

COLAB

NEWSLETTER

VOL.17 ISSUE 8 August 2008

Change History!

On August 26, 2008

Urge the County Board of Supervisors to
Pass a Resolution

That Will Change the Course of our Nation's History!

The Board is scheduled to discuss the energy crisis now facing the nation and take action to communicate the position of the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors to appropriate State and Federal officials.

Will You Spare a few hours of your day to come and testify to support lifting the moratorium on off-shore drilling? Or will you continue to let the EDC, GOO, Congresswoman Lois Capps and Assemblyman Pedro Nava claim to speak on your behalf?

It really is high time that we speak up and tell the world, for they will surely be listening, that oil drilling can be done safely and that we need energy independence and economic relief.

The Hearing will be in Santa Maria. Call The Clerk of the Board at 568-2240 for the approximate hearing time the day before the hearing. This is your biggest chance ever to do something positive here locally that could help change things on a national level! Please Show Up!



July 18, 2008

Al Montna, President
 California State Board of Food and Agriculture
AgVision@cdfa.ca.gov

RE: Vision for California Agriculture in 2030

Dear Mr. Montna:

The Association represents 150 vegetable and strawberry growers with farming locations along California's central coast. We believe agriculture will undergo substantial changes by the year 2030. The following issues have been identified with suggestions as to how California Department of Food and Agriculture could respond.

- Association members have experienced conflicts between **federal and state endangered species laws** and the application of such laws to curtail normal agricultural activities. We believe this unfortunate situation will increase. CDFA needs to advocate for agriculture with resource agencies and support amendments to endangered species laws exempting normal agricultural activities. Information explaining the environmental benefits of agriculture needs to be developed and made available to environmental policy makers.
- The Association believes the incremental effect of **new legislation and regulatory mandates** will continue to undermine the economic conditions of California farmers and ranchers. CDFA needs to establish a legislative analyst that would review proposed legislation and quantify the economic impact on California agriculture.
- We anticipate in the year 2030 California agriculture will be using the **H2-A Program** to obtain the majority of the labor force. That program can only be used if employers supply housing for those workers. CDFA needs to create a farm worker-housing specialist who can work with other agencies to remove regulatory and permitting obstacles and provide assistance to farmers attempting to provide such housing.
- We anticipate **agricultural lands will continue to be threatened by urban development**. CDFA needs to support Agricultural Commissioners who become involved in the local land

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use planning process. The outstanding agricultural land use program in San Luis Obispo County is a program that should be supported and expanded to other areas.

- The Association believes competition and demand for **irrigation water** will greatly increase by the year 2030. CDFA should develop a water resource position to explain agriculture's water requirements and the success of conservation efforts. Expanding water diversions and new conveyance systems will need to be supported. Water rights of overlying landowners need to be protected.
- California's specialty crops will continue to be hand-harvested. We believe **immigration reform efforts** will eventually include an electronic verification process to determine a worker's eligibility to work. CDFA needs to recognize the impact that will have on production agriculture and become involved with the California Congressional delegation emphasizing the need for a guest worker program.
- The Association believes that the labor supply will be constricted by 2030 and some production and harvesting activities will need to be **mechanized**. CDFA should anticipate this and support research and technology to develop harvest aids that reduce the amount of hand labor required to produce specialty crops for which California is noted.
- The Association anticipates **food borne illnesses** will increase. A single incident can undermine an entire commodity and many innocent growers are economically impacted. It will become critical that an effective trace back process be implemented so that contaminated food can be quickly located and isolated from the channels of commerce. CDFA can assist producers in achieving this end. CDFA should support efforts to eliminate microbial contamination at the processing step for packaged food items.
- The Association believes that by 2030 consumers will recognize the benefits of a domestic food source. CDFA should support "**country of origin**" **labeling** and continue to strongly promote the benefits of California agriculture as well as emphasizing the strategic dangers of relying on foreign countries for our food source. Toward that end, California's labor, environmental, food safety, and quality standards need to be explained to the public.
- CDFA should continue to support subvention funding for the **Williamson Act**, which the Association believes, is California's single most effective agricultural land preservation program. Funding for agricultural easements that divert development from rural to urban areas should also be supported.
- We believe farmers need to improve their **marketing practices** so that producers capture a greater amount of the sales proceeds. CDFA should support the use of Agricultural Co-Operatives by producers to negotiate on an equal scale with consolidated retailers.
- The Association fears that California's crops will be threatened by **exotic pests**. CDFA will need to expand its pest eradication efforts and develop new pest control methods for urban

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Judge for Yourself!

We are reciting arguments made by Greg Gandrud, in opposition to Measure A (which will be on the November Ballot) along with a rebuttal by Joe Armendariz, the Executive Director of the County Taxpayers Association'

Greg writes: This proposed countywide, 30-year, half-percent tax will generate over \$1 billion. Per the proposed expenditure plan, only \$213 million of that is to be spent on regional highway projects. Twenty-five million dollars is to be spent on commuter rail for the southern portion of the county — even though SBCAG's feasibility study determined that stand-alone commuter rail was not feasible.

Joe responds: This is an inaccurate portrayal of the measure and the measure's intent. First, because of Measure A, there will be in excess of \$520 million in regional projects albeit much of that is going to be financed with state and federal gas taxes. But those dollars wouldn't be available to our county **WITHOUT** Measure A. Second, the \$25 million earmarked for a commuter rail option does not pretend or intend to finance a standalone commuter rail service. The \$25 million will be used to construct capital improvements (like sidings) to minimize the conflicts with other trains operating in the corridor, addressing concerns about potential loss of ridership in the LA area with the earlier start time and of course funding is needed. The SBCAG rail study that was presented to the South Coast Subregional Planning Committee earlier this month indicates that the rescheduling is feasible. Also, when we met with Caltrans Director Will Kempton, he was supportive of the idea of rescheduling the Surfliner trains.

Greg writes: During the next 30 years, new regional transportation needs are likely to become clear. Measure A reserves no money for future needs, which may lead to proposals for more tax increases in the near future.

Joe responds: This is a disingenuous statement in that the entire Measure-A list of projects is an effort to address not just current projects but projects that anticipate future needs as well. Obviously you can't predict with perfect precision what your future needs will be, so to suggest we should tax ourselves and put the money in a lock box while we all wait until to know what our future needs will be is ridiculous.

Greg writes: Sixty percent of the countywide tax is to be distributed to local governments for local streets and sidewalks. We object because local amenities should be funded with local tax revenues to ensure greater fiscal responsibility.

Joe responds: This is a circular argument. Measure A is a countywide tax but it is also a local tax... therefore, one could argue that it does exactly what Gandrud suggests.

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Visit the COLAB Website at:
www.colabsbc.org

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Greg writes: The 30-year life of the proposed Measure A is too long, given the uncertain future makeup of SBCAG. The current transportation tax — Measure D — failed to live up to its promises, and too much money has been spent on bureaucracy.

Joe Responds: As of today, **14 of the 15 projects** in the original Measure D list of projects have been completed. Moreover, also as of today, significant work has now begun on the 15th project which is widening the freeway between Milpas and Carpinteria. The Milpas to Hot Springs widening project is now under construction and this is a substantial component of the 101 widening project. So is the \$151 million La Conchita to Casitas Pass widening project funded with Prop-1b money. Also, the opponents should state what percentage of the Measure D tax has been spent on "bureaucracy". The fact is several of the projects have come in under budget which has allowed SBCAG and CalTrans to spend additional Measure D dollars on some needed regional improvements, including the work currently being done on the 154

Greg writes: A better alternative is a half-percent tax for 10 years, which would generate over \$330 million, and would more than cover the \$213 million of regional highway projects.

Joe Responds: This ignores the fact that there are significantly more than \$213 million of planned regional highway projects funded via Measure A. The 101 freeway alone is priced at over \$425 million. And as explained by William Kempton, Director of CalTrans, only counties with local matching funds, for regional projects, will be given favorable consideration by the CTC and the Feds.

Greg writes: Cities and the county should do more to encourage economic vitality, including drilling for oil and gas where technology allows extraction without harming the environment, which would provide more revenue for local transportation projects. A 10-year tax could be renewed if voters are satisfied with how the money is being spent.

Joe responds: This is of course true but has nothing to do with Measure A. In fact, because of the favorable economics of Measure A, the county should pursue both.

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Death By A Thousand Cuts

Californians value their agricultural heritage and support farmers. The platform of virtually every elected official is to preserve agriculture and open space.

Americans take pride in their ability to grow their own food and through exports help “feed the world.” The percentage of per capita income we pay for food is among the lowest of any industrialized country, while the quality and variety of our food is of the highest standard. Moreover, our source of food is safe and secure. We are not at the mercy of foreign cartels, nor do we need to worry about tainted produce imported from the Far East.

The success of California agriculture however is threatened by a thousand cuts. These cuts are “regulations and mandates” foisted upon farmers which lead to declines in productivity and increased costs. Every year, the legislature, as well as public agencies, enacts new policies that cut into farming practices. Looking at each new policy in isolation the impact at first glance appears modest. However the cumulative impact of those mandates, over a long time period, is undermining the agricultural economy. Overlapping and inconsistent mandates from different regulatory agencies are being imposed year after year without considering the overall burden being placed upon agriculture.

I am fearful agriculture is being seriously wounded by these regulatory cuts. They are sapping the entrepreneurial spirit of farming families to continue growing produce in our state. Below are examples of recent mandates being imposed on farmers. The Regional Water Quality Control Board requires farmers to manage and monitor their irrigation practices of water leaving their land as a condition of granting a “Waiver”. The Air Resources Board requires farmers to change diesel engines to power irrigation pumps and trucks to newer tier engines with lower emissions. US Fish & Wildlife Service prosecutes if farming practices kill a salamander, red-legged frog or other protected species. The Department of Pesticide Regu-

lation restricts the use of pre-plant soil fumigants reducing yields for several important specialty crops. The Agricultural Labor Relations Board is empowered to write private collective bargaining agreements when employers and farm labor organizations negotiate to an impasse. The Department of Homeland Security suddenly determines the mere receipt of a social security mismatch letter constitutes “knowledge” the employee is unauthorized to work. The Army Corps of Engineers does not allow farmers to mechanically clean debris from creeks to protect against flooding from winter rains. Cal-OSHA issues mandatory \$750 fines to farmers when toilet paper is not on a suitable holder. The Agricultural Commissioner is required to issue mandatory fines instead of simple warnings because pesticide use reports are incomplete or turned in late.

All of these mandates have a negative economic impact. Pressure is building on farmers to move farming operations to other countries where labor is plentiful, environmental concerns relaxed and economic development is welcomed. This exodus has already happened with many other consumer items. However if we lose agriculture in California, we also lose our ability to feed ourselves. If this happens we will have only ourselves to blame. A self-inflicted wound, exacerbated by a thousand cuts, is undermining the agricultural economy of this state. To turn the tide Californians need to start recognizing the value of those who grow our food. We need to purchase California grown products. We also need to stop supporting policies that weaken the position of California’s farmers in a burgeoning and competitive global market.

Submitted by,

Richard Quandt, President
Grower-Shipper Association

Contact the Governor and Get This Bill Defeated!

BILL NUMBER: AB 2716 INTRODUCED BY Assembly Member Ma

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST: AB 2716, as amended, Ma. Employment: paid sick leave days. Existing law authorizes employers to provide their employees paid sick leave. This bill would provide that an employee who works in California for 7 or more days in a calendar year is entitled to paid sick days, *as defined*, which shall be accrued at a rate of no less than one hour for every 30 hours worked. An employee would be entitled to use accrued sick days beginning on the 90th calendar day of employment. The bill would require employers to provide paid sick days, upon the request of the employee, for diagnosis, care, or treatment of health conditions of the employee or an employee's family member, or for leave related to domestic violence or sexual assault. An employer would be prohibited from discriminating or retaliating against an employee who requests paid sick days.

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areas that don't involve aerial application of chemicals. The impact on crops and the possibility of other jurisdictions placing quarantines on the introduction of food crops from infected areas need to be explained to the public.

- The Association is concerned with the **loss of agricultural chemicals** and the lack of newer replacement products for minor crops. The complexity and cost of achieving registration of these newer chemicals for California's specialty crops needs to be overcome.
- By the year 2030, we anticipate advances in **biotechnology** and the development of genetically modified crops. We think CDFA can plan a role educating the public about the benefits of this powerful new technology and the opportunities to conserve rural resources and improve nutrition and food quality.
- Association members farm in close quarters next to large population centers. Public policy is being decided by those urban people who are divorced from agriculture. The state will continue to be dominated by urban interests and will be governed from an urban viewpoint. It becomes very important that these future policy-makers have some knowledge about agriculture and how our food is produced. It should be a high priority for CDFA to **educate the public about agriculture** and its production practices. This can most effectively start with school-age children. It's no longer enough to teach, "Old MacDonald." Children need to learn what makes MacDonald's farm work.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our vision of the challenges that California agriculture will face in 2030. I hope this assists your efforts in planning for that future.

Sincerely,

Richard S. Quandt
President
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The COLAB Newsletter is published by the Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business of Santa Barbara County.

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