

From: George Kendall <gwkendall@wildblue.net>
To: <AgOrder@waterboards.ca.gov>
Date: 1/3/2011 4:03 PM
Subject: Comments on November 2010 Draft Ag Order
Attachments: ag order comments.doc

Jeffrey Young
Chairman of the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

cc: Angela Schroeter

We would appreciate if you would consider our attached comments on the November 2010 draft ag order.

Thank you,

George W. Kendall and Elizabeth T. Kendall
Cambria, CA
January 3, 2011

Jeffrey S. Young, Chairman of the Board
California Regional Water Quality Control Board
Central Coast Region
895 Aerovista Place, Suite 101
San Luis Obispo, 93401

Re: Draft Ag Order (dated November, 2010)

Dear Mr. Young:

My wife and I are retired geologists with previous careers in the petroleum and environmental industries. For the past thirteen years, we have owned and actively operated a small farm (30 irrigated acres) in coastal San Luis Obispo County. We grow avocados, citrus and pumpkins, and we do most of the farm work and marketing ourselves. We have read the draft ag order and appreciate that you are reading our comments. As conscientious farmers who try to minimize our environmental impact, we think that the ag order has a harsh and authoritarian approach that will be more costly and burdensome to many farmers than it needs to be.

In 2004 we took the required 15 hour water quality course and wrote our farm plan. We routinely avail ourselves of industry- and state-supported seminars (Avocado Society, UC Extension), and we have contracted with the NRCS to work on erosion issues. These educational activities have significantly improved our understanding of water quality issues and have shown us how to reduce erosion and improve water quality. These courses have led to increased discussion of these issues and methods among our farming

and ranching neighbors. We think these sorts of educational efforts are far more valuable to improving water quality than many of the proposed reporting and testing requirements in the ag order.

We presume that the requirement for groundwater sampling and testing is to look for nitrate contamination from fertilizer use. Much data already exists in our watershed regarding ground water quality. The community service district downstream from our farm routinely tests its wells. Our own well testing has consistently shown very low (essentially undetectable) nitrate levels. With no large farms in our watershed, it is not remotely likely that normal ag activities will contaminate our water resources with nitrate. A local sewage spill just last week probably caused more environmental damage than any foreseeable ag activity in our area. The water board should not require costly annual groundwater testing by all the little farms in our area because current data show the area to be free of nitrate contamination and without high risk of future contamination. If the water board does require testing, it should specifically list the contaminants to be tested for and allow greater time between tests if contamination is below acceptable levels. Individual farmers should be trusted to sample their own wells, rather than be required to hire expensive professionals.

We think the tiered approach is good, but we are concerned about some of the tier definitions. Our farm is upstream from an urban area where there are urban pollution and municipal pumping issues. Water quality in the urban area is lower than in the upstream agricultural area. The ag order should clearly state which portions of impaired water bodies are subject to Tier 1 versus Tier 2.

We hope that the water board will modify its draft ag order to encourage education and reduce unneeded testing and reporting. The water board should use existing and available data to help focus on problem areas. We hope the board will further clarify tier requirements. The water board should encourage a cooperative and collaborative approach to water quality issues rather than one that is burdensome and ineffective.

Sincerely,

George W. Kendall
Elizabeth T. Kendall