SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY FARM BUREAU

ORAL COMMENTS MADE TO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS APRIL 6, 2021 ON AGENDA ITEM 26, THE PASO BASIN PLANTING ORDINANCE

Madam Chair and Board Members,

On behalf of San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau members and our local agriculture industry, we urge you to VOTE NO on Agenda Item 26 the Paso Basin Planting Ordinance.

We want to first say thank you to each of you for your willingness to meet with us over the past several weeks to find common ground on this issue. We have not found that yet, but I am hopeful that if we work together we can. We know this issue is not going away anytime soon.

We appreciate that the intent of this ordinance is a positive one, and one that could help some Farm Bureau members. We will continue to meet and work collaboratively with all of you, and we support finding ways to help all of our farmers and ranchers who are not currently able to irrigate more than 5 acre-feet per year. Through conversations with you and outreach among our own membership, we have only identified 6 farmers and ranchers who were actually locked out of irrigating their crops when the Ag Offset Ordinance was implemented. To be clear, we absolutely care about finding a solution for those 6 and any other farmers in the Basin, but we also have to be mindful of long-term impacts to our entire agriculture economy.

County staff has not yet put out the exact number of properties that would be eligible to expand their pumping under this new Ordinance. I believe Supervisor Arnold estimated 4,800 properties in a previous meeting. If 4800 properties pump an additional 20 acre feet per year, that's 96,000 acre feet of new pumping in the Basin. Let's say only 10 percent take advantage of this, that's still nearly 10,000 acre feet per year.

The agriculture community is united against allowing the Board to inject CEQA into farming and ranching. SLO County Farm Bureau, along with your SLO County Agricultural Liaison Advisory Board, Grower-Shipper Association of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties, Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance, the San Luis Obispo County chapter and Santa Barbara County chapter of the Coalition of Labor, Agriculture & Business (COLAB), and other agriculture industry stakeholders, oppose any land use ordinance that includes a discretionary permit for routine agriculture practices like planting crops. Why are farmers in South County and the Coast worried about what you're about to do in Paso Robles? Because they know what a terrible precedent this is for all of agriculture.

This ordinance is not the way forward. The more appropriate (and inevitable) regulatory pathway for groundwater regulation is the Groundwater Sustainability Plan process, not a new county land use ordinance. The County is the lead Groundwater Sustainability Agency and has the ability to address longterm challenges with groundwater distribution through the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). We don't have to wait on approval of our GSP by the California Department of Water Resources (the State has until Jan. 2022 to do so) to begin implementing the basic provisions of reaching groundwater sustainability.

If you are dead-set on a new land use ordinance, there are alternatives that would be preferable to what is presented today. You can extend the lookback period to a time sufficient to redress these farmers situation. You could change the documentation or criteria to determine eligibility to resume historical irrigation. You could keep Tier 1 and Tier 2 and remove Tier 3. But whatever you do, please keep CEQA out of ag.

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