

Kern receives grant to help farmworkers

Bus service will use funds to continue program that transports rural workers.

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Kern County will receive \$1.09 million grant to help with farmworker transportation.

The grant will be awarded to Kern Regional Transit, a division of the county roads department, which will use the money to continue a rural transportation service that began a year ago, said John Wilbanks, associate planner with Kern Regional Transit.

The new grant will extend service for another year and provide transportation to agricultural workers and their families living in Arvin, Lamont and Weedpatch, he said.

The bus service transports Lamont and Arvin residents who work in the carrot plants in the Lamont area.

It also allows Lamont and Arvin residents to ride the bus to Bakersfield, even on a Sunday.

An assessment will be done to see if other areas, such as Edison, could be provided with the service, Wilbanks said.

Last year, Kern Regional Transit was awarded the same grant and the same

amount.

Altogether, both grants have made it possible for the service to buy four buses, which are used to serve the Lamont area, Wilbanks said.

The grants are part of a larger government award to address transportation problems facing farmworkers in the valley.

This year, the U.S. Department of Transportation provided a \$2.49 million grant to the California State Department of Transportation to expand farmworker transportation service in the Central Valley, Congressman Cal Dooley, D-Hanford, said Wednesday.

Since 2000, Dooley has been working with state officials from Caltrans to develop a Central Valley farmworker transportation pilot program to address the systemic problems faced by agricultural laborers.

Dooley also worked to include the recently awarded Kern Regional Transit money in the federal Job Access and Reverse Commute Program.

Run by the federal Department of Transportation, the program is a national grant program that provides states and communities with funding to expand employment transportation programs and services.