



Farm Bureau of Ventura County Water Policy

Adopted November 2014

WATER POLICY

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE. Access to water is essential to the viability of commercial agriculture. The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework through which Farm Bureau can evaluate, address and engage with policy makers and the public on water-supply and water-quality issues that affect Ventura County agriculture. Farm Bureau seeks to influence water-management decisions in order to assure an affordable, reliable and sustainable supply of high-quality water for crop and livestock production and processing. It promotes strategies and policies that appropriately balance the needs and interests of agricultural interests with those of municipal and industrial users as well as the natural environment. It encourages solutions to water-supply and water-quality challenges that are reached through stakeholder-driven processes at the local level, rather than regulator-driven approaches at the state or federal levels.

1. **SUPPLY AUGMENTATION.** In many parts of Ventura County, demand for water exceeds supply. This imbalance cannot be remedied solely by reducing water use without inflicting significant damage on the agricultural industry. Farm Bureau supports the construction of cost-effective local projects that enhance Ventura County's water storage, recycling, recharge and diversion capacity in order to ensure adequate supplies for all users and to secure regional water independence to the greatest degree feasible.

We support continued operation of Santa Felicia Dam, Vern Freeman Diversion Dam, Casitas Dam and the Robles Diversion in a manner that produces the maximum amount of water for agricultural and urban uses while minimizing harm to native ecosystems. We oppose efforts to reduce project yields or otherwise impede operations to achieve unrelated economic, social or cultural objectives, or nonessential ecological goals.

Farm Bureau encourages construction of projects that recycle municipal wastewater, or that treat brackish or poor-quality groundwater to acceptable standards, whether constructed by public or private entities. We support construction of infrastructure to deliver recycled or reclaimed water to end users, and believe agricultural irrigation should be given highest priority for access to such supplies. The water yielded by such projects should result in an overall increase in supply, and should not be used as a mechanism to maintain a level of groundwater extraction that exceeds the safe yield of a basin.

Conjunctive-use projects can be an important tool in managing a diversified water portfolio. We support such projects, but only if they can be operated in a manner that recognizes the rights of existing water users and does not impair their ability to conduct their usual farming activities.

Agencies within Ventura County have State Water Project contract entitlements they do not exercise, because of physical limitations on transport and delivery. We encourage local water agencies to cooperatively seek creative methods for bringing this additional SWP water into the county whenever it is available. We oppose any attempt by holders of those contract rights to sell their SWP entitlements to agencies outside Ventura County until and unless all options for local delivery have been explored and deemed infeasible.

2. DEMAND MANAGEMENT. Farm Bureau supports reasonable restrictions on groundwater use if needed to ensure that extractions do not exceed the safe yield of individual basins. Such restrictions should be mandated only if there is sufficient science-based evidence to indicate that voluntary restrictions are not achieving this goal.

Safe yield calculations should be based on the totality of all aquifer recharge sources, including, but not limited to, water imported from outside the basin, natural infiltration from rainfall or surface flows, irrigation return water, surface-flow diversions to recharge fields, and direct injection or percolation of recycled water.

We support ecological restoration efforts, such as removal of arundo and other invasive plants, that increase the quantity of water available for beneficial uses.

We support development of management plans for all pumped groundwater basins in Ventura County. We support investment in the scientific and technical studies and modeling needed to determine the safe yield of individual basins, as well as the interactions among basins and between surface and ground water.

Basin adjudication can be an effective method by which to fairly apportion access to groundwater. We support basin adjudication if it is initiated by groundwater pumpers through a cooperative, consensus-based process. We oppose efforts by non-pumpers to impose adjudication on basins.

Demand-management strategies should be implemented in a way that does not penalize previous investments and achievements in water-use efficiency. We support programs that help all water users maximize their water-use efficiency, including urban conservation initiatives and cost-share irrigation management programs for agricultural users. Through our industry education programs, we encourage growers to employ the most sophisticated technology and strategies available, and to manage their irrigation systems in the most efficient manner feasible.

Regulatory authorities with jurisdiction over groundwater use should limit their demand-management policies and regulations to groundwater use. Growers with access to surface, imported, recycled or other alternative sources of water should be free to acquire and use as much of that water as they wish without penalty or restriction so long as they remain within their groundwater allowance.

Specific management policies and strategies should focus on water use alone, and not be regarded as a method for manipulating crop choices. Growers should be free to produce any crop they wish, so long as they can do so without using more than their fair share of the available water supply in a particular basin.

Accurate use reporting is critical if groundwater basins are to be managed effectively. We support mandatory metering and reporting of groundwater extractions in basins being managed under the authority of a legally established entity.

In the event that water use must be reduced, either to cope with short-term circumstances such as drought or emergency interruptions in delivery, or to address long-term supply-demand imbalances, those reductions should be borne equitably by all categories of users.

3. **FINANCING AND PRICING.** Within the parameters established by the California Water Code and California Constitution, the cost of maintaining and operating existing water-supply systems, as well as the costs of constructing new systems, should be borne by the beneficiaries of those systems in proportion to the benefits they derive. Calculation of these benefits must take into account indirect but quantifiable factors such as the value urban property owners realize from living adjacent to low-intensity agricultural operations, the benefits to fish and wildlife from open lands and irrigation return flows, and the different standards of quality and delivery interruptibility required by agricultural and urban users.

Farm Bureau recognizes that agricultural water in Ventura County has historically represented a relatively minor share of crop production costs, and we acknowledge that this is likely to change as new sources, most of them much more costly to produce, are developed. Additionally, we recognize that repair or replacement of aging infrastructure, new regulatory burdens, rising energy costs and other factors are likely to pressure water agencies to raise additional revenue in order to remain financially sound and meet their core responsibilities. We support sound fiscal planning, but we believe that changes to pumping fees, extraction surcharges, water rates or other revenue-generating mechanisms should be made only after a thorough and publicly transparent process of analysis

and review that involves all those stakeholders subject to such fees, charges and other assessments.

We recognize that markets are an efficient means of establishing commodity prices and balancing supply with demand. We support the voluntary movement of water between public and/or private entities so long as potential impacts on third parties, including other agricultural water users, are first evaluated and mitigated, and we support the open marketing of new or conserved water. “New water” is water that augments the water supply without adversely affecting other legal users of water, such as reductions of flow to the ocean. “Conserved water” is the amount of water previously applied to beneficial purposes that is captured by reductions in use through such techniques as land fallowing, changes in crop patterns, or reduction in non-crop water use. Sales, transfers or exchanges of groundwater must not cause a net loss of water to any overdrafted basin through either a reduction in recharge or an increase in extractions.

4. **WATER QUALITY.** Like their urban counterparts, farmers and ranchers have a legal obligation to ensure that their activities do not impair the beneficial uses of surface and ground water. Runoff from Ventura County cropland is regulated by state and federal law, administered by the Regional Water Quality Control Board under the “Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges from Irrigated Lands within the Los Angeles Region.” Farm Bureau supports and facilitates compliance with the Conditional Waiver through its management of the Ventura County Agricultural Irrigated Lands Group.

We believe that the iterative approach to water-quality improvement mandated by the Conditional Waiver, which relies on collective monitoring, reporting and Best Management Practice implementation to mitigate or eliminate identified impairments, is the best way to address agricultural impacts on water quality. As long as water quality continues to improve under the waiver, Farm Bureau opposes any effort to discontinue it and replace it with requirements for individual permits, farm discharge limits, edge-of-field monitoring, individual groundwater monitoring or other intrusive and burdensome regulatory measures that are unlikely to improve water quality any more rapidly but which would subject growers to substantial added costs and legal penalties.

Due to the prevalence of salt-sensitive crops in Ventura County, we support protective regulatory limits on chloride discharges from municipal wastewater treatment plants to surface waters, and believe urban ratepayers should bear the full cost of mitigation measures required to comply with those limits. We support swift and effective enforcement of those limits by the appropriate regulatory authorities. We oppose any

activity that contributes to degradation of groundwater quality, and support regulatory efforts to protect that resource.

We believe in working proactively with agency staff to develop water-quality regulations that address documented impairments through measures that are fair, cost-effective, based on sound science, narrowly targeted to achieve clearly identified goals, and which avoid imposing an undue burden on agricultural operators. Whenever possible, we support establishing cooperative partnerships between agriculture and other regulated entities, including those with municipal wastewater or stormwater permits, to share compliance costs and maximize program efficiency.