Madera County Department of Agriculture
Weights and Measures

Robert J. Rolan, Agricultural Commissioner
Sealer of Weights and Measures

Jay Seslowe, Assistant Agricultural
Commissioner/Sealer

April 23, 2009

Alfred G. Montna, President
California State Board of Food and Agriculture
1220 N Street, Room 400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear President Montna,

On Monday, April 20, I received your request for data related to drought-related economic damage, specifically, acreage abandoned or fallowed; income loss as a result of abandonment or fallowing; and lost jobs. Numerous contacts were made to a variety of state and local agencies and growers and a number of findings were made:

- According to the California Economic Development Department, Madera County unemployment in the "total farm" category was 33.8% higher in March, 2009 than was recorded in March, 2008 (9,100 vs. 6,800). An attempt was made to quantify the economic value of that unemployment figure through the EDD, University of California and other sources but that information was not available through our contacts.
- Drought and limitations on water deliveries have affected planting decisions. There are approximately 10,000 fewer acres of corn, cotton and tomatoes scheduled for planting this year compared to this time last year. The estimated value of those unplanted acres is $8,194,728 (based upon a comparison between 2008 and 2009 pesticide permit data).
- Growers are diverting water allocations to mature orchards and supplying young, non-producing trees with only enough water to keep them alive.
- One water district reported that pre-drought "normal" year deliveries were made over a nine month period, allowing pre-plant and post harvest irrigations. Last year, water was delivered for 13 weeks; this year, the district will only deliver water for 7 weeks.
- With water deliveries beginning later and ending sooner, growers are forced to rely on groundwater. This results in an additional expense to those growers and places extreme demands upon limited groundwater resources.
- Wells are being drilled deeper at great expense, groundwater is being depleted, and water quality has become seriously compromised in some areas.
- The demand for new or rehabilitated wells has motivated well drilling companies from as far away as Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico to move into this area.
- Yield reduction in almonds due to salt damage has been estimated at 5-10% for growers who are dependant upon well water.

332 Madera Avenue · Madera, CA 93637-5499 · Phone (559) 675-7876 · Fax (559) 674-4071

On April 13, I submitted a request to OES for Madera County to be considered for a USDA primary disaster declaration due to freeze damage that occurred between March 9 and March 11. We have sufficient data to confirm a minimum loss of 30% to this year's almond crop due to freeze. Consequently, it is very difficult to estimate what portion of loss could be attributed to insufficient irrigation, salt damage, or other drought-related stressors.

The majority of Madera County's agricultural production lies in permanent crops, dairy, livestock, and poultry. Less that 10% of our 2007 crop value ($1,220,230,000) was attributed to field or vegetable crops. We are fortunate to not be experiencing the acute "Westside" difficulties of some of our San Joaquin Valley neighbors who have seen the fallowing or abandonment of hundreds of thousands of acres. However, as drought conditions continue, less-obvious impacts to our permanent crops (e.g., yield reduction, reduced vitality, and susceptibility to insects and disease) will become manifested, threatening those investments.

Finally, there is a strong consensus among water districts and the agricultural community that the amount of groundwater pumping that has been necessary over the last few years is unsustainable. Action must be taken immediately to increase surface water deliveries to this region to prevent further economic losses and unknown damages to the aquifers in our region.

Robert J. Rolan
Madera County Agricultural Commissioner/
Sealer of Weights and Measures

Attachment

c: Madera County Board of Supervisors
A.G. Kawamura
Kevin Masuhara, CAC Liaison, CDFA
Mike Boitano
Wendy Martin