



COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

May 12th, 2022

Hon. Chair Joan Hartmann
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
105 East Anapamu St.
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

RE: Opposition to the Proposed Santa Maria River Levee Trail

Dear Chair Hartmann and the Board of Supervisors:

The Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) discussed the referenced project at our meeting on April 7, 2022 and we respectfully submit these comments to you regarding several important agricultural issues:

In preface, we would like to remind those reading these comments that the AAC's purpose and mission is to provide County Departments and Agencies with advice that will help maintain and enhance agriculture as a viable and sustainable industry in Santa Barbara County. While the creation and enhancement of public recreation opportunities is in the best interest of our community, the proposed trail is in the wrong location to serve this public need while sustaining existing agriculture.

A number of our committee members have first hand knowledge of trespassing by trail users in other like scenarios across our County. The accounts discussed move the effects to adjacent farmland from "potential" to "actual" from this trail.

The AAC opposes any trail condition that results in predictable land use conflicts with agricultural operations. Active recreational use trails and agricultural production are generally incompatible, particularly in situations where a large interface makes it difficult to monitor and enforce rules of responsible trail use.

The trail would require liability and damage protections for growers and landowners from the

extensive problems related to food safety, illegal trespass, theft and vandalism. Theft, including stolen vehicles and farm equipment, is common along the Santa Maria River according to the officers [Sheriff officers from both Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties].

Regarding Food Safety; some products essential to crop cultivation such as strawberries have buffer zones prohibiting entry of most individuals of several hundred feet; if the buffer cannot be maintained due to the introduction of the proposed levee trail and public presence, then the agricultural operation cannot be sustained, which could result in reduced productivity of a significant acreage of Prime and Unique agricultural lands.

Dogs present additional food safety concerns: direct contamination of fields with urine and feces; soil contamination; and contaminated runoff moving from the trail to fields. Other potential concerns include employee safety from off-leash dogs entering farming areas.

The likely increase of homeless encampments will pose another threat to adjacent farmland. Homeless encampments have increased along other similar pathways in both Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties.

For these reasons and more, the AAC voted unanimously to oppose the proposed extension of the Santa Maria River Levee Trail. Based on extensive experience from the existing levee trail and other trail locations in the County, AAC does not believe that the negative impacts could be reasonably mitigated. We urge the Board to consider the negative impacts to a broad range of individuals and businesses from the project moving forward and focus instead on projects that are more feasible and a better fit with the surrounding land uses and community needs and enjoyment.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,



Paul Van Leer, Chair

Committee Members

Bradley Miles
Ron Caird
Sharyne Merritt
Jim Stollberg
Randy Sharer

Representing

1st District Supervisor, Das Williams
2nd District Supervisor, Gregg Hart, Chair
3rd District Supervisor, Joan Hartmann
4th District Supervisor, Bob Nelsen
5th District Supervisor, Steve Lavagnino

Carrie Jordan
Claire Wineman
Paul Van Leer, Chair
June Van Wingerden
Tyler Thomas, Vice Chair
Bill Giorgi, *Alternate*
Chrissy Allen

California Women for Agriculture
Grower-Shipper Association of SB and SLO Counties
Santa Barbara County Farm Bureau
Santa Barbara Flower & Nursery Growers' Association
Santa Barbara Vintners
Santa Barbara County Cattlemen's Assn.
California Strawberry Commission