



March 31, 2016

California Department of Water Resources
Public Affairs Office
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Sacramento, CA 94236

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Christina Beckstead
Executive Director

Subject: Draft Emergency Regulations for Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSP) and Alternatives

Dear California Department of Water Resources,

The Madera County Farm Bureau (MCFB) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Emergency Regulations for GSPs (Draft Regulations). MCFB is a centennial organization representing 90% of all of farmers and ranchers in Madera County on a variety of issues throughout the county.

Madera County has been significantly impacted by the current water issues resulting from the multi-year drought, resulting in several years of zero percent allocation of surface water, and both of our sub-basins have been deemed critically over-drafted. Given these facts, we appreciate and support the "substantial compliance" that the Department of Water Resources (DWR) will use to review the Ground Sustainability Plans (GSP). Flexibility at the local level is key to the framework as those implementing the GSP need to have room for adjustment. With this, we absolutely stress that this process be kept at the county level as the relationships will be the driving force in obtaining the sustainability that is mandated by 2040.

Upon review of the Draft Regulations, MCFB felt that it was pertinent that the following concerns be addressed:

Overly Excessive and Prescriptive

- Local agencies must have sufficient flexibility to make SGMA work for their communities. This does not mean that the basic requirement to achieve sustainability should be eroded, or that the obligation to submit a valid and complete GSP to DWR for careful review should be avoided. Rather, it means that local agencies must have the ability to achieve sustainable groundwater management in a way that works for the local community.

Madera County Farm Bureau

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- Bureaucratic Redundancy – The regulations do not allow local agencies to efficiently utilize existing agency infrastructure. This will require creation and expansion of existing bureaucracies that goes beyond what is necessary to comply with SGMA. Specifically, the requirement to establish a Coordinating Agency should be deleted.
- It is important that the regulations be efficient in order to ensure the cost of compliance is affordable. Because groundwater pumpers are ultimately going to bear the cost of developing and implementing a GSP (costs will be passed along by the GSA), farmers and ranchers are very concerned that the regulations avoid requirements that impose costs on GSAs that are not necessary to achieve groundwater sustainability.

Expand Outreach to Pumpers (p. 17-18)

- The regulations should require outreach to those groundwater pumpers who will be directly impacted by and subject to the GSP requirements. While there is plenty in the regulations about outreach to stakeholders, only a subset of those stakeholders are subject to paying additional fees, reporting water use, and cutting back pumping. There should be directed outreach to these stakeholders who will most directly be impacted by the GSP and special notice should be given to anyone who might be in a position to violate the GSP.

Data and Reporting Standards (p. 8)

- The requirements in 352.6(a)(1)-(4) may be unnecessarily expensive to implement. The regulations should be focused on ensuring the data is sufficiently reliable, without requiring standardization that increases costs without providing substantively better information.

Data Management and Recording (p. 10)

- Section, §354.34(c) Monitoring Network: The Draft Regulations state that a plan has the ability to incorporate information and monitoring data from a number of existing sources such as the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (ILRP). Madera County has at least two programs within our county boundaries, the East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition and CASGEM, and feel there is a collective amount of established data that can be used for the purpose of the development and implementation. We support the ability to use such data moving forward. As the information received by DWR is intended to be posted online for public consumption, we request that DWR place measures to protect the privacy of individuals, families, and the community.

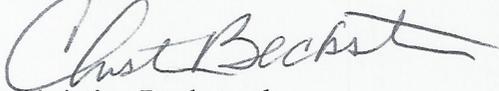
Department Review of Initial Adopted Plan (p. 39)

- The regulations indicate that it will take two years for DWR to evaluate the GSP, is the five-year review based on the submittal date or the approval date? Further, when does the 60-day period begin?

Although MCFB does not have the ability to play an active role in the formation of the GSPs for Madera County, we feel that the formation, development and implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act is crucial to our members as a large number of them fall in areas that will struggle with compliance because of their lack of surface water. MCFB will continue to engage our local and state officials in this matter, but we feel it necessary to provide our concerns in furtherance of our mission, and as the leading industry in Madera County. We also want to note that we support the letter put forth by the California Farm Bureau Federation.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the comment period.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Christina Beckstead". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Christina Beckstead
Executive Director