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September 20, 1999

Mr. Rick Breitenbach
CALFED Bay-Delta Program
1416 Ninth St. Ste. 1155
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Breitenbach:

This letter is in regards to the Draft Programmatic Bay-Delta EIS/EIR assembled by CALFED. I would like my comments submitted into the report as well as having my concerns/ comments be considered in making a final decision on this important issue.

I am an almond grower in Northern California. My family has farmed the same land since the 1880's and I am committed to preserving that legacy. Life is full of obstacles that must be surmounted. The most recent obstacle I am preparing to tackle is CALFED. My concerns with the current proposal are two-fold:

* Water Storage

* Economic Risk

Water Storage

I farm almonds. Almonds grow on trees. Once planted, an almond orchard stays in the ground for about 25 years. The costs of establishing an almond orchard is about $1500 per acre excluding the cost of the land. Without water my trees will die. If my trees die, then I don't get to harvest my nuts. If I don't have nuts to sell, then I can't pay my employees and suppliers that live in the community. Eventually, the banker will foreclose on my farm and I will be forced to sell the 500 acres of almond ground I farm (which has already been subdivided into 10 acre parcels). The 500 acres, which currently has about 15 people living on it will swell to over 200 people putting tremendous pressure on the fragile environment of this area. If you think I am joking, then consider that this land is 55 minutes from Sacramento, 25 minutes from Woodland, and 40 minutes from Vacaville. Is this what CALFED wants?? Without guaranteed water supplies for my farm, I will be forced to pursue the above plan of action. We must ensure guaranteed water for

1040(2)

agriculture and therefore I propose that all new urban and environmental interests should foot the bill for additional storage to provide water for these new users. The economic point is this; new urban dwellers and businesses can pack up and move to Chicago, New York, Dallas, Atlanta, etc. without affecting their business. California farmers and the environment cannot simply pack up their Mediterranean climate and move to sunny Bangor, Maine. Therefore, I propose that new businesses and urban dwellers meet their "new" water needs by footing the bill for additional storage and conveyance. This ensures that the additional water demand is paid for by the people that are demanding it. The environment generates little income, but it does benefit us all. Therefore I believe that the tax payers should decide if they want to dedicate their tax dollars to preserving this resource. The final vote on a bond measure designed to restore Delta habitat could be settled at election time.

* Economic Risk:

If the CALFED proceeds without storage and water guarantees for farmers then I think undue risk will be borne by the farmers of this state. Remember, most farmers are investing over a thirty year time horizon. Therefore, I would like to see money in the CALFED budget to compensate growers when they are deprived of their water. In my particular situation, CALFED will have to compensate me with millions of dollars due to lost revenue and idled assets if my trees are killed. Furthermore, my fixed assets (primarily land) will have decreased in value and I will need to be compensated for that loss in market value or be forced to sell to development interests. This land was farmed to dry land wheat before we paid for the water delivery systems to be installed. The differential between irrigated almond ground and dry land wheat ground is about $2,500 per acre, therefore CALFED would need to compensate me with about $1.25 MM for the land alone.

It is painfully obvious that agriculture is being ransacked in this "process". If the plan is not modified to guarantee water for farmers or at least a means of compensating them for their loss, then what we have is a modern day Owens Valley water grab only on a much larger scale! I cannot in good conscience allow this "faceless" and unaccountable committee to steal my livelihood and the farming business my ancestors built out of hard work over the past 120 years.

Thank you for considering my viewpoint.

J.R. Abele
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cc: Doug Ose