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DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Wastewater DEIR testimony of Ed Grossi
Finley Center hearing, September 1996

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your EIR. My comments will apply both to the EIR and the merits of a project, since the format and the options provided by the EIR can significantly affect your final choice. 001

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 the availability of water. And Sonoma County agriculture is here to stay; someone is always predicting the death of agriculture; and have been for the last 50 years. Crops and products may change, but agriculture is alive and well.

Your "waste" water is a tremendous resource to farmers and the community at large, since it can allow greater diversity in crops, increased farm income and employment, and continued use of land for farming. Your water is needed and we are willing to help solve this problem to both our benefits. Several years ago, a group of south county farmers lined up owners or operators of over 10,000 irrigable acres that wanted the water. Looking also to the east and west, it is clear there is not enough water to meet the interest. Users can be pasture, dairy, truck farms, vineyard, tree farms, speciality crops and more.

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, agricultural participation will increase and the commitment will be stronger if the project can be phased, by incrementally adding new irrigation and storage. This will allow the farm community itself to learn how to best use this 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 the farmers put together packages of irrigation and storage as active partners with the City. Smaller sites, if developed by the farmers themselves, can be cost-effective and easier to permit and build. The use of smaller sites will also support the phased project goal, by building incremental reservoirs where and when they are needed.

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(cont.)

Lastly, you 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 can't work if everyone is looking over their shoulder to see if the City is going to change from friend to enemy. But true partnership opens up some new opportunities. Loans and grants are often available to farms that the City is ineligible for. 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 it is needed.

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Specifically in terms of the EIR, I want to ensure that certain key options will be adequately covered by the document

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1. 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.

2. The EIR should address the cost affects of a phased project. The costs of a reuse project appear very high relative to simply dumping in the river. The cost and ratepayer impacts would be much more competitive with a phased project and active partnerships with agriculture.

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There are specific points in various sections of the EIR, and a more detailed written statement will be submitted.

