

**CENTRAL COAST REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD  
DISCLOSURE FORM  
EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS REGARDING PENDING GENERAL ORDERS**

*Note: This form is intended to assist the public in providing the disclosure required by law. It is designed to document meetings and phone calls. Written communications may be disclosed by providing a complete copy of the written document, with attachments. Unless the board member(s) provide you with a different contact person, please your materials to: [stacy.denney@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:stacy.denney@waterboards.ca.gov)  
Use of this form is not mandatory.*

1. Pending General Order that the communication concerned: Ag Order 4.0
2. Name, title and contact information of person completing this form: Steve Shimek, Executive Director, The Otter Project, [exec@otterproject.org](mailto:exec@otterproject.org)
3. Date of meeting, phone call or other communication: 9/8/2020  
Time: ~ 8am  
Location: via email
4. Type of communication (written, oral or both): Written
5. Names of all participants in the communication, including all board members who participated: All Central Coast Board Members. Jeff Young, Jane Gray, Monica Hunter, Jean-Pierre Wolff, Michael Johnston
6. Name of person(s) who initiated the communication: Steve Shimek
7. Describe the communication and the content of the communication:  
A copy of the content of the email is attached
8. Attach a copy of handouts, PowerPoint presentations and other materials any person used or distributed at the meeting. If you have electronic copies, please email them to facilitate web posting.

Attached

# THE SACRAMENTO BEE

California Forum

## **Farms don't need dangerous chemicals to grow food. Let's cut our dependence on them**

BY BRIAN LEAHY *SPECIAL TO THE SACRAMENTO BEE*

MARCH 06, 2020 05:00 AM , UPDATED MARCH 06, 2020 09:01 AM

Forty years ago, farm neighbors told my surprised family that our wildlife friendly farming practices were organic - which doubled the value of our rice crop. Our farming methods evolved after my father-in-law's return from World War II.

Like many peers, he tried new technologies - chemical pesticides and synthetic nitrogen fertilizer - and saw them kill the wildlife he loved and the soil he relied on. He sensed that a food system based on toxic chemistry was a dead end. Instead, he developed an approach that incorporated wildlife – instead of fighting it.

Today, organic is a multi-billion-dollar market, but society still relies heavily on chemical pest management and synthetic fertilizers. Many farms have become biological deserts. Although pesticides are cheap and effective in the short term, they come with unintended [health](#) and [environmental](#) consequences. They also develop [resistance](#) that eventually undermines their effectiveness.

In recent decades, many pesticides have been banned, or had their use limited, because of health impacts. Every time a new chemical replaces an old one, new challenges arise, leading to more restrictions or bans. And on and on. Academics call this a “pesticide treadmill.”

Our food supplies and public health rely upon effective pest management and soil health. Unfortunately, society has delegated the development of new tools to a handful of chemical companies. There is virtually no public investment in non-chemical approaches. If we want less chemical-intensive solutions, it's time to stop hoping the chemical industry will develop them.

How do we do this? Let's look at how we made progress on air pollution.

As a child in Southern California, I loved to bicycle up Mt. Baldy. As I did, my eyes and lungs burned because of the intense smog that blanketed the region. I couldn't even see

the 10,000-foot mountain's summit. But our government responded to public outrage and required auto manufacturers to create cleaner cars. These new cars save money and [result in cleaner air](#), saving lives.

Today, car companies market these clean cars. But at the time, they fought clean air requirements.

Here's the lesson for reducing agriculture's chemical dependency: A purely [voluntary approach](#) doesn't work.

Regulators must set science-based application limits on pesticides and synthetic fertilizers. Synthetic nitrogen is perhaps the least-regulated dangerous chemical product on the market.

The [Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board](#) can take this step over the coming year. Effective regulation is an essential first step toward innovation and more sustainable agriculture.

But this new approach will also require significant public investments to understand complex biological systems and help farmers adopt new practices.

Whether it is controlling pests that plague strawberries or stopping outbreaks like coronavirus, prevention based in an understanding of how natural systems work is a good investment.

Over forty years, ranging from a radical outsider questioning the wisdom of a chemical-based food system to serving as the director of the California Department of Pesticide Regulations, I learned that change is difficult. But in my lifetime I have also seen remarkable change. I breathe that change every time I visit Southern California.

Strong regulations with deadlines work. And public investments could create a new approach to sustainable agriculture to meet the challenges of climate change. This will be hard work. But in the long term it is better to work with life than to destroy it.

Just as the public demanded the auto industry clean up our air, the public must demand that agriculture clean up our water. Then we need to work with farmers to find new ways to control pests and provide crops with the nutrients they need.

*Brian Leahy is a former rice farmer and served as the director of the Department of Pesticide Regulation from 2012 to 2019.*