

# Farmland Working Group

*Striving to protect food, families & farmland. Since 1999.*

## ECONOMICS OF STATE'S WATER GRAB DON'T ADD UP



by Mike Dunbar  
The Modesto Bee  
November 21, 2016

Les Grober, deputy director of the State Water Resources Control Board, said his agency had done “more than was required” in studying the impacts of the state’s water grab on our rivers. But

what became clear during a daylong public session in Modesto was that his agency hasn’t done as much as it should have.

Rod Smith, who earned his doctorate in economics at the University of Chicago, had some pointed questions for the bevy of state officials who attended Friday. He started by asking about the state’s assumptions on volatility and reliability.

Grober said he didn’t understand the question. We think it was the most important question asked.

Grober and the state insist the demands contained in the 3,100 pages of their revised Substitute Environmental Document are about saving salmon. Hardly anyone here believes that. With our planet warming, the rivers are likely to become too warm to support salmon. Plus, all the salmon currently spawning on the Merced, Tuolumne and Stanislaus rivers come from hatcheries – meaning the genetically distinct salmon the state’s trying to save are already extinct.

Why is the term “reliability” important? Because it’s the word Gov. Jerry Brown uses when promising to save the Delta and simultaneously make water deliveries to

Los Angeles and south Valley farmers more “reliable” through his twin tunnels. The only way to do that is by sending more of our water into the Delta. Under the state’s current thinking, making something more reliable there will make it less reliable here.

But that reliability is no less important to us. Without reliable water, farmers are stuck raising lower-value annual crops. Without reliable harvests, people working in food processing plants and wineries might not have their jobs. Will city wells be reliable when nearby farmers are forced to pump twice as much groundwater – an outcome the state says it anticipates – just to keep from going bankrupt? And who will pay to make those city wells deeper when they fail? No worry, says the state, cities can always buy water from farmers.

But if farmers are selling water to cities, they’re not growing crops – and that means thousands will go without jobs.

Mark Hendrickson, Merced County’s director of development, was incredulous the state hadn’t considered volatility or reliability. “Volatility is absolutely going to discourage companies trying to grow here, or companies we’re trying to attract to the region,” said Hendrickson. “The San Joaquin Valley economic recovery is much slower than other regions around the state; what comfort can you provide? What would you encourage us to tell those who might want to come here?”

That, said Grober, was a policy question for those sitting on the water board.

“Stanislaus is No. 1 in food production in the entire state,” said White. “And water is the lifeblood of that. You turn off the lifeblood and you turn off our economy.”

*Continued page 2*

**Our Mission:** To preserve the agricultural foundation of our region and promote smart growth in our urban communities through education, outreach and action.

Such questions might be answered in a serious impact study. But not this one.

Instead, the state's "answers" only raised more questions. The state's models say the economic impact of losing 300,000 or 350,000 acre-feet of water will range from \$64 million to \$124 million. The state figures that means following 23,000 acres, costing 433 jobs.

That left Stanislaus Agricultural Commissioner Milton O'Haire shaking his head: "Wow, not even close."

He says every 10 acres of ag land produces one job. So using the state's best-year numbers, the county would be out 2,300 jobs; in the driest years it would lose 12,000.

Think that will hurt a region already suffering from the state's highest unemployment numbers? Dave White, CEO of Opportunity Stanislaus, does.

"Stanislaus is No. 1 in food production in the entire state," said White. "And water is the lifeblood of that. You turn off the lifeblood and you turn off our economy."

Meanwhile, Smith and his associate Jason Bass understand the models the state used – and their limitations.

"Did you consider the downstream effects" of farmers not planting lower-value crops like hay and corn? asked

Bass.

"(The model) is not designed to look at forward linkages," said state economist Tom Wegge. "We worked with the info we had."

The state had inadequate info because it never talked to the five irrigation districts or the county or the cities or to White or Hendrickson.

Two days earlier, Grober et al. appeared before the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors, who released a statement Friday pointing out their belief this is just another step in the state's twin tunnels plan.

In Modesto, Friday's meeting was for county and state staff, but open to the public. The more critical meetings will be in December in Modesto, Merced and Manteca.

Gov. Jerry Brown has insisted his state agencies should reach voluntary agreements with those of us most affected by this drastic change in water policy.

While we think the state's water demands are unreasonable, we cautiously support that approach. But it won't work unless the state understands the impact its demands will have – impacts we fear will be utterly devastating.

If the state can't even do that much, how can anyone embrace an agreement that might create a better habitat for fish without harming all the humans who live nearby?



The Modesto Bee Photo





## WE ARE WATCHING...

### Stanislaus County

[www.co.stanislaus.ca.us](http://www.co.stanislaus.ca.us)

In November 2016, the Board of Supervisors approved an amendment that will permit weddings, and other similar events, on General Agriculture District (A-2), provided they are not located on Williamson Act contracted land. Each use permit application will be evaluated individually, in terms of environmental review and required operating standards, and will go through a separate public review period and public hearing process.

The general public voted in favor of Measure L that will allow an additional 1/2 cent sales tax to be used for transportation improvement projects. This type of local "self-help" tax is designed to leverage more financial support from state and federal funding sources for road and other transportation improvements. Holding our local representatives accountable for the use of these new funds will be key to insure that conversion of prime farmland is minimized by new projects to connect urban communities throughout our county.

### City of Modesto

[www.modestogov.com](http://www.modestogov.com)

The City of Modesto has spent a decade and over \$130 million on a state of the art Tertiary Biological Nutrient Removal (BNR) and Membrane system to meet the stringent effluent limits required by the State of California.

In May of 2018, we will use the Tertiary BNR system to create a ZERO effluent/discharge to the San Joaquin River. As partners in the North Valley Regional Recycle Water Project, our tertiary effluent water supply will provide a new source of water for agricultural customers in the Del Puerto Water District (DPWD), whose supplies have been severely impacted by drought and environmental restrictions on pumping from the Delta.

The project was awarded to a Joint Venture team of Myers-Rados in August 2016. Recently, the project "broke ground" for the recycled water discharge structure at the Delta-Mendota Canal. The pipeline portion of the project will start construction in the next couple of months. It is anticipated the entire project (discharge structure, pipeline, San Joaquin River crossing and pump station) will be completed before December 2017, weather permitting. (source: COM)

### City of Riverbank

[www.riverbank.org/](http://www.riverbank.org/)

Unfortunately, since the last FWG newsletter, the application by the City to expand its Sphere of Influence east and west was approved by LAFCO. Both the City and LAFCO made no attempt to seek alternatives to prevent the eventual (planned) urbanization of hundreds of acres of prime farmland to the city's west. Despite the obvious contrast between the prime farmland on the west and the lesser soils to the east, as was displayed, LAFCO commissioners placed no requirement upon the City to seek a lesser impact.

At the state level:

CALAFCO recently teamed up with the American Farmland Trust (AFT) on a joint collaboration White Paper on Agricultural Land Preservation. Work is just getting underway on this paper with an estimated completion date of June 2017. (source: [http://www.calafco.org/files/Oct\\_2016\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.calafco.org/files/Oct_2016_FINAL.pdf))



A donation has been made

*In Memory of*

**Joyce Warner**

*by*

*Audie Dahlgren*

*JoAnn DiGiovanni*

*Jeani Ferrari*

Joyce Warner was a charter member of the Farmland Working Group. Prior to the organization becoming an educational, non-profit organization, Joyce was invited to join a discussion group made up of elected officials, city planners and community members. The Ad hoc committee, organized by Congressman Gary Condit, was discussing the loss of farmland in Stanislaus County.

The newly formed FWG met at the Warner Ranch in Hickman, where Joyce and her husband had raised their three sons. Joyce was passionate about preserving the agricultural land in the county, along with its capacity to process foods. Joyce, with Betty Wynn and Gert Zehrung, began the educational, advocacy non-profit organization, California Women for Agriculture. Joyce helped create the video, *A Vision and Legacy* in 1999, the first year FWG was identified as 501(c) (3). The video is still used as an educational tool in classrooms.

# LAFCo 101

## An Introduction to Local Agency Formation Commissions

In 2016, FWG put its energy and focus on Stanislaus County LAFCo, a commission that the public knows little about. LAFCo has the final word on sprawl, and conversely, the final word on the preservation of agricultural lands and open space. The FWG Board will stay focused on LAFCo, hoping to educate the public of its important role in the long term quality of life issues of each city, and more importantly, the long term preservation of high quality farmland in Stanislaus County.

### The Courts Support LAFCo Authority

- ❖ Engaged in the pursuit of an overriding State purpose
- ❖ Is quasi-legislative; limited legal challenge to decisions
  - ◆ Determinations vs. findings
- ❖ Is the Legislature's "*watch dog*" on local governments

California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions

### LAFCos Are Independent

- ❖ Commissioners make final decisions
- ❖ Adopt local policies
- ❖ Decisions cannot be appealed to other administrative bodies
- ❖ Executive Officer accountable to Commission and statutes
- ❖ Administrative authority as an independent public agency

California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions

### Spheres of Influence §56425

- ❖ In determining the SOI the commission considers ...
  1. Present and planned land uses, including agricultural and open-space
  2. Present and probable need for public facilities and services
  3. Present capacity and adequacy of public facilities
  4. Existence of social or economic communities of interest

California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions

### Spheres of Influence §56425

- ◆ (a) "... the commission shall develop and determine the sphere of influence of each local governmental agency within the county and enact policies designed to promote the logical and orderly development of areas within the sphere."



California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions

### AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION POLICY

Amended March 25, 2015

Agriculture is a vital and essential part of the Stanislaus County economy and environment. Accordingly, boundary changes for urban development should only be proposed, evaluated, and approved in a manner which, to the fullest extent feasible, is consistent with the continuing growth and vitality of agriculture within the County.

LAFCO's mission is to discourage urban sprawl, preserve open space and prime agricultural lands, promote the efficient provision of government services and encourage the orderly formation of local agencies. Additionally, Government Code Section 56668(e) requires LAFCO to consider "the effect of the proposal on maintaining the physical and economic integrity of agricultural lands."

Consistent with the legislative intent of LAFCO, the goals of this policy are as follows:

- Guide development away from agricultural lands where possible and encourage efficient development of existing vacant lands and infill properties within an agency's boundaries prior to conversion of additional agricultural lands.
- Fully consider the impacts a proposal will have on existing agricultural lands.
- Minimize the conversion of agricultural land to other uses.
- Promote preservation of agricultural lands for continued agricultural uses while balancing the need for planned, orderly development and the efficient provision of services.



## Message from the Chair

*E. Timothy Parker*

A recent visit with my 91 year-old grandmother (1925) reminded me that hope reigns eternal as she toiled in her small

garden to prune her tomatoes. Despite a bad back she smiled the whole time. No complaining, just happy how well her plants were growing... "good dirt," she said. Inspired, I remain hopeful for our future, the continued cultivation in our big garden, the central valley farmland. I'm told, it's the best soil in the world for growing crops...good dirt!

As we reflect on yet another year passing, it bodes well that FWG continues to remain diligent in protecting prime farmland. We simply cannot ignore the impact paving over fertile soils has on our agricultural future. Grown in the USA will take on a whole new connotation if that goes unchecked.

My acceptance to chair FWG marks a transition, but the focus remains the same: preservation of vital farmland.

Farmland Working Group has been ably led by our outgoing chair Allen Gammon. Allen has worked tirelessly to broaden our collective knowledge of what LAFCo is and how decisions made by LAFCo impact our land use. We are, of course, as we have been since the beginning, preservationists of our most vital and important farmlands. We acknowledge LAFCo's impact not only in Stanislaus County but also the individual land use policy boards throughout the state.

I intend to steer FWG to stay the course. With land use advocacy in their DNA, the organization's founding members, Denny Jackman and Jeani Ferrari, will surely help guide us.

### FWG Executive Board

Chair

*E. Timothy Parker*

Vice Chair

*Lori Wolf*

Treasurer

*Audie Dahlgren*

Secretary

*Jeani Ferrari*

Directors

*Lisa Braden*

*Chance Carrico*

*Elizabeth Mullen*

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*Erica Stewart*

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## FWG Welcomes New Directors



Lisa Dovichi-Braden's roots go deep: she is the third-generation of her family to live in Modesto and has seen many changes throughout the landscape of this city. Lisa is a Realtor with RE/MAX Executive in Modesto and is passionate about helping her client's whether they

are buying or selling a home.

Lisa and her husband Rob, also a lifelong resident of Modesto, have been married 14 years and live in his family home in Wood Colony. When the City of Modesto started their process to amend the General Plan and to pave over Wood Colony her passion to protect farmland, her neighborhood and her home showed her that a small group of passionate people can make a difference. Being involved with Denny Jackman to help get Measure "I" on the ballot was very rewarding and eye opening at to what needs to be done to protect farmland in the Great Central Valley.



Lani Melenbacker Turner comes from a farming background in Madera County. After graduating from Fresno Pacific University she went to work at John Deere Agri Services (a division of John Deere) where she was the supervisor of the Technical Assistance/Training Center working with growers and agri-businesses.

Lani retired from John Deere in 2007. She and her husband, Scott, live in Wood Colony in Stanislaus County where she has been active in the efforts to protect the prime farmland of that historic area. Together they enjoy traveling, time with family and hiking with their yellow lab. Lani also stays busy as a docent supporting "Modesto's Treasure," the McHenry Mansion.



Lori Wolf was born in Hawaii, but grew up in Modesto. She graduated from Stanislaus State with a BS degree in Biology and married Dwight Wolf in 1983. They have two children – Daniela and Dakota. Lori's father founded Professional Landscaping and she began working with him after college.

Lori eventually managed the company and became a part owner.

During that time Lori was the Treasurer and then President of the Yosemite Chapter of the California Landscape Contractors Association. She is also past president of the Valley Builders Exchange in Modesto. Lori's husband has been farming forty years and is committed to preserving our valuable farmland for future generations. Lori is excited to be able to serve on the board of the Farmland Working Group. Lori's passion is landscaping and exterior design and sharing that passion with others.



# Farmland Working Group

P. O. Box 948 Turlock, CA 95381 (209) 343-4174

 [www.farmlandworkinggroup.org](http://www.farmlandworkinggroup.org)

**It's time to renew your membership!**

## **Our Wish for ~~2015~~ 2017**

**The statutory goals of LAFCo  
(Local Agency Formation Commission)**

**Encourage the preservation of agricultural land and open space  
or, conversely, discourage urban sprawl.**

**Commissioners should be selected  
based on their commitment to the mission of the agency.**

**Farmland Working Group hopes that  
the mayors and supervisors  
who appoint LAFCo commissioners select members  
who are committed to LAFCo's intent and purpose.**