



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY FARM BUREAU

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August 9, 2021

San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors
1055 Monterey Street Suite D430
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408
By email to: ad_Board_clerk@co.slo.ca.us

Re: August 10, 2021 Agenda Item 46: Request to 1) receive and file an update on current drought conditions ... and 2) provide staff direction on offset clearances issued under the County's Agricultural Offset Ordinance (Offset Ordinance) for the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin (Paso Basin).

Supervisors:

San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau offers comments on Agenda Item 46 regarding direction to staff on the proposed Paso Basin Planting Ordinance. We appreciate the Board's contemplation of ways we can both minimize burdens on farmers in the Paso Basin and conserve groundwater.

Specific to "Option 1" and "Option 2" presented in the Staff Report on how active offset clearances would be transitioned to a yet-to-be-adopted Paso Basin Planting Ordinance, our preliminary feedback to you is that Option 2 appears to be somewhat preferable, as it would not require landowners to waste the time and expense to come back to the County and reapply for an offset clearance.

We agree with comments from Supervisors made at the July 14, 2021 Board Meeting that we should not have a policy that compels people to irrigate in a given year only to maintain their future ability to do so. Given our longer-term groundwater challenges in the Paso Basin, policies like the proposed new Planting Ordinance should be pragmatic toward providing flexibility to farmers to limit groundwater use, whether or not the county has issued an emergency drought declaration. We do not necessarily oppose adding some sort of extension based on a drought declaration, but it is important to recognize that the need to conserve water in the Basin will remain even after this declaration expires.

For clarity, while we are currently under a county drought emergency declaration, this agenda item will not provide any immediate flexibility to property owners under the existing Offset Ordinance. That is, a property owner who is currently "on the clock" to exercise their offset clearance by planting an irrigated crop (like the person who raised this issue at the Board's July 14, 2021 meeting) will still be compelled to irrigate agricultural land they would otherwise leave fallow. This situation is not unique, and it demonstrates the need for a more straightforward system to facilitate fallowing in the Paso Basin.

We remain your willing partner in finding policies to achieve our shared goals of protecting San Luis Obispo County's \$2.5 billion agriculture economy and safeguarding our limited groundwater resources.

Sincerely,

Brent Burchett, Executive Director
San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau