



August 25, 2025

RE: Support of Moratorium on New Agricultural Well Permits in YSGA Focus Areas

To the Honorable Supervisors of Yolo County,

Community Alliance with Family Farmers thanks you for your attention to Yolo County groundwater. SGMA implementation combined with a changing climate and the threat of drought make our attention now critically important for future generations.

We are writing in support of the proposed moratorium on the approval of new agricultural water well permits in the YSGA Focus Areas including parcels that are only partially located in the Focus Areas.

Several other counties, like San Luis Obispo and Sonoma have taken a similar step to protect groundwater in sensitive areas. In San Luis Obispo, the Board of Supervisors approved a resolution to ensure that if there was not existing irrigated crop production on site within the 5 years preceding the permit application, and if the site was within the "area of severe decline", then there are no options for new or expanded irrigated crop production under the current ordinance.

Alarm in response to vast new plantings of perennial crops on previously unirrigated land has been voiced in many northern Sacramento Valley counties. The number of acres planted to perennial crops in Yolo County nearly tripled between 1997 and 2021 and 20% of those lands were historically unirrigated leading to an overall increase in water demand. Now, planting of new almond and walnut orchards has slowed, but pistachio and olive orchards are taking their place. Because perennial crops require high initial investment and cannot be fallowed, the increase in perennial plantings has resulted in hardening of demand for groundwater. As the Ag Well Staff Report submitted by April Meneghetti states, further study of the impacts of these changes in land use should take place. As SGMA implementation results in water scarcity in southern parts of the state, we encourage strong protection now to ensure that Yolo County's valuable groundwater resources are preserved.

The staff report proposes the formation of a Working Group. Some additional considerations for the Working Group, the YSGA, and for Yolo County staff and Board are as follows:

1. If domestic wells or small farm agricultural wells in the Focus Areas go dry as a result of groundwater overdraft, a dry well mitigation program is needed to guarantee that family farms and rural residents can continue to survive and thrive. Especially if the well moratorium is not approved, it's critical that those with shallow wells do not risk well dewatering as a result of increased pumping happening around them.



2. The cumulative impacts of increased groundwater extraction in the Focus Areas needs to be better understood. When considered alone, any one well is unlikely to register a significant impact but a more thorough analysis of all agricultural wells proposed to be added in an area would likely produce different results. This cumulative analysis should be incorporated in well applications, rather than examining them only one at a time.
3. The hydrogeologist that provides analysis for well permits should be contracted through YSGA rather than through the applicant, with the applicant paying for this cost as they currently are. The hydrogeologist should be familiar with the history of wells going dry in the Focus Area and should have no affiliation with any well drilling companies or agricultural operations.
4. Agricultural wells that have been permitted in the Focus Areas in the last five years should be required to install meters. The property owners would be required to report this information to the YSGA on an annual basis. This would serve two purposes. It would provide verification that the wells are not pumping more than was indicated on their well permit, and it would assist the YSGA in gathering the data needed in the Focus Area. This suggestion was part of the staff report for the August 26 Board of Supervisors meeting.

Thank you very much for your consideration. The moratorium and subsequent study of these issues is a service to Yolo County small farmers, to the communities in the Focus Areas, and to all of us who care about our precious water resources.

Sincerely,

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