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April 11, 2022

Lake County Board of Supervisors
255 North Forbes Street
Lakeport, CA 95453

Dear Members of the Board,

As our rainy season comes to an end, Lake County faces yet another year of disappointing rainfall amounts. We keep referring to this as “drought”, but for all we know this may be the new normal that climate change has in store for us. The Lake County Chamber of Commerce (LCCC) is very concerned on the effects water shortages may have on its members and the local economy. We have always discouraged government overreach, but in this case feel that local government action may be necessary to ensure current demands on water are met, and future economic development can take place without compromising these current demands.

Lake County has monitored ag wells in the Big Valley and Upper Lake areas for decades. The County has collected data over a wide range of rainfall years and should have a good understanding of the aquifer levels in these areas. We suggest the County should prioritize the same data gathering from all agricultural irrigation users. It is very easy to measure the static water level of a well, the same measurements taken in Big Valley should be expanded County wide. LCCC will encourage all agricultural members, from cattle to wine grapes, to participate. Without this information we are uncomfortable with the way County government determines which aquifers are suitable for agricultural expansion. Cannabis Use Permit holders are already gathering this information, this does not seem to be a burden on anyone. The increased collection of data will also be useful in determining which aquifers are suitable for residential expansion.

We would also encourage agricultural users to install gauges on their wells to measure gallons used. This would help them manage their water use or detect underground leaks. It would also give the County a better understanding on the demands of an aquifer. We do NOT support control over a farmers irrigation procedure by County government, however.

In the meantime, we have the following suggestions:

- All agricultural permits currently in process should go forward. This applies to grading permits for vineyards or Use Permits for cannabis. It seems very unfair to punish farmers who have waited years for a hearing to be delayed further based on an incomplete understanding of local aquifers. The County has been requiring hydrology reports for Use Permits since the current drought began, this unprecedented request should be adequate for project review.
- No new permits for agricultural expansion to be accepted in 2022. Again, this would apply to grading permits for vineyards and orchards and Use Permits for cannabis. Crop conversions, such as pears to grapes, do not normally require permitting. This would be reevaluated in January of 2023. Given the backlog of Use Permits waiting for hearing dates, this would not affect real estate values this year nor discourage investments for future projects.
- We do not agree that the current situation warrants an Urgency Ordinance with no sunset clause. Before County government should adopt such a draconian infringement on the property rights of local farmers, they should have proof that this measure is necessary. The proposed ordinance only cites disappointing rainfall amounts, without any aquifer data.
- The letter to the Governor repeatedly refers to water trucks delivering water to illegal cannabis operations. This is completely within the County's control, if they know an illegal cannabis operation exists, abate the nuisance before the water trucks are mobilized. The legal cannabis market is suffering enough right now without being punished further for the actions of illegal operators. We do not support the County of Lake sending the letter to the Governor as written.

Thank you for your time. We are all in this together and hope that a better understanding of our water resources will lessen the public's concerns over agricultural use.

Sincerely,

Bobby Dutcher

Bobby Dutcher,
Immediate Past President and
Chair, Government Affairs Committee