



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: Agricultural
Commissioner
Department No.: 051
For Agenda Of: April 14, 2015
Placement: Administrative
Estimated Tme:
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: None

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Cathleen Fisher, Commissioner and Rudy Martel, Assistant
Director(s) Commissioner 681-5600
Contact Info: Rudy Martel or Kendra Stites, 681-5600
SUBJECT: Summary of the Agricultural Stakeholder Roundtable Meetings

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

- 1) Receive and file the summary of the Agricultural Stakeholders roundtable meetings.
- 2) Determine that this action is not a project as defined by the California Environment Quality Act (CEQA) and is exempt from CEQA review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15378(b)(5).

Summary Text:

During the January 4, 2014 Board of Supervisors hearing, your Board voted to create an Agricultural Ad hoc subcommittee with Supervisor Carbajal and Supervisor Adam volunteering to serve. On April 16, 2014, the Ag Ad hoc subcommittee met and agreed to schedule two Agricultural Stakeholder Roundtable meetings. On June 2, 2014, the South County Agricultural Stakeholder Roundtable meeting took place at 3:00 p.m. located at Farmers West Nursery in Carpinteria. Invited participants included representatives from the following commodity groups: avocado, citrus, cattle, cut flowers and pistachios. On June 6, 2014, the North County Agricultural Stakeholders Roundtable meeting took place at 10:00 a.m. located at the Far Western Restaurant in Orcutt. Invited participants included representatives from the following commodity groups: strawberry, vegetable and wine grapes. Other attendees included members of the Ag Ad hoc subcommittee: Supervisor Carbajal and Supervisor Adam in addition to Board office staff and the Agricultural Commissioner. During each meeting, commodity group representatives had the opportunity to share with the Ag Ad hoc subcommittee members what are the main issues impacting local agricultural throughout the county. This summary only includes feedback provided by agricultural stakeholders that attended the roundtable meetings and does not reflect any consensus reached by the Board of Supervisors Agricultural Ad hoc subcommittee.

Background:

The following are the main issues identified by agricultural stakeholder participants at the South County Agricultural Stakeholder Roundtable meeting:

- Some agricultural stakeholders expressed the need to have local control of ground water aquifers;
 - ✓ Agricultural stakeholders asked for guidelines and directions to obtain local control of ground water;
 - ✓ Agricultural stakeholders emphasized the County should not have local control, only agricultural stakeholders who depend on the ground water should have local control.
- Continuation of the Williamson Act contract program;
 - ✓ Some agricultural stakeholders emphasized the need to continue with the program or they would be forced to sell the property because they could not afford the property taxes;
 - ✓ Other agricultural stakeholders paid more property taxes after some of their acreage was under Williamson Act contract because of the production value of some agricultural operations on smaller acreage can be much greater than other agricultural operations;
- Labor Issues:
 - ✓ All of the agricultural stakeholders stated there is currently a 20% shortage of skilled farm labor in south county;
 - ✓ Some agricultural stakeholders emphasized the need to retain a year round labor force;
 - ✓ The same stakeholders claimed there is a need for affordable housing for farm labor in the county;
 - These stakeholders claimed to have advocated for the county to allow them to provide affordable housing for their farm labor on their property as a business incentive to retain year round skilled labor force;
 - ✓ Agricultural stakeholders shared their concerns about increasing the minimum wage.
 - One agricultural stakeholder stated “Every dollar increase of minimum wage may result in an additional \$500,000 of labor costs a year for my business.”
- Permitting for land use proposals
 - ✓ The majority of the stakeholders stated the County permitting process for land use projects is too expensive;
 - ✓ The majority of the stakeholders stated the County permitting process for land use projects takes too long.

The following are the main issues identified by agricultural stakeholder participants at the North County Agricultural Stakeholder Roundtable meeting:

- Labor Issues:
 - ✓ All of the agriculture stakeholders stated there is currently a 20% shortage of skilled farm labor in north county;

- Some of the agricultural stakeholders accused the welfare system as a part of the labor shortage problem;
- All of the agricultural stakeholders claimed the labor shortage is causing hourly wages to increase;
- One particular stakeholder made the statement: “Farm Labor Contractors will now have to provide healthcare starting January 2015 because of the new Affordable Healthcare Act. This will cause labor costs to increase.”
- Permitting for land use proposals;
 - ✓ All of the agricultural stakeholders said the County land use permitting process is the second biggest issue impacting agriculture in the north county.
 - All stakeholders agreed that the County permitting process for land use projects is too expensive;
 - The stakeholders also said “The County permitting process for land use projects takes too long.”
 - Another stakeholder added “Businesses rather do business with the cities because it is half the cost and takes half the amount of time for a land use project.”
 - ✓ Stakeholders expressed the need to be able to have their agricultural business infrastructure as close to the field as possible. They explained that packing and shipping perishable raw agricultural commodities has to be handled quickly so the quality is not impacted. Stakeholders also added commodities are shipped across the country and around the world. If the shipment arrives in poor quality, they will not be paid for the shipment and will have to pay for disposal. One agricultural stakeholder shared with the group the cost to ship a single semi-truck of broccoli to New York City costs the grower \$25,000.
- Local control of ground water aquifers.
 - ✓ The adjudication process was explained by Supervisor Adams legal counsel. Stakeholders agreed the best approach is for protecting a valuable resource like water by maintaining local control.

Steps taken by the Board of Supervisors to address some of the issues described during the Agricultural Stakeholder Roundtable meetings:

- The Board of Supervisors continues to support the Williamson Act program in Santa Barbara County even though the county lost subvention funds in 2010.
- The Board of Supervisors has included in the 2015 Legislative Platform a Williamson Act item that requests the State delegation, the Legislature and the Administration to restore the funding for subvention reimbursement to counties who continue to have a Williamson Act program. The Williamson Act program has been an effective tool to preserve farmland and open space and assists local government with general plan and zoning objectives and promotes orderly growth.

- The Board of Supervisors has included in the 2015 Legislative Platform an item recommended by the Agricultural Advisory Committee regarding the need for Comprehensive Immigration Reform.
- The Board of Supervisors approved funding for the San Antonio Water Availability Study, November 4, 2014. The approximately five year study will help address the requirements of recent State Legislation requiring sustainable management of the States groundwater basins (SB1168, SB1319, and AB1739) and delineate water availability within the Basin under differing climatic and land use scenarios. The study, now underway, is being conducted by the United States Geologic Survey (USGS) in conjunction with the Santa Barbara County Water Agency (SBCWA) and is funded primarily by the SBCWA with contributions from the USGS and Vandenberg Air Force Base.
- At the September 9, 2014 Board of Supervisors meeting, the Board received and filed a comprehensive report on water availability within the Cuyama Valley Groundwater Basin. The six year study which was conducted and funded by the USGS and Santa Barbara County Water Agency (SBCWA) confirmed a substantial imbalance in groundwater use and replenishment within the basin on the order of 30,000 acre feet per year more use than replenishment. Other conclusions included the occurrence of land subsidence and naturally occurring poor quality groundwater. It is anticipated that the study will constitute a key piece of information toward compliance with the recently enacted Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014.
- In January 2015, the Agricultural Commissioner began scheduling monthly agriculture stakeholder roundtable meetings for local growers to share information about issues impacting agriculture in the county. Information gathered from the meetings will be shared with individual Board members during quarterly meetings with the Agricultural Commissioner in addition to presentations provided by the Agricultural Commissioner during Board hearings and updates for the Agricultural Advisory Committee.
- At the February 3, 2015 Board of Supervisors meeting, the Board approved revisions to the Housing Element of the General Plan to align it with existing State law. The revisions include changes to the Farm Labor Housing permitting process that provides enhanced flexibility for property owners.

Recommended next steps:

- Stakeholders participating with the roundtable meetings appreciated the opportunity to share with the Ag Ad hoc subcommittee their concerns about the issues impacting agriculture in the county and requested additional roundtable meetings in the future.

Performance Measure:

Identifying Impacts to Local Agricultural Industry

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

No Fiscal or Facilities Impacts

Fiscal Analysis: None

Staffing Impacts: N/A

Legal Positions:

FTEs:

Special Instructions:

None

Attachments:

None

Authored by:

Cathy Fisher

cc: