



December 22, 2017

Ms. Jeanine Townsend
Clerk to the Board
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street, 24th Fl. (95814)
Submitted to: commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov

Subject: Comments to A-2239 (a)-(c)

Dear Ms. Townsend:

The Almond Alliance of California (Alliance) is submitting comments on behalf of the California Almond industry including the Almond Board of California (ABC), on the second staff-proposed order for Eastern San Joaquin Agricultural General WDRs (WDR).

About the Almond Industry

The Alliance and the ABC work together to provide regulators with a better understanding of how specific issues impact the California Almond industry.

The Alliance is an association representing the California Almond industry and is organized to promote the interests of its members. Our members represent over 80% of the California Almond industry based on volume.

The ABC is a grower-enacted Federal Marketing Order under the supervision of the United States Department of Agriculture representing over 6,800 almond growers and 100+ almond handlers. The ABC engages in production/environmental research to support almond growers and handlers as well as carrying out a broad-based market development program to create demand in domestic and international markets. Research data and industry facts generated by the ABC have been incorporated into these comments.

For the 2015-2016 crop year, the farm gate value of California Almonds was \$5.3 billion from approximately 890,000 bearing acres. Per USDA-NASS, there were 1,110,000 total acres for the 2015 growing season. U.S. almonds are predominantly grown within the Central Valley of California.

Comments on the General WDRs

The ABC has a long track record of developing scientifically based information on best practices for nitrogen management. Given the current WDR requirements, we built off our research to help growers develop nitrogen plans. ABC developed a tool to assist growers in improving their nitrogen management, and use the resulting information to inform regulatory compliance forms for our growers.

The coalition structure allows for a cost-effective method of compliance in lieu of individual farm monitoring, and it is important that any new requirements retain the goal of cost-effective compliance, with fees that allow for continued production.

We appreciate that the process for The State Board to define “outliers” is still in development, and determining “target values” still needs to be developed in conjunction with the Regional Water Board and coalitions. We look forward to continuing to supply our research to inform this process, and if necessary perform additional studies to understand why some variation in fertilizer application may be necessary to maximize production across different conditions, soil types, irrigation regimes, water quality, etc. Therefore, leaving the definition of outlier in the hands of each coalition is appropriate.

We would like to start by listing the aspects of the WDR that we support:

- Continue anonymity in reporting as advocated by the coalitions. Farmers should be encouraged to participate and inform their practices relative to others, without being at immediate risk of fines or publicly chastisement. Best practices are not only variable by region, but within regions, and typical application rates are still being determined through this process. We encourage both the state board and advocates to be patient and allow the current negotiated process to run its course. This will also allow for processes such as CV-SALTS to mature and inform longer term solutions.
- Keep participation and reporting as simple as possible. This includes allowing outreach to Coalition Members remotely, whether through email, webinars, on-line videos, etc. Additional information such as newsletters or annual reports can be sent out, but if desired can also be distributed electronically. These decisions should be determined by growers through their coalition representatives.
- Reduce the frequency of revisions to Farm Evaluations. Particularly for permanent crop, management practices are developed at the time the orchard is installed and remain stable from year to year. Therefore, annual updates without additional identified concerns is unnecessary.
- All parts of the crop are removed nitrogen. We agree that in calculating the amount of nitrogen removed, we support including all parts of the plant (prunings, removed vegetation, etc.), not only the total amount of crop.

There are also areas where we have some concern, and request they are reflected in the final order:

- Allow sufficient time for changes to be adopted. We would like to build on the awareness of ABC’s nitrogen calculator and its ability to help prepare regulatory reports. Changing the format so close to the form’s original adoption risks losing some of the progress we have made to date. Should the system for tracking and reporting start to vary among different coalitions, it could make it more challenging for us as a commodity organization to provide this sort of across the board assistance. We would like to have sufficient time to help our growers prepare for any changes, particularly in areas that haven’t been subject to reporting requirements, or where those requirements are changing.
- Don’t harm the potential for new groundwater recharge. The new requirement under the INMP to report irrigation should be harmonized with the desire under SGMA to maximize groundwater recharge opportunities and conjunctive management. Any assumptions of negative water quality consequences from recharge should be balanced with an understanding

of commitments under SGMA to balance supply. Some practices could benefit supply, and although there may be a temporary water quality impact, it may be outweighed by long-term supply and potentially water quality benefits. We encourage recognition that a sound INMP include consideration of excess irrigation for purposes of groundwater recharge, in-line with other relevant state policies. Over-irrigation may also be agronomically necessary for salinity management.

- Benefits should outweigh costs in expansion to low vulnerability areas. Consistent application of requirements should be balanced by the actual potential for risk. Requiring the same INMP for low and high vulnerability areas should be clearly justified.
- Maintain a realistic expectation of irrigated agriculture and its benefits. For any new monitoring requirements, we encourage a realistic approach that allows for accurate sampling without substantial cost. If convened, an expert panel should engage growers and their coalition representatives who have had experience with the scale, difficulty and expense of setting up monitoring programs.

In Summary

We look forward to continuing to supply information on nitrogen management in almonds, how nitrogen use can be made more efficient, and helping to inform regulatory compliance. Fertilizer inputs, with nitrogen in particular, are critical for economical food production, and this process should make sure that any new regulations allow for continued economical food production for a growing domestic and international market.

Sincerely,



Dr. Gabriele Ludwig
Consultant
Almond Alliance of California