

## Public comment to SB LAFCO Commissioners

**Re: Formation of the Cuyama Basin Water District**

**Hearing date: Friday, August 5, 2016**

**From: Brenton Kelly, 35070 Hwy 33, Cuyama Valley Community Association Member**

I live, work at, and represent the interests of a 450 acre regenerative farm and non-profit located adjacent to the proposed Water District boundary. I am committed to the wellbeing of the Cuyama Valley and am serving my community as the Vice President and a Board Member of the Cuyama Valley Community Association. I am strongly opposed to the formation of this Special District as opposed for the following reasons:

- The only purpose for the formation of this District is for the biggest landowners to gain a participating seat in the upcoming SGMA-legislated formation of the Groundwater Sustainability Authority. SGMA and LAFCO are expressly all about local governance of local resources. This proposed district has no plans or intentions for any standard water supply projects. The principal reason for forming the proposed water district is to provide a local public agency controlled by the landowners to work with the affected counties and with the CCSD to implement SGMA. LAFCO must ensure that any such local public agency be representative of all the stakeholders or resource users, not just a few. This proposed District is an affront to local democracy, and represents a power grab by the major corporate growers and absentee landowners in our valley.
- A “one acre, one vote” structure is an antiquated, disenfranchising and non-democratic system of governance. Groundwater resources are the right and responsibility of all shareholders in the basin, not just the major growers with the deepest well pumps. When water levels drop and land subsides, the whole community is diminished. Absentee corporate farming interests have shortsighted concerns in the face of long-term groundwater sustainability. If the governance structure of this District is approved as proposed, a small handful of landowners and corporations will have full decision making authority while the majority of Cuyama valley resident and farmers will be voiceless while their wells and basin-wide water levels decline nonetheless.
- The proposed Water District boundaries were improperly drawn and do not include all the irrigated lands within the Cuyama groundwater basin by excluding major ground water use in the western region. Who or how would this part of our groundwater basin be managed?

Great urgency is called for to fulfill the requirements and intentions of SGMA. Local authorities must be encouraged and supported and, where necessary, be created in order to take control of our vital ground water resources. Any local agency formed for this express purpose must not be exclusionary in any way and must be given the authority of representational democracy. What service is the proposed district providing, other than giving the biggest growers access to an exclusive seat on the Groundwater Sustainability Authority? How can that be construed as a public service? We need the big growers to join the discussion of concerned stakeholders about aquifer depletion and responsible resource management, but we cannot allow them to dictate or obfuscate that discussion.

Thank You for your serious consideration,

Brenton Kelly