

Craig McNamara
Board President
Owner, Sierra Orchards

March 18, 2014

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The Honorable Karen Ross
California Department of Food and Agriculture
1220 N Street, Suite 400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Ross:

On behalf of the California State Board of Food and Agriculture, thank you for your leadership and dedication to the agricultural community as we experience this drought crisis. The impacts on California's farmers, ranchers, farm workers and rural communities will be significant. Members of the Board take seriously our role to advise you and the Governor on agricultural issues. We want to be a valued source of information as representatives of consumers, conservation organizations as well as a diverse group of farmers and ranchers representing different commodities and regions of the state.

We are aware that since the Board meeting on March 4th, there has been extensive outreach to water contractors and others in the private sector to collaborate on potential solutions for managing water to mitigate drought impacts. It is a daunting challenge and we are pleased to see the close coordination among state agencies and with our federal partners.

The following recommendations are offered to enhance outreach efforts to more clearly inform the public about our serious drought and the decision making process being undertaken by the Administration:

Water rights and contracts are the foundation of water reliability throughout California. We recommend that wherever possible it is plainly stated that water rights laws are adhered to in managing our scarce water supplies and that the state will take every opportunity it can to enable water transfers and sharing through water markets. Such clear statements will help address concerns that have been raised in the agricultural community.

The concept of "real time management" is a good one. We recommend that your outreach clearly explains what this means with regard to the decision making process; who is involved; the balance of beneficial uses that is required; and, the results achieved. This will address the perception that the system has not been



able to move swiftly and effectively to take advantage of increased outflows for storage. To improve planning and response time for the future, it will be useful to document how the “real time management” process has worked and lessons learned.

Persistent drought is forcing the State to consider potentially monumental actions to restrict water to California’s farms – multiplying the socio-economic impacts to rural agricultural communities. We recommend more aggressive action be taken to reduce water use for non-agricultural uses across California and reinforce that all Californians are in this together. We encourage the Drought Task Force to consider recommendations for mandatory conservation practices.

During the last drought there was significant need within the farm worker community for assistance as a result of farm unemployment and other factors. Individuals and families were in need of basic human necessities – food, utility and rental assistance. We recommend that:

- The Drought Task Force work closely with California Emergency Foodlink, other state/local assistance programs, and local non-profits;
- Self-certification by recipients for drought assistance be allowed to streamline services;
- Organizations the farm worker community knows and trusts be funded to conduct outreach to ensure folks in need know about the services.

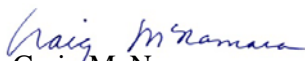
We have been repeatedly questioned what California is doing to be better prepared for future droughts. It is important the Drought Task Force capture lessons learned to improve drought preparedness and mitigation strategies. While the drought requires significant time, attention and resources, the State also needs to focus on constructive, long-term planning and implementation of measures captured in the *California Water Action Plan*.

Drought underscores the need for a comprehensive approach that includes the creation of a water conservation culture, extensive water recycling, ground water banking, and additional storage facilities to provide relief in future droughts. During this period of short-term crisis management, we must not lose sight of long-term needs.

Water challenges are not new to California. It does seem that increased public outreach and communication will continue to be needed. The newly announced centralized drought web page should highlight our changing water conditions and the drought mitigation decision making process.

We encourage the Drought Task Force to continue its leadership and much appreciated engagement with local communities, California’s farmers, ranchers and farm workers. We want to be a resource to assist you.

Sincerely,



Craig McNamara

President

cc: The Honorable Edmund G. Brown Jr.