



SONOMA COUNTY FARM BUREAU

Affiliated with California Farm Bureau Federation and American Farm Bureau Federation

July 21, 2020

Santa Rosa City Council
City of Santa Rosa Board of Public Utilities
100 Santa Rosa Ave
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

Dear Councilmembers and Board Members,

For many decades, agriculture has played an important role in keeping your water treatment plant process viable. Our farmers have been the failsafe solution for the City of Santa Rosa's need to offload treated water, and as such, over the last 40 years have developed their farming practices around using recycled water. They have built the necessary infrastructure to distribute the treated water and many have decommissioned their pumps and wells in anticipation of this available water.

Local farmers have been working their lands for generations and are the icons of what our county is about. This belief has been further reinforced through the COVID-19 pandemic through the urgent need for locally produced food brought to us by our farmers. The concern of water availability during this growing season is not only a threat to our local agriculturalists and their businesses, but to our community at large as we continue to navigate through this pandemic.

For the past few years, we have had ongoing conversations with the City staff about this program and have felt that often our voices were not heard, or empty promises have been made. The quality of communication, information transparency, and water usage management has been declining and has reached a critical point.

Communication

The traditional annual meeting with agriculture water users was not held this year with the blame on COVID-19. However, as we have all come to know well, a modified virtual meeting still could have been held. These meetings are critical as they allow for direct conversation about the projections and plans for the coming irrigation season. Many of the current issues could have been discussed at this meeting which most likely would have resulted in more viable outcomes.

Recent communication from City staff indicates that there will be a drastic reduction of water to farmers compared to prior years. However, the first communication went out to ag users on May 20, 2020 and stated that no allotments would be made, and that irrigation would remain available through September as normal. Based on the initial information, some farmers invested upwards of \$25,000 in seed stock and other supplies to begin planting. These investments are not taken lightly

and if ample time and information were provided, farmers could have pivoted and adjusted their planting schedules or invested those funds in alternative options to get them through the summer.

Aside from the immediate financial investments, this shortfall in water availability may cause several farmers to not meet contractual requirements for grazing and crop production. These unintentional and uncontrollable defaults may cost farmers long term contracts that will have dramatic lasting impact on their financial situation. This shortfall may also force some farmers to begin using groundwater again to stabilize production and to guarantee a water supply. *If farmers revert back to using groundwater, they will no longer be inclined to take excess water when the City of Santa Rosa needs to dispose of unneeded water due to demand or a shutdown of the Geysers pipeline.*

Accurate Projections

We suggest that the City enlist a third-party review of the contract obligations with Calpine to make sure that they are meeting the requirements of the contract and the need of the geysers without over depleting their water reserves by sending an overabundant amount of water through the geyser system that could otherwise be used for agriculture irrigation. This review could provide opportunity to make timely adjustments to better project and meet the needs of the irrigation system.

Capital Improvements

Future planning for improvements like the Delta Pond repair should consider all contractual responsibilities before scheduling. The repairs and subsequent impact on the water availability are something that should be discussed with the users prior to the irrigation season start. There are many alternative plans that could have been developed to lessen the impact on the season for our farmers that they were not given the opportunity to discuss or consider.

Collaboration

Further, we suggest that the City immediately consider establishing a stronger collaboration with other local water districts. This will allow for the city to gain valuable information on the structure and process of other local reclaimed water systems, and to open up opportunities for support from other districts in rectifying the immediate shortage and to help better prepare for future situations.

Resolution

We are looking to the City of Santa Rosa to reevaluate their program, staff, and planning of the reclaimed water system. We strongly believe that the responsibility to finding an immediate solution to this water resource shortage lies with the City department due to their failure in communication, accurately assessing water storage projections, and capital improvement planning. We are willing to collaborate with the City to offer data, input, and assistance as needed to assure an immediate solution can be obtained to guarantee an ample supply of water is available to farmers for the next 120 days.

We hope the City of Santa Rosa will continue to understand the value of our agriculture users and act upon this request immediately. As you know, farming is a critical part of our community's infrastructure and specifically our local economy. This failure in communication and unwillingness

to deliver promised vital resources will undoubtedly put a strain on specific sectors of local agriculture that could likely result in the loss of these contributors to our economy and food to our local consumers. Sonoma County Farm Bureau supports all local farmers and ranchers regardless of their membership in our organization and believes that an appropriate resolution must be reached immediately.

Sincerely,



Tawny Tesconi, Executive Director
Sonoma County Farm Bureau

A sampling of agriculture water users who opted to be included in support of this letter:

Doug Beretta	Robert Muelrath	Kathy Reese	Ken Lafranchi
Greg and Lisa Harder	Tricia Henry	Val Aggio	Achim and Patricia Gartmann

cc: Sonoma County Farm Bureau Board
Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
City of Santa Rosa agriculture water users