



February 11, 2011

The Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 4 took up the Williamson Act again on February 10<sup>th</sup> and unanimously approved a motion by Senator Doug La Malfa (R-Richvale) to increase the funding for the current year from \$10 million to \$20 million. Last week, at the urging of Senator Noreen Evans (D-Santa Rosa), the subcommittee held the item open, meaning they took no action, so the item would go to conference committee for final resolution. Chairman Michael Rubio (D-Bakersfield), a strong supporter of the program, was also instrumental in pushing for the increased funding. This development, almost certainly done with Democratic leadership's approval, is another indication of the strong bipartisan support for the Williamson Act. The negotiations over the mid-year budget cuts are still in the very early stages but the actions of both the Assembly and Senate has sent a clear message that they reject the governor's budget proposal to eliminate the funding for this venerable farmland protection program.

Both the Senate Budget Subcommittee 2 and Assembly Budget Subcommittee 3 took action on the California Department of Food and Agriculture's budget this week. The Governor's budget proposes to reduce the CDFA budget by \$15 million in 2011-12 and an additional \$15 million in 2012-13, for an ongoing loss of \$30 million in General Fund support to CDFA's budget. Both committees approved the \$15 million in cuts and asked CDFA to provide the specifics of the cuts to the committees within the next week or two.

The Governor's budget also includes \$32 million cut in General Fund support to the network of California Fairs. Representatives of local fairs testified in opposition to this cut and asked for additional time to develop an alternative proposal that will allow all the fairs to continue operating and generating sales tax revenue for the state. Both budget subcommittees held the item open, providing more time for a proposal to be developed. However, the Senate Budget Subcommittee 2 Chair, Senator Joe Simitian, impressed upon fair supporters that his committee is unlikely to provide state funding for the fairs, but is open to entertaining solutions supported by the fairs.

The Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee held an oversight hearing February 1<sup>st</sup> entitled "Management of California's Groundwater Resources." Thomas Harter from U.C. Davis, the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) and the Department of Water Resources gave an overview of groundwater in California, including past and recent efforts to manage it. The LAO made a point of stating there is no comprehensive, statewide regulation of groundwater use as there is with surface water, but that there is a patchwork of state and local rules governing groundwater use. In a March 24, 2010 report, "Liquid Assets: Improving Management of the State's Groundwater Resources," the LAO recommends:

- ✓ Phasing in a comprehensive monitoring system.
- ✓ Establishing active management areas.
- ✓ Removing the legal distinction between percolating groundwater and subterranean streams.
- ✓ Phasing in statewide groundwater use permitting.

A second panel highlighted successes through local case studies from the Sonoma Valley Groundwater Management Program, Orange County Water District and the Kings River Conservation District.

Northern California Water Association President David Guy, Laurel Firestone of the Community Water Center (an environmental justice group) and Maurice Hall of the Nature Conservancy made up the third and final panel and addressed many of the challenges in managing the state's 515 groundwater basins.

Farm Bureau believes additional statewide regulations governing groundwater use is premature at this time. The 2009 Comprehensive Water Package has a groundwater component in SBx7 6 that is just now beginning to be implemented.

Farm Bureau sponsored bill AB 316 authored by Assembly Member Carter (D-62) is a newly introduced and amended version of AB 237 from 2009. The intent of the legislation is to help law enforcement officers reduce metal theft and vehicle theft from farms, ranches and construction sites. It will enable officers from the CHP, county Sheriff's department and city officers who are conducting investigations related to these thefts, to stop vehicles if they have a reasonable belief that it is a stolen vehicle or is a vehicle transporting stolen metal. Farm Bureau agreed to sponsor this bill at the request of several county sheriffs departments who have been hindered by the limitations in law to conduct their investigations and apprehend those suspected to have committed the crimes.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture has released a draft set of regulations to expand CDFA's Fertilizing Materials Inspection Program's authority over organic input materials. These regulations are drafted to comply with the requirements of AB 856 (Anna Caballero, D-Salinas, 2009), which mandated that the CDFA Secretary require registration of each label for organic input material and collect registration fees for these products. AB 856 also provides additional levels of authority for CDFA to inspect and enforce labeling and ingredient provisions of the California Fertilizer Law and has specific language about how input materials approved for organic use may be regulated and monitored. The law further increases inspections and penalties on fertilizer and compost manufacturers for organic input materials. The legislation and regulations are in response to the spiking of organic fertilizer that came to light in early 2009. The comment period for these proposed regulations closes on March 7, 2011. CFBF will be providing comments and will be requesting a public hearing on this topic. The proposed regulation package is available on the [CDFA website](#).