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To: Clerkoftheboard
Subject: Moratorium in Focus Areas

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Comment on 45-day moratorium on the approval of agricultural well permits in the Focus Areas of the Yolo Subbasin Groundwater Agency

Our family has been a subscriber to Good Humus Produce (one of the early Community Supported Agriculture farms which are icons of California's family farming community) for close to 30 years. Our family was one of the early families in California to appreciate the amazing resource provided by Good Humus Produce (and other similar farms) and its value for California and the environment. We are thankful to be able to take advantage of this opportunity to (1) know the source of our weekly fruits and vegetables, (2) know that the food was coming from land where the farmers were caretakers of the soil and the related environment and (3) support small family farms that are critical to the mosaic of farming, urban and wildlife habitat that makes California unique.

Good Humus Produce is located in the Hungry Hollow area of the Yolo Subbasin Groundwater Agency (YSGA). Farmers in Yolo County, and especially those from Hungry Hollow, have been leaders in encouraging the development of these kinds of farms. With this in mind, we have been concerned about the developments in Yolo County which are permitting groundwater wells, especially in the areas identified as Focus Areas by the YSGA. We have reviewed the proposal to adopt a temporary 45-Day Moratorium on the approval of new agricultural water well permits in the YSBA's Focus Areas and strongly urge the Yolo County supervisors to adopt the proposed urgency ordinance and set a noticed public hearing within 45 days of adoption, to consider whether to extend the 45-day moratorium and whether to modify and extend Urgency Ordinance No. 1569 for Non-Focus Area agricultural well permits.

We support the intent and purpose of the proposed moratorium to temporarily halt the issuance of new agricultural water well permits in the denoted Focus Areas in order to maintain the status quo to enable the County and YSGA to study and develop policies and regulations and implement other recommended actions for issuing well permits within the Focus Areas.

Water Code Section 113 (enacted by SGMA) states that “[I]t is the policy of the state that groundwater resources be managed sustainably for long-term reliability and multiple economic, social, and environmental benefits for current and future beneficial uses.” In enacting SGMA, the Legislature recognized the importance for communities, farms, and the environment of properly managing groundwater resources and recognized that failure to manage groundwater to prevent long-term overdraft infringes on groundwater rights. SGMA states the Legislature’s intent to “enhance local management of groundwater consistent with rights to use or store groundwater and Section 2 of Article X of the California Constitution” (Water Code Section 10720.1).

The staff report identifies a growing amount of investment agriculture which is developing land and water resources with perennial crops on irrigated field crop lands and on previously unirrigated lands in the Focus Areas. As noted in the GSP, “An important feature of land use changes in the Subbasin is an increasing acreage of perennial crops (deciduous, subtropical, and vines), which have partly replaced field crops, and brought previously uncultivated area into production in some regions. Because perennial crops are permanent, they decrease the flexibility of water demand (“demand hardening”). (GSP, Sec. 2.3.2.) The options above for changes to Urgency Ordinance No. 1569 include consideration of longer-term changes that take into consideration groundwater demand hardening with conversions to perennial crops, but absent a moratorium or temporary pause on well permits in the interim, new wells would be approved in the Focus Areas where data gaps and groundwater sustainability concerns are of particular concern”.

We believe that new groundwater wells should not be permitted where there are data gaps which exist with regard to groundwater sustainability, including potential lowering

of the groundwater table. The lowering of the groundwater areas in the Focus areas, spreads additional costs for well drilling, lowering pumps and operating costs and may threaten the ability of some farms to access water needed to supply their needs. These types of impacts affect both homeowners and farmers who have chosen to live and work in the area, and who have provided many economic, social and environmental benefits to the area. Continuing new agricultural development (and quite likely recent past agricultural development) is not likely to continue without adversely affecting the sustainability of the ground water basin with respect to current and future economic, social, and environmental beneficial uses. Difficult choices may have to be made, including restrictions on new and recent production that would adversely affect groundwater levels. The process going forward should take into consideration: the impact of climate change on groundwater management; the nature of different agricultural operations and their impacts on local economies and the environment; and, if they become necessary, how pumping restrictions should be allocated, including limits based on historic pumping. We commend the suggestion to establish working groups for different subareas that can assist in providing input to YSGA and the County.

Given the level of current knowledge of ground water levels and effects of current and future planned agricultural development, we strongly support the need for a moratorium on new wells in the Focus Areas of Yolo County.

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