

MINUTES

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY AGRICULTURAL LIAISON ADVISORY BOARD (ALAB)

MONDAY, JULY 7, 2008
7:00PM

Farm Bureau Conference Room
651 Tank Farm Road
San Luis Obispo, CA

Members/Alternates Present: Joy Fitzhugh, Tom Ikeda, Bob Lilley, Anne McMahon, Eric Michielssen, Dick Nock, Mark Pearce, Chuck Pritchard, David Pruitt, Richard Quandt, Neil Roberts, Don Warden, Dan Westigard

County Staff Present: Michael Isensee, Brenda Ouwerkerk
Also Present: Lisa Bodrogi, Kevin Kester, Karen Mansfield, Steve Sinton

1. Call To Order, Self Introductions: 7:05pm by Chairman Warden
2. Open Comment: none
3. Reports from Members/Guests:
 - Bob Lilley: summarized the July 1, 2007 public listening session held by the State Board of Agriculture in San Luis Obispo. Wide variety of viewpoints representing a large cross section of agriculture and other interests were expressed. Local marketing and distribution of food was a common theme.
 - Brenda Ouwerkerk: asked if anyone had suffered crop loss from extreme high temperatures from June 16-20, 2008. Department has received phone calls from avocado growers with very significant fruit drop or sunburn. Ouwerkerk requested members refer anyone they hear from to her to record damage for possible follow-up of a request for a disaster declaration.
 - Ouwerkerk invited all to November 5, 2008 workshop "Land Use Planning 101 for Agriculturalists". Workshop is co-sponsored by the SLO Ag Task Force and the County Department of Ag and Department of Planning and Building and will be held at the SLO Farm Bureau conference room, 6:00 –9:00pm. Ag Department staff and County Planning Department staff will be presenting information.
 - Ouwerkerk requested members to review and correct membership roster. Tom Ikeda provided corrected phone number.
 - Ouwerkerk circulated folder for Mary Bianchi containing 18 Fact Sheets - reference material from the UC Cooperative Extension Service that explain many components of local land use planning programs. Web site to get copies of each Fact Sheet is <http://ucanr.org/landusefactsheets>

- Ouwerkerk reported the Public Records Act excludes the release of home addresses and phone numbers and asked permission to release only e-mail addresses if a request is made, as was discussed at the June 2, 2008 meeting. Ouwerkerk asked members to sign roster to indicate permission granted.
- Ouwerkerk explained tape recorder was to be used to record meetings to create accurate minutes and recordings would not be archived.

4. Review and Approval of June 2, 2008 minutes: Motion by Ikeda, seconded by Anne McMahon to approve minutes. **Motion carried.**

Special Presentation: Chairman Warden and members took time to publicly thank Joy Fitzhugh for her many, many years of excellent service as Secretary for this Board. Lilley presented a plaque of appreciation from the five Board of Supervisors members. She remains active in the Board as the Farm Bureau Alternate. Staff from the County Ag Commissioner's office will be performing the administrative duties of the Board beginning with this meeting.

5. Review and Possible Action on Agricultural Policy 16: Agricultural Land Conservation Programs: Michael Isensee

AGP 16: *Agricultural Land Conservation Programs*, an ag and open space policy of the County General Plan, was introduced by Isensee. Discussion is before ALAB as implementation by the Ag Commissioner's staff of one more policy of the Ag and Open Space Element of the County General Plan. Policy directs county to encourage and support efforts of non profit organizations that obtain conservation easements and also directs the county to consider establishing a limited county program to acquire conservation easements to protect ag land and maintain ag production. Isensee asked ALAB members for input on appropriateness of a county conservation easement program.

Isensee introduced Steve Sinton –Founding Board Member of the Calif. Rangeland Trust (CRT) and Kevin Kester, property owner with CRT easements.

Sinton provided overview of CRT program including mission, benefits for property owners, negotiation process, monitoring and enforcement of conditions of easement, funding sources, importance of owners finding organizations that matches their priorities because this becomes a long term relationship.

Sinton questioned why the County would develop an ag conservation easement program and whether the County has the expertise to negotiate contracts and perform the required long term monitoring of conditions of the contract. Future legal defense of easements could create a potential burden to the County. Private conservation organizations provide this service already, at a bargain, which is beneficial to the county residents.

Several Board members questioned the County's ability to fill the role of administrator of easements for the following reasons:

- creates a new agency

- add more layers to government
- funding issues
- ineffectiveness of the County's TDC program

Kester provided an overview of his conservation easements with CRT on portions of his 18,000 acre ranch in Parkfield. This was a pilot project for CRT that eventually became a model for other easements, such as the Hearst Ranch project. Negotiations lasted 3.5 years. Kester expressed frustration for how appraisals are conducted - because of IRS requirements, ranchers are only compensated for the value of the development rights that they give-up or donate, not for the value of conservation practices on the ranch. Overall Kester stated he was happy with the easements and feels the monitoring was very reasonable and fair.

Kester agreed with Sinton that the County should not develop an ag conservation easement program, but should encourage and fund non-profit organizations to acquire such easements. Kester stressed the relationship between the land owner and the organization is very important and it is not a good idea for the County to develop these types of relationships.

Chuck Pritchard reported the SLO RCD can acquire easements, for example in the Edna Valley.

Members had several questions for Sinton and Kester, including enforcement, funding, affirmative ag easements, how to establish value of easements.

Lilley asked to bring this topic back to ALAB, perhaps bringing in a speaker from the American Farmland Trust to discuss other kinds of conservation easements. Ag Department staff will inventory types of voluntary easement programs to review options property owners have.

6. Future Agenda Items/Meetings: members discussed cancellation of the August 4, 2008 meeting. Ouwerkerk will check with the County Planning Department to see if they have any time-critical issues that should come before the Board. Ouwerkerk would let everyone know by mail the date of the next meeting.

Ouwerkerk asked members to consider changing the meeting date from the first Monday of each month to the second Monday of each month. This request was made by the SLO Ag Task Force. Their meetings are always on the first Wednesday of each month. Ouwerkerk also asked members to consider changing the starting time from 7:00pm to 6:00pm or 6:30pm. This will be discussed at the next meeting.

The next meeting will either be August 4 or September 8, 2008 at the Farm Bureau Conference Room.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned by Chairman Warden at 8:35pm. Everyone enjoyed "Joyful Cake" in honor of Joy's hard work!!