

Dear Ms. Bean,

I have been working in agriculture as a pest control adviser for 18 years. I have been a farmer for the last 15 years (Riverside and San Diego Co.). After many years of hard work and struggle I am finally poised to have an income producing farm. I have done everything to conserve and be efficient and I have foregone any luxuries for that entire time. With these new cut backs coming it is possible now that I will lose everything I have worked for. This will not only impact me financially. This will have ramifications for the economy. If you would consider how many farms will be put out of business and the impact that will have on the state I would greatly appreciate it.

I have been living and farming in Valley Center since 2004. When I purchased my avocado grove I found out within a year that it had a high amount of trees with sunblotch virus (30-50%). Instead of walking away from the property I decided to replant it. I pulled out 25% of the trees in 2005 and replanted that section to high density in 2007. I planted the last trees in September of that year and a week later went to a meeting letting me know that I would need to cut my water usage by 30% starting in 2008. I was told I could appeal to the water district but that there would be little chance of getting more water than my allocation for the 2005/2006 year.

I decided to bring my well back into working order (at great expense) and used it to supplement what I was allocated. I never exited the IAWP or the SDAWR program for SD County. My well went dry in October of 2013 and I am not sure at this time if I will be able to rely on it for any future use.

I pulled out the rest of my trees in 2012 (75%). From July to August of 2013 I replanted the rest of my property and now have about 90% of my acreage planted to high density. I have now made the same mistake twice. I pulled out my trees at a time period that is close to the year that will be used for my allocation and I replanted my property around the time that I will have to ration water. My new trees are going to need increasing amounts of water and I was planning on doubling my use this year starting in spring.

To add to the problem I have been efficient in my water usage for the last 11 years. I have used CIMIS and tensiometers to make sure I wasn't "wasting" water. So I find myself in a very difficult position with the impending water cutbacks. I have been thinking about what I am going to do for some time. Mostly what I come up with is what I am going to do in the future to prevent from having to go through this a third time. In the meantime I am wondering what I can do to make sure I can give my trees sufficient water. My well is not a reliable source but it is one thing I can try and get up and running again. I have contacted my water district to see what I can do and they told me there is very little they can do to help. I plan on farming in Valley Center for many years to come. As my trees mature I will begin using increasingly larger amounts of water. I plan on getting all of my acreage producing and will keep in mind that I might need to ration water in the future. That way I will wait to stump or heavily prune an area at the appropriate time.

For now I really need your help. I need to secure enough water to turn my grove into a profitable operation. I have been struggling for eleven years with a large mortgage, high operating costs and low farm income. I am working two jobs to keep things going but still need to get outside help from my family. If it wasn't for that support I would have sold or lost the property several years ago.

I am at a critical point. I have invested heavily in my property and now have approximately 5100 trees on 17 acres (high density planting). These trees are heavy with bloom this year and it would be so gratifying to have my first profitable year after so much hard work and struggle. The only way I can do that is by giving these young trees the water they need over the next year. I cannot cut down any of my acreage. I am pruning the 7-8 year old planting to reduce water consumption there but I am not sure that will be less than what I used in 2013-2014. Please let me know if there is anything we can do together so that I can continue to farm in Valley Center.

In his April 1st call for statewide water use reductions and in comments since, Governor Brown stated that the mandatory program of restrictions was not directed at agriculture. It has now been learned the proposed conservation framework considers farming in San Diego County to be part of the urban landscape and subject to the same restrictions designed to curb excessive landscape irrigation. This provision will create undue harm to farmers in San Diego County who are just as important as farmers in other parts of the state. The conservation framework should exclude all agriculture as Governor Brown promised, regardless of location.

All water users in San Diego County have made heavy investments in a system that includes a variety of water sources. That investment has been so high as to force many local farmers out of business and idle thousands of acres of productive farmland. This investment was done intentionally based on lessons from previous droughts with the aim of lessening the impacts of future droughts. This exact strategy was promoted by Governor Brown last year when he called for increased regional self-reliance. San Diego County not only heeded that call, but we were practicing it long before the governor's proclamation. To now say those efforts cannot be used to mitigate the impacts of this drought is a powerful disincentive to make future investments in local water supplies.

Farmers in San Diego County are no less concerned about the ongoing drought as are other Californians. Please consider and act on these comments as a matter of fairness. Please remember that farmers are not the end users of the water we purchase. The consumers that buy the food and flowers we produce are. We are distinctly different than homeowners and other businesses in that we are not the end users of our water and we are not using the water for luxury but for necessities (food and fiber). These things contribute heavily to our economy and we will all feel the impact if farms go out of business for many years to come.

P.S.

I am applying to the Agricultural Leadership Program and my goal is to have an impact on the water issues here in San Diego County. I plan on contacting you in the near future and asking you what I can do to be a part of a plan to secure continued water availability for farming here in San Diego County.

Sincerely,

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