United for Change in Tooleville

March 21, 2011

Katherine Hart
Chair, Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board
11020 Sun Center Drive, #200
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670

Re: Recommended Irrigated Lands Regulatory Framework: Groundwater

Dear Chairperson Hart and Board Members:

I am writing to ask the Regional Water Board to develop an Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program that is strong enough to reduce fertilizer and pesticide pollution of our valley's water resources before any more communities lose their source of safe drinking water.

Today many thousands of people in the Central Valley cannot use the tap water in their homes for drinking or cooking due to nitrate contamination. In some areas in the valley, more than 20% of small public water systems are already unable to supply safe drinking water, including many of our valley's schools, which must use their shrinking educational budgets just to supply safe water to students and teachers. Many more communities are on the edge, forced to pay for expensive nitrate treatment or close wells, limiting local drinking water supplies and creating additional barriers to local economic development.

The good news is that nitrate contamination is a preventable problem that is primarily caused by runoff from chemical fertilizer and animal waste. Therefore, the Board has the power and responsibility to develop a program that is strong enough to reduce fertilizer and pesticide pollution of our valley's water resources before any more communities lose their source of safe drinking water.

For these reasons, I am asking the Board to approve an effective regulatory program that includes:
1) effective on-farm programs that actually reduce polluted runoff; 2) basic data collection on farm practices and water quality in order to establish a baseline, evaluate management practices and measure progress towards water quality objectives; 3) clear standards for compliance to ensure that water quality goals and timelines are met; 4) strong enforcement powers to ensure compliance; and 5) provisions for cleanup and abatement of legacy agricultural contamination.

A strong and effective Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program can stop further contamination of our drinking water sources before more communities are burdened by the high cost of cleanup. It can also ensure that future generations are able to find safe drinking water sources. We urge the Board to incorporate our recommendations into the framework prior to adoption.

Sincerely,

Eunice Martinez

Eunice Martinez, Spokesperson for the Committee, United for Change in Tooleville

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