

Salinas Valley Water Coalition



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TRANSMITTED VIA FACSIMILE AND EMAIL

Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
Mr. Jeffrey Young, Chair
895 Aerovista Pl., Suite 101
San Luis Obispo, Ca 93401

23 October, 2009

Re: Executive Officer's Report, Agricultural Regulatory Program

Dear Chair Young and Board Members;

The Salinas Valley Water Coalition (SVWC) is a not-for-profit organization comprised of agricultural landowners, farmers and businesses within the Salinas Valley. The SVWC's primary purpose is to participate in the various governmental processes in an effort to preserve the water rights of its members, to protect their water resources and to effect water policy decisions in a manner that provides this protection while sustaining agricultural production and quality of life within the Salinas Valley.

The SVWC worked with, and supported, your Board and its efforts in developing and implementing the Agricultural Waiver Program in 2005. The development of the first Ag Waiver as adopted by the Region 3 Board and supported by the agricultural community was said to be a model for the State. Many were watching to see if it would work or if we would fall on our face. It has worked.

The agricultural community is to be commended for its willingness to establish a non-profit governing board (CCWQP) to oversee the management and funding of the Ag Waiver program – and to fund the program. There are almost 400,000 irrigated acres and almost 1,800 farm companies or individuals, enrolled in the Ag Waiver program with CCWQP.

While the program may not be perfect, it is working and we are learning how to improve it as we move forward. Community participation is an essential element in any project, and critical to obtaining support for that project.

We believe we can achieve greater success by continuing the current Ag Waiver monitoring program and establishing more of an outreach program. 1) Grower research to mitigate problems, 2) watershed trials and 3) cooperation with agencies that have research and education responsibilities are facilitating the long-term goals of the Waiver(s). The Agricultural Community operators want to be shown ways they can incorporate better practices to maintain the goals of the Ag Waiver program. If the Regional Water Quality Control Board starts requiring individual on-farm sampling for

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all, or the majority of, growers/operators, we believe you will lose the support of growers/operators. The remaining action will be one of enforcement which is costly to everyone and often does not achieve the desired result and potentially ends in a failed program.

We would like to see the Ag Waiver continue in the manner it is currently implemented with additional outreach. Perhaps one segment of the outreach program could target those growers who have reported tail-water. We could assist and encourage them to incorporate better practices. This could be done through CCWQP on a voluntary and confidential basis. CCWQP could maintain a record and develop an annual report to show the improvements made. Many growers may want to incorporate better practices but may not have the ability or finances to do so.

We can spend less, learn more and educate the entire region—even beyond our borders—if we use science and scientific resources creatively and educate operators to be better. If at the end of adequate time (improvements from each five-year waiver will be limited by how much good science we can develop and extend through outreach and, we are dealing with long-term conditions)...if, then, operators are not adopting and incorporating better practices; then, consider initiating individual testing and regulatory processes. It probably will be more expensive and slower (and we believe much less successful) than working with a voluntary process in the Ag community.

We support your staff's recommendation to proceed with a more traditional public outreach process and have a formal public comment period on the draft Order. It is important for your Board to maintain the support of the agricultural community throughout this process in order to obtain a program that will meet your needs and requirements, but that will also benefit the entire agricultural community. Anything less will not be supported by the agricultural community and you will be forced to proceed with enforcement at a tremendous cost to you – forcing you to utilize funds not available. None of us want this.

We thank you for your consideration of our comments and concerns. We look forward to continuing to work with you to achieve greater water quality for our region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Roberts". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Keith Roberts, President