



Yolo County Resource Conservation District

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Ryan Maughan
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Subject: Comment Letter – September 13, 2007 Irrigated Lands Program Joint Workshop

Dear Mr. Maughan,

I cannot attend the meeting in Clovis, but wanted to submit something brief relative to my concerns with what ails the ILP in RWQCB Region 5. I cannot speak to technicalities, but only the prevailing lack of trust between the Water Board and Coalition groups. Given that this all sprang from legal action, and our legal system is by its nature antagonistic, developing trust from the start was a challenge. Clearly the folks in Region 2 took a wiser path and had cultivated relationships and took the risk of trusting them in developing their ILP. Given that my work depends almost entirely on the trust given us by farmers and agencies alike, I am strongly biased in favor of introducing and fostering opportunities for trust and collaboration to make the ILP more effective and efficient.

It seems to me that a bridge can be made with Coalition Groups by funding positions locally, within county ag departments, RCDs or commodity groups, as the Water Board has piloted in Northern California. The ILP should not be run as a regulatory point source program, which by many appearances it has been in Region 5. Funding local positions reflects a willingness to develop a partnership with agriculture that is more appropriate to a non-point source program, and will engender more collaborative opportunities with coalition group members and leaders. Given that different watersheds have different resources and different water quality issues with varying degrees of severity, such a program would be best implemented according to need. So, even though in Yolo County, we could do well with an investment of state resources and trust, as we have with what we have received so far, other regions have more significant water quality issues and fewer organizational resources. As a shotgun approach to the ILP isn't appropriate given the variation within the region, efforts to improve the program should be made with greater attention to regional differences and needs. I'll be the first to tout collaboration among local Farm Bureau/Ag Commissioner/Water District/UCCE/RCD for reaching the broadest range of farmers with the broadest range of expertise for locally-led solutions for on-farm water quality management. I'm also willing to help if you want further input in this direction.

If we are going to make real progress with managing water quality passing through agricultural watersheds while still maintaining California agriculture and managing to feed ourselves and not depend on foreign food sources and the associated demand for fossil fuels, a point-source regulator/regulatee 'relationship' approach is ineffective. The solutions to the issue at hand must be met through a partnership between agencies and those working the land, and, legally-defensible or not, mutual respect and trust must be part of that process.

Sincerely,

Paul Robins
Executive Director
Yolo County Resource Conservation District