA and focus on Veteran farmers. This is important because Veterans bring tremendous technical skills that will impact the future of agriculture through technology. Also, new Veteran farmers can help create a sustainable food supply in the United States, and farming creates an attractive new career path for our Veterans that is connected to the land."

The Farmer Veteran Coalition, whose mission is to mobilize Veterans to feed America, also spoke at the event.

In conjunction with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), VA developed and presented five categories of Challenges: channels of communication; improving Veteran healthcare through the use of rural broadband; increasing the number of rural Veteran farmers; education; and employment.

Twelve teams turned ideas into commercial enterprises. The first and second placed winners built applications focusing on diagnosing plant diseases through artificial intelligence and machine learning. The third place winner focused on promoting agritourism. Winners received cash prizes ranging from \$2,500 to \$10,000, tickets to the University of California Davis Food and Ag Entrepreneurship Academy, and additional resources to help start ventures.

Other teams came up with solutions to connect farmers with Veterans who are seeking employment in agriculture, an online resource for bees, an application to simplify shipping logistics, and an application for detecting mold on produce.



Supporting Veteran Farmers

More needs to be done, however, to collaborate on policy and research to understand how we can better support Veteran farmers.

At the event, VA released four new Veteran farmer data assets highlighting the three counties in California with the highest percentage of Veteran farmers:

San Diego county (13.0%); Los Angeles county (7.5%); and Riverside county (6.6%).

Data about Veteran farmers by county was also used at Tableau's Student Data Hackathon on July 31, 2018, where Washington D.C. area college students, who are Veterans, learned about Tableau products using data from VA's Open Data and the Bureau of Labor Statistics to build data analytics skills creating data visualizations (see: [Tableau Public](#)

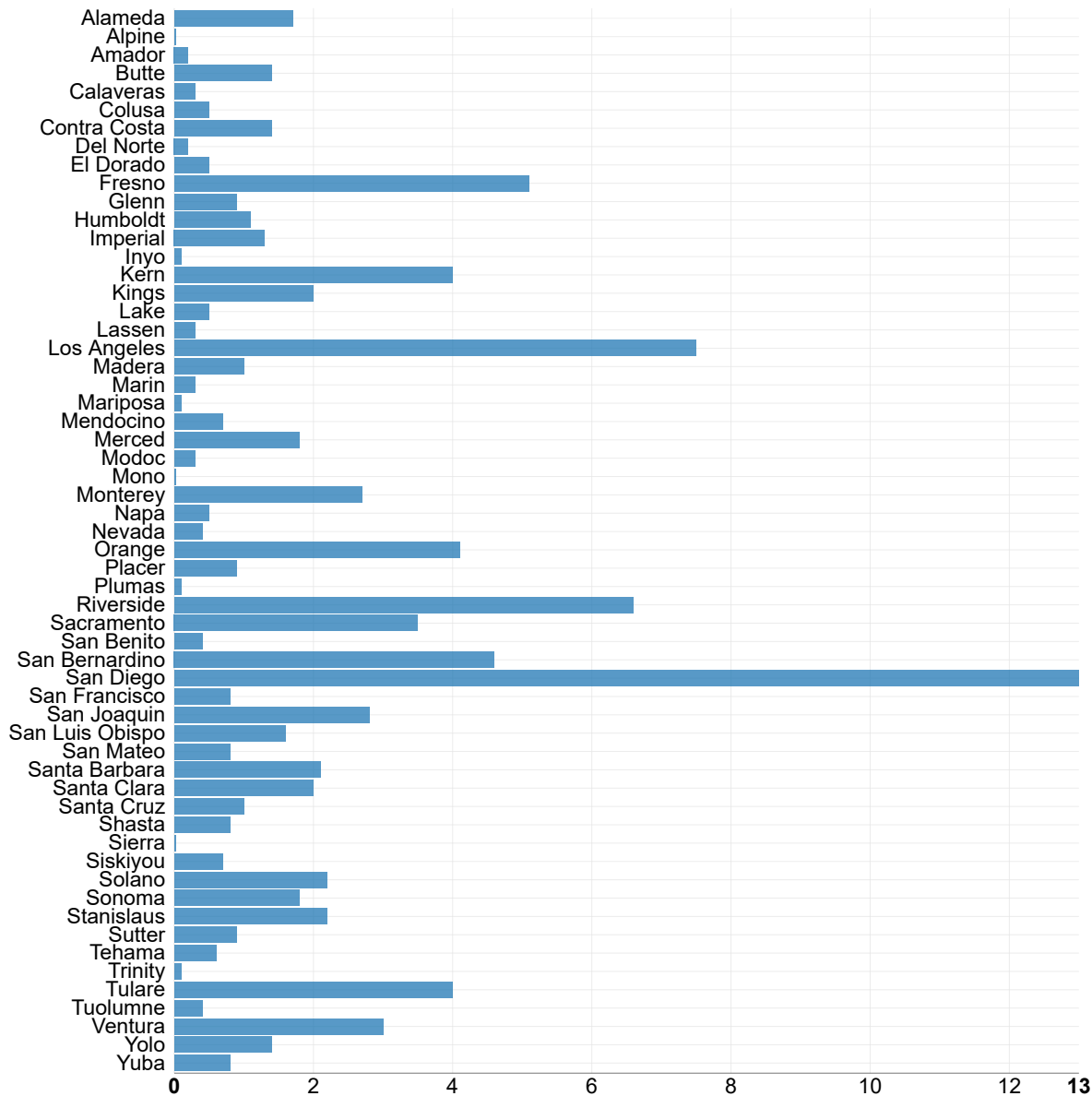
(<https://public.tableau.com/profile/donald.ingham#!/vizhome/TheTransitionDashboard/TransitioningVeterans>)).

By joining a USDA dataset on food deserts with a VA dataset on Veteran population, one of the teams created a new dataset (see: [Dataset link](#) (https://figshare.com/articles/Food_Insecure_Veterans/5998520/1)) of Veterans in food deserts with potential policy implications for Veterans at risk and homeless.

Percentage of Farmer Veterans in California

For a larger view of this map, see <https://arcg.is/OCG9m> (<https://arcg.is/OCG9m>). Source: USVETS 2015

Percentage of California Farmers Who Are Veterans, By County



Source: USVETS 2015

VA's Office of Enterprise Integration led the event, and presented VA's technology platform for data stories and data visualizations. VA wants to create awareness within the technology community around its vast collection of [open data \(https://www.data.va.gov\)](https://www.data.va.gov). The breadth of open data that VA collects is essential to developing technology that can have a positive impact on and for Veterans.

USDA

california

agriculture

Basic Statistics, Use, and Operational Data (https://www.data.va.gov/search/field_topic/basic-statistics-use-and-operational-data-311)



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[VA.gov \(http://www.va.gov/\)](http://www.va.gov/) - [Veteran Services \(http://www.va.gov/landing2_vetsrv.htm\)](http://www.va.gov/landing2_vetsrv.htm) - [Business](#)

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