

ALAB MEETING MINUTES

Monday, June 1, 2015

Members and Alternates Present: Tom Ikeda, Mark Pearce, Dick Nock, Jerry Diefenderfer, Eric Michielssen, Don Warden, Claire Wineman, Joy Fitzhugh, Chuck Pritchard, Robert Hartzell, Greg France, Sarah Kramer, Neil Roberts, Melanie Blankenship

Absent Members: David Pruitt, Rick Hawley, Jean-Pierre Wolff, Lisen Bonnier

Guests Present: none

Staff Present: Marc Lea, Lynda Auchinachie – SLO County Dept. of Agriculture, Xzandrea Fowler-San Luis Obispo Planning Department

1. Call to Order: 6:02 Vice-Chair Michielssen

2. Open Comment:

- Sarah Kramer, Ag Finance Representative Alternate, and Greg France, the new District 4 appointee, were introduced to ALAB members. Greg indicated he grows conventional and organic strawberries in both San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties.
- Joy Fitzhugh shared that Planning Commissioner Jim Irving stated he wanted to hear from Farm to Table growers about their thoughts on exempting small farms from the agricultural offset program over the Paso Robles groundwater basin. Joy indicated that the Planning Commission had discussed a one-time exemption that may apply to those growing between 5 and 20 acres of specialty crops. Growers are encouraged to attend Thursday's Planning Commission meeting.
- Chuck Pritchard shared a letter from Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District (RCD) that identified concerns regarding the proposed agricultural offset program. Chuck stated that the proposed program does not include the necessary technical analysis and monitoring/verification requirements to ensure compliance with the 1:1 neutrality offset requirement.

3. Announcements from ALAB Members & County Ag Department Staff Updates:

- Marc Lea informed ALAB members that: 1) there was another Asian Citrus Psyllid (ACP) detection in Arroyo Grande this past April. All detections within the county have been in residential areas and the source is believed to be from people moving plants from infested areas of the state. There currently are two quarantine areas in the county covering Arroyo Grande/San Luis Obispo and one in Cayucos; 2) Farmer's Market fees in San Luis Obispo County will be unchanged in FY15-16 with the exception of the market registration fee going down from \$500 to \$340. Eric Michielssen indicated he requested this information based on issues in Sonoma County; and 3) Sequestration was a topic discussed by the Planning Commission a few months ago. At the August 13, 2015 hearing, the topic will be discussed again including consideration of sending a general

letter of support to the Board of Supervisors. Joy Fitzhugh stated her concerns about how sequestration would be dealt with from a regulatory standpoint, and emphasized the need for the Planning Department to hear from local growers on the issue prior to any further steps being taken.

- Lynda Auchinachie shared highlights of the 2014 Crop Report. The top five value crops included strawberries, wine grapes, cattle and calves, broccoli, and vegetable transplants.

4. Previous Minutes: MOTION: Nock Approve with addition of ALAB GRAP letter attachment.

March 2, 2015 minutes: **Motion: 2nd: Ikeda Approved:** Unanimous by all voting members in attendance with one abstention (France) not an active member in March. No “No” votes.

5. ALAB Governance & Membership Updates: Marc Lea

- Marc Lea updated ALAB members that the strawberry representative position had been approved and that the Strawberry Commission would be looking for a representative to fill the position.

6. Presentation: Countywide Water Conservation Program and DSEIR, Xzandrea Fowler- Planning Department

- Xzandrea Fowler provided an overview of the proposed general plan and ordinance amendments associated with the agricultural water neutral new development (ag offset program) and water waste prevention programs. She also provided highlights of the associated environmental review and hearing schedule. Xzandrea indicated that the ag offset program would only apply to identified areas over the Paso Robles groundwater basin (PRGWB). In general terms, the ag offset program would 1) require all new irrigated plantings overlying the PRGWB to offset water use at a 1:1 ratio; 2) allow planting credits to be generated from removal of existing crops or switching to a lower water use crop; 3) allow obtained planting credits to be applied on the same site or applied to a receiving site; 4) sunset at the adoption of a groundwater sustainability plan (estimate of 5-7 years) pursuant to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). The water waste prevention changes to the Agriculture Element are aimed at encouraging continued implementation of best management practices countywide and providing information to help the public better understand standard irrigation practices.
- ALAB members raised several concerns including the legality of allocating water rights in the manner proposed, the precedent setting nature of the offset program that could be applied to other basins, lack of clarity that the offset ratio would not be more than the stated 1:1 ratio, BMPs already adopted by growers and such encouragement is not necessary, duplication of regulatory efforts, exemptions would be discriminatory, requiring replacement plantings to obtain a clearance, introducing a discretionary permit, and the precise timing of the sunset clause.
- Claire Wineman indicated that the courts have accepted water use estimates similar to what is proposed with the ag offset program.

- ALAB members questioned what the cost of a ministerial ag offset clearance may be. Xzandrea Fowler indicated that the current estimate is around \$2,000 and the final fee will need to go through a formal adoption process.
- Xzandrea Fowler concluded with a summary of future hearing dates: planning commission - June 4, July 16, and July 30; board of supervisors – August 11 and August 25. Public comments for the supplemental draft environmental impact report are due to Xzandrea by 4:30 pm on Monday, July 6, 2015.
- ALAB members discussed general concerns and next steps to communicate such concerns. Members agreed to study the information provided and return to July 6, 2015, meeting prepared to draft a letter based on concerns.

7. Future Agenda Items: Next meeting – July 6, 2015

Countywide Water Conservation Program

Meeting Adjourned: 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Lynda Auchinachie, County Department of Agriculture/Weights and Measures