



The Honorable Anthony Rendon
State Capitol, Room 2136
Sacramento, CA 95814

February 27, 2014

RE: AB 1331 – Support with Clarifying Amendment

Dear Assemblymember Rendon,

On behalf of Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) and the California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN), we write in support of AB 1331, the Clean and Safe Drinking Water Act of 2014. AB 1331 goes a long way towards helping California realize a more sustainable water management system. However, we write to request a clarifying amendment to AB 1331 that we believe is crucial to realizing water stewardship gains on the over 77,000 farms and ranches in the state.

For too long state policy has neglected the importance of providing technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to improve their on-farm water management. Without strengthening efforts to improve on-farm water management on the 25 million acres of agricultural land in California, the state cannot achieve its goals of sustainable water management. The current drought makes these issues even more pressing as we face unprecedented water resource constraints.

Background:

Significant amounts of water can be saved on-farm through the combined adoption of precision irrigation technology, holistic farming techniques, and best management practices (BMPs). The Department of Water resources has estimated that through water use efficiency measures, California agriculture could reduce water use by up to 1 million acre-feet annually, a conservative estimate. Despite this potential, California farmers have indicated that in many cases they lack the knowledge and resources to adopt new BMPs. Surveys of growers conducted by American Farmland Trust indicated that risk, lack of knowledge, and financial burden were all large barriers to adopting new practices¹.

Given the potential for water savings from on-farm water stewardship methods, but the barriers to adoption that California farmers are facing, Community Alliance with Family Farmers researched the programs and funding streams in California that could provide outreach, technical, and financial assistance to farmers. The results indicate that these programs and

¹ For more on this see: <http://www.farmland.org/programs/states/ca/Obstacles-to-Adopting-BMPs.asp>

funding streams have been **unable to support the adoption of on-farm irrigation BMPs** for the following reasons:

Programs that provide outreach, training, and technical assistance are underfunded and understaffed, leaving them without the capacity to provide assistance to the farmers. Once the focal point of technical service delivery to agriculture, UC Cooperative Extension staff levels in 2010 were down by 40% compared to what they were in the early 1990s, with only 200 on-farm advisors. Furthermore, Resource Conservation District (RCD) staff cite a lack of base funding and dwindling resources as some of their biggest challenges. For example, in the 1990s, the Department of Water Resources cut regular funding for the RCD Mobile Irrigation Lab program, which provided on-farm assessments of irrigation efficiency and distribution uniformity.

Federal Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding is overwhelmingly used for irrigation system and equipment upgrades in California, not best management practices. From 2002-2010, equipment/system upgrades received \$141 million in EQIP funding; best management practices received \$21 million. Although installing new irrigation systems and equipment may be the first step to managing water on-farm, it cannot be assumed that installing efficient systems will lead to water savings. A holistic management plan that includes best management practices, such as soil moisture monitoring, is necessary to ensure on-farm water savings in conjunction with the installation of new irrigation systems.

Integrated Regional Water Management Plans (IRWMPs) do not adequately address agricultural water stewardship projects. IRWM planners are only required to “consider” agricultural water use efficiency when developing plans. Analysis of 10 IRWMPs in major agricultural regions found that agricultural water stewardship was not addressed in proportion to the level of agriculture in the region. This is largely due to the lack of participation by irrigation districts and farmers in the IRWMPs. Without the inclusion of agricultural water stewardship in IRWMPs, funding cannot be directed to those projects.

Insufficient funding from previous Water Bonds—specifically Proposition 50 (2002) and Proposition 84 (2006)—has been allocated to on-farm water stewardship projects. From 2005-2013, CAFF estimates that about 70% of Prop 50 Agricultural Water Use Efficiency Grant funding was given by DWR to implementation/infrastructure projects, 8% to outreach, training, and technical assistance, and 22% to research and demonstration projects. Both Prop 50 and Prop 84 include water use efficiency project money through IRWMP allocations, but as IRWMPs do not prioritize agricultural water stewardship projects, the majority of this funding has not been used to support on-farm water efficiency.

On-farm water stewardship was excluded from the state’s efficient water management collaboration with irrigation districts. In reviewing the creation of the MOU that led to the Agricultural Water Management Council in the late 1990s—an organization that was mandated by AB 3616 in 1990; that combined government, agriculture, and environmentalists to promote efficient water management practices; and that was disbanded in 2013—the report found that “on-farm water management, land conversion, land retirement, crop selection, and groundwater

production” were specifically excluded from any action that the irrigation districts would be made responsible for.

Here are just a few of the examples of how innovative approaches to agricultural water management can support sustainable water management:

- Through their Mobile Irrigation Labs (MILs), Resource Conservation District staff conduct individual on-farm evaluation of irrigation systems and recommend improvements to ensure that the irrigation systems are well-maintained and operated correctly. This program has reduced on-farm water use and has improved crop yields, but of 98 RCDs in the state, only 15 currently have funding to operate such a program.
- UC Extension Advisors from Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties, along with UC Davis researchers, are working to determine optimum irrigation amounts for lettuce, spinach, broccoli, and strawberries. This research, and subsequent educational material and outreach, will help farmers reduce water use and nitrogen application, while improving yields. Funding is needed to develop such programs for other crops and to reach out to farmers so that they adopt them.
- CSU Fresno has two programs, the Advanced Pump Efficiency Program and Agricultural Water Energy Center, that can provide farmers with on-site assessments of either their irrigation well, pump, or entire system to ensure efficient energy and water use. These programs reduce over-watering and energy consumption through on-site system testing, as well as through training and seminars.
- Community Alliance with Family Farmers is partnering with the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance, The Wine Institute, The California Association of Winegrape Growers, the Vineyard Team, Lodi Rules, Sonoma County Winegrowers, Napa Valley Grape Growers, El Dorado Winegrape Growers Association, and the Calaveras Winegrape Alliance to provide on-farm workshops on irrigation efficiency topics, such as irrigation scheduling, soil moisture monitoring, and sap flow sensors. Through targeted workshops, winegrape growers can learn new techniques, ask questions, and adopt new practices on-farm. Funded by DWR, this effort will end in two years without more funding dedicated to agricultural water efficiency.

Amendment Request:

We seek language in Chapter 7 to address the current lack of on-farm water use efficiency technical and financial assistance that is necessary to achieve sustainable water management in California and help realize the goals of AB 1331.

Because many IRWMPs do not engage agricultural stakeholders in their planning and implementation, as described above, and because it can be very difficult, if not impossible, to access IRWMP funds for on-farm water use efficiency efforts, we strongly recommend that a separate funding stream, through the Department of Water Resources in the form of competitive grants, be included in AB 1331. Such a provision will ensure that funds for on-farm water use efficiency technical and financial assistance reach the state’s growers and achieve the desired result of improved agricultural water use efficiency. We suggest the following:

Chapter 7, Section 79749

(a) The sum of two hundred million dollars (\$200,000,000) shall be allocated to the Department for a competitive grants program to fund on-farm projects and programs, including direct technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers, to support agricultural water use efficiency. Those eligible for the grants include Resource Conservation Districts, state university technical service providers, and nonprofits and consultants with demonstrated expertise.

The current severe drought is a strong reminder of the need to marshal limited resources for strategic investments for our long-term water security.

Thank you for leadership on these issues. We look forward to speaking with you about AB 1331.

Sincerely,



David Runsten
Community Alliance with Family Farmers



Jeanne Merrill
California Climate and Agriculture Network