



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY FARM BUREAU

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May 4, 2020

San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors
1055 Monterey Street Suite D430
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408

Submitted by email to: ad_board_clerk@co.slo.ca.us

Re: May 5, 2020 Agenda Item 22: Industrial Hemp Ordinance

Supervisors:

Industrial hemp remains a challenging issue for SLO County Farm Bureau, as we have members who grow hemp and those who want hemp banned or regulated differently than other crops. The hemp market nationally is down considerably relative to when the Urgency Ordinance was passed in 2019, but regulatory changes at the federal level regarding cannabidiol could raise hemp prices in 2021. We want to find a path forward for hemp that works for SLO County. This ordinance is far from perfect, but we hope the Board will not delay adoption of a permanent ordinance. Agriculture and community stakeholders have attempted to find compromises over many months, and further debate seems unlikely to change conflicting perspectives.

We believe the ordinance should prioritize the need to protect our existing top commodities like wine grapes and produce. If contamination of grapes by hemp is actually proven at some point in the future, then this ordinance may need to be revised to ensure wine grapes are further protected.

We support previous efforts by the County to mitigate pesticide drift liability issues as part of the hemp and cannabis registration process. Those efforts, coupled with new proposed setbacks between hemp and existing crop production in this ordinance, will hopefully limit neighbor-to-neighbor pesticide application conflicts in the future.

The vast majority of our members in Edna Valley believe hemp is incompatible for their community. We do not oppose adding an Exclusion Area for Edna Valley. Allowing hemp only by a discretionary permit in certain areas is preferable from an outright ban, but the criteria to grant a Minor Use Permit application to grow hemp is somewhat unclear. Specifically, the “neighborhood compatibility plan” component should include more detail.

Our membership has diverse opinions on what an appropriate setback distance should be, but we hope the Board will consider the precedential nature of instituting the first ever odor-based setback on a federally legal agriculture crop in SLO County. A setback of 300 feet from sensitive receptors is more reasonable than a 1000 feet setback. A one-mile setback from Urban or Village Reserve Lines as contemplated by the Planning Commission seems excessive.

We oppose the minimum parcel size requirement. Other setback requirements and zoning restrictions better achieve the goal of decreasing neighbor-to-neighbor conflicts.

We believe the riparian and wetland setback should be removed. This requirement seems unnecessary, as hemp cultivation should not have impacts to water different from other crops.

We support the ordinance’s allowance for non-flowering hemp production in the Residential Rural land use category instead of a complete prohibition. To disallow hemp

transplants in Residential Rural areas would be especially problematic for our local greenhouse industry.

Thank you to the Board, County staff and all of our agricultural stakeholders who have spent considerable time over the past year trying to find a path forward for hemp in SLO County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BB', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Brent Burchett, Executive Director
San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau