



CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS DIVISION

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December 15, 2014

Jeanine Townsend, Clerk to the Board
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street, 24th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: COMMENT LETTER – SAFE DRINKING WATER PLAN

Dear Ms. Townsend:

On behalf of our 57,000 farm families and individual members the California Farm Bureau Federation has reviewed the Safe Drinking Water Plan for California Report to the Legislature dated October 2014 and offers the following comments.

Farm Bureau's purposes are, among others, to work for the solution of the problems of the farm, the farm home and the rural community throughout California and to protect and advance the social, economic and educational interests of California farmers. Farm Bureau strives to protect and improve the ability of farmers and ranchers engaged in production agriculture to provide safe, reliable, and healthful food and farm products through responsible stewardship of California's diverse natural resource base. A safe and reliable drinking water supply is essential to the communities our members and their employees live and work in for the short and long-term health of the State's economy and the maintenance of a local food supply.

The Farm Bureau appreciates the urgency to find drinking water solutions for economically disadvantaged communities and to that end Farm Bureau has actively participating in multiple venues to address this important challenge. The Governor's Drinking Water Stakeholder Group, the California Department of Food and Agriculture's Nitrogen Tracking and Reporting System Task Force, the California Roundtable on Agriculture and the Environment, the California Roundtable on Water and Food Supply, the Dairy Regulatory Program and the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program are just a few of the platforms Farm Bureau has been proactively engaged in to find broad based, sustainable solutions for those communities impacted.

Additionally, Farm Bureau actively advocated for Proposition 1 (the Water Quality, Supply and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014) overwhelmingly approved by voters November 4th. One of the key principles Farm Bureau pushed for in the Act was \$520 million for drinking water solutions for the economically disadvantaged communities that do not have safe drinking water. Because there are many contaminants, such as naturally occurring arsenic, chromium 6, perchlorate and nitrate, a comprehensive solution is needed with a comprehensive funding source. We believe further discussion regarding the equity of any tax to fund safe drinking water for all Californians, especially those in economically disadvantaged communities, should continue while other available funds are utilized such as remaining Proposition 50 and 84 funds and new Proposition 1 funds.

California has the most stringent water quality regulations in the nation. Currently, farmers and ranchers within the Central Valley and the Central Coast regions pay mandatory Regional Water Board regulatory program monitoring and reporting costs averaging about \$37 million a year and increasing. Additionally, these farmers and ranchers have significant costs to implement new beneficial management practices and infrastructure upgrades to comply with the surface and groundwater elements of the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program and the Dairy Regulatory Program. However, our commitment to addressing water quality issues, especially drinking water in economically disadvantaged communities, is our highest priority.

In addition to complying with mandatory regulations, agriculture has been proactive in addressing groundwater problems locally by investing a significant amount of money partnering with local water agency actions. Farmers are also providing replacement water or treatment systems for communities voluntarily.

For these reasons we urge the State Water Resources Control Board to move expeditiously towards drinking water solutions utilizing existing funding sources. Farm Bureau looks forward to continuing to work with you on this important matter. Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Danny J. Merkley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "M".

Danny Merkley
Director of Water Resources

cc: Karen Ross, Secretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture