

KINGS COUNTY AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

CHARLES DRAXLER – DAIRY INDUSTRY
JIM GREGORY – AG CHEMICALS & PETROLEUM
DIANE FIREND (CHAIR) – KINGS COUNTY FARM BUREAU

DON MILLS – WATER
BILL TOS (V. CHAIR) – NUT CROPS
VACANT – SMALL FARMS

JOHNNY STARLING – AG PROCESSING
BOB PRYS – FEED/SEED & GRAIN
BRIAN POTTER – AG EQUIPMENT

STAFF: DAN KASSIK (559) 582-3211 EXT. 2655

MINUTES OF October 10, 2013

Call to Order:

Chairperson Diane Friend called the meeting of the Agricultural Advisory Committee to order at 12:07 p.m. in the Ag Commissioner's Admin Multi-Purpose Room, 680 N. Campus 1400 W. Lacy Blvd, Hanford, California.

Committee Members Present:

Brian Potter, Don Mills, Jim Gregory, Bill Tos
Johnny Starling, Charles Draxler, Bob Prys,
Diane Friend

Committee Members Absent:

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Greg Gatzka

Ex-Officio Members Absent:

Tim Niswander, Kathy Sargent

Auxiliary Members Present:

Auxiliary Members Absent:

Charles Buhl, Jay Salyer, Carol Collar

Committee Coordinator Present

Joe Neves

Committee Coordinator Absent

County Staff Present:

Erik Kaeding, Chuck Kinney,
Terri Yarbrough

County Staff Absent:

Dan Kassik

Visitors Present:

Hector Uriarte, Steve Schweizer, John Garamendi Jr., Luke Dunnington, Aimee Epstien, John Oliveira,
Dino Gacomazzi, Michael Miya

Unscheduled Comments:

None

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Solar Use Easements:

Greg Gatzka provided an overview of the solar use easements and their relation to solar projects on agricultural lands and cancellation of Farmland Security Zone contracts. He reported that a Williamson Act (WA) contract can be cancelled by a Board of Supervisors decision, but cancellation of a Farm Land Security Zone requires (FSZ) approval from the California Department of Conservation. Mr. Gatzka asked for feedback from the Ag Committee regarding solar use easements and cancellation of FSZ contracts. Concerns were raised by the Committee regarding potential reduction in values of adjacent properties, if selling water rights would qualify as lack of water, and what impacts solar projects have on neighboring farming operations. Erik Kaeding, County Counsel, stated that he felt it will be challenging in many cases to make the findings for a cancellation of the FSZ contracts because the county has a lot of very productive land. Supervisor Neves suggested making the determination based on soil types. Mr. Gatzka will work with County Counsel to draft language that would recognize that there is a portion of Kings County which has impaired farming due to many factors including water availability, water quality and poor soil characteristics. Due to impaired farming conditions a case could be made that solar is a compatible use on some parcels in conjunction with some form of farming. Michael Miya, Kings County Farm Bureau President, asked if the county wanted a letter of support from the Farm Bureau. It was the consensus of the committee that it would be beneficial to receive the letter of support. Mr. Mills suggested that we may be able to show that the water is unusable due to the nitrates, selenium or boron and according to the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program this water would be considered as waste. A case could be made that the solar projects could help alleviate additional waste water.

It was the consensus of the commission that Greg Gatzka would continue to work with County Counsel to draft language which would recognize that there is a portion of Kings County which has impaired farming conditions due to many factors including surface water and groundwater availability, water quality and poor soil characteristics.

Update on Water/Drought Conditions in Kings County:

Don Mills provided an update on the water/drought conditions. He reported that the San Joaquin River along Highway 152 is settling and has subsided five to six feet over the last fifteen years. He also reported that the aquifer above the Corcoran Clay which receives the flow from the Sierra's isn't recharging and may be depleted in the next five to ten years. He reported that the first lawsuit in a long time has been filed over Dudley Ridge. There is a concern that this may open the door to future lawsuits.

Correspondence: None

Member Comments: None

Staff Comments: Greg Gatzka reported that he sent a letter to the consultant for the High Speed Rail denying 17 water well permits between Kent Avenue and Corcoran.

Adjournment

With no further business before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 1.40 p.m. The next regularly scheduled meeting will be January 9, 2013 at 12:00 noon.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Gatzka", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Greg Gatzka, Secretary

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