

PUBLIC COMMENTOR 209 - ED GROSSI, SEPTEMBER 24, 1996

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I'm Ed Grossi, and my vegetable farm is at 6652 Petaluma hill road, east of Rohnert Park. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the EIR. My comments will apply to both the EIR and the merits of the project, since the format and the option provided by the EIR can significantly affect your choice. Some specific points will be in writing and sent to you later.

Sonoma County agriculture has a tremendous stake in the outcome of your decision on how to address wastewater. Local agriculture is diverse and has a strong land base. The greatest limiting factor is availability of water. Sonoma County agriculture is here to stay. Someone's always been predicting the death of agriculture and they've been doing it for the last 50 years.

Crops and products may change, but agriculture is alive and well. Your wastewater is a tremendous resource. And the community at large -- excuse me -- to the farmers in the community at large, since it can allow greater diversion in crops, increase farm income, and employment, and continued use of land and farming. Your water is needed, and we as farmers are willing to help solve this problem to both of our benefits. Several years ago a group of South County farmers -- and I was part of that group -- lined up owners and/or operators of over 10,000 irrigable acres that wanted the water. Looking also to the east and west, it is clear there's not enough water to meet the interest that is out there in agriculture today. Users could be pasture, dairy, truck farms, vineyards, tree farms, specialty crops and more. Some of this interest was generated partially by the EIR, but also by our studies that show that the on-farm, or farmgate value of crops grown with this water would equal about 25 million dollars per year. That's farmgate value. You multiply that by three within this county, so you're talking about \$75 million of economic growth within the county every year, and that would continue to grow into the future.

As a main beneficiary of expanded reuse, there are several ways to take the good idea of reuse and turn it into a successful and cost-effective project. First, agriculture participation will increase and the commitment will be stronger if the project can be phased by incrementally adding new storage and irrigation. This will allow the farm community itself to learn how to best use its resource, learn from the experiences of their neighbors, and build support for specific uses. Second, the use of small to medium size storage sites will greatly expand the areas that can be irrigated and will let farmers put together packages of irrigation and storage as active partners with the City. Smaller sites that develop by the farmers themselves can be cost effective and easier to permit and build, such as the one just completed in Cotati. The use of smaller sites will also support the phased project goal by building incremental reservoirs where and when they are needed. There is currently a proposal being formulated for an 80-million-gallon storage east of Rohnert Park that the farmers wish to do on their own. Lastly, we should consider ways to make the farm community an active partner in your project. Part of that partnership means agreeing not to use condemnation to acquire storage or irrigation land. A lasting partnership that many farmers will want to join cannot work if everyone is

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looking over their shoulder to see if the City is going to change from friend to enemy. A true partnership opens up some new opportunities. Loans and grants are often available to farms that the City is not eligible for. And vice versa. That's why the partnership would work so much better than what's been proposed. Agriculture qualifies for faster and cheaper processing of many types of permits and agriculture as a partner can speed the process of assembling the necessary storage and irrigation to come on line as needed.

Specifically in terms of the EIR, I want to ensure that certain key options will be adequately covered by the document. One, the document emphasizes large sites. We believe there are a variety of good reasons to consider using smaller storage sites and want to be sure that this document will permit the use of smaller sites subject to any site-specific analysis required by CEQA.

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Two, the EIR should address the cost effects of a phased project. The cost of a reuse project appear very high relative to simply dumping in the river because of the front loading of many of the costs. The costs and rate payer impacts will be much more competitive with a phased project and active partnerships with agriculture. Thank you for your time.

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Mayor Wright :

Thank you. Scot Stegeman, followed by Anne Seeley, followed by Alan Strachan.