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COACHELLA VALLEY FARMERS EDUCATIONAL MEETING

IN THE MATTER OF: .
CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM .
LISTENING SESSION .
PUBLIC COMMENTS ONLY .
.....

PARTIAL TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

TAKEN AT USDA SERVICE CENTER

82-901 BLISS STREET

INDIO, CALIFORNIA 92201

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2004

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1 INDIO, CALIFORNIA, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2004

2 PROCEEDINGS IN PROCESS, PUBLIC COMMENTS BEGIN

3 MS. FLACH: Do we have someone who wants to start?

4 Yes, ma'am. Please start with your name? If you, if you feel
5 more comfortable standing and talking, whatever you feel
6 comfortable with.

7 DR. JANE SMITH: Thank you. Jane Smith, Whitewater.
8 We grow organic. Some of the things that the last four years
9 that we've been fighting for is the fact that none of the
10 agencies talk to each other. The Forest Service doesn't talk
11 to the Ag Department, the Ag Department doesn't talk at all to
12 Fish and Game, the U.S. Forest Service doesn't talk to anybody
13 else. The BLM is wholesaling our land instead of protecting
14 it. And none of the agencies whatsoever get together and talk
15 to each other and to the problems.

16 The USDA recently, nor the USDA Organic SAM
17 (phonetic) said the fertilizer had to be made from organic
18 alfalfa or whatever you're going to feed animals so that it
19 would not be raised through effluent water, which is only the
20 very beginning.

21 As anybody here who's ever read a newspaper, all of
22 the streams and rivers in the United States are polluted and
23 most particularly with antibiotics and estrogen which they
24 cannot get out. The frog study last year which is sort of like
25 the Canary and the mine, the Canary falls over and dies is

1 (inaudible) the mines. And the frog study, the frogs are
2 developing two sets of sexual organs, testosterone level in
3 female frogs is just going down to estrogen levels. And I
4 personally had lost twelve species of frogs and toads because
5 of the aquifer being drained by (inaudible).

6 And what possible ways can the Governor hold some
7 sort of universal hope (phonetic) conservation with all of the
8 different departments forced to come and talk to each other
9 much like the Homeland Security, for a unified approach to
10 water quality, soil quality, all of the different areas because
11 none of these departments talk to each other and the result is
12 really a constant degrading of our water supplies, the
13 Williamson Act, salinity, and our growing areas. And these are
14 all aspects that are not being addressed at all.

15 MS. FLACH: Thank you.

16 MR. LOUNSBURY: Pete Lounsbury, Mojave Desert
17 Resource Conservation District. I -- guess I have one of the,
18 my major problem with this at this point is the assurance or
19 feeling that California will get paid just -- justice out of
20 this program, especially at the initial stages here, even for
21 the first couple of years. Historically I'd say most of the
22 sight of the U.S. government has been right around Washington
23 and the Chesapeake Bay, and then maybe get a little further
24 from there. And then it'll jump into the Midwest where they
25 will take care of the number of the (inaudible) issues in that

1 area.

2 But for the Western States to get any recognition as
3 to the needs and the vulnerability of our lands and our
4 problems out here, we just have not found that. Basically all
5 these rules are set on Eastern, Midwestern basis and, you know,
6 one rule fits all. And the conditions out in the west, western
7 part of the United States are so different and so unique to the
8 rest of it. And when you -- not to us, but to the rest of the
9 county, that, you know, they just don't see us as a vital
10 interest, even though they realize that most of the food comes
11 from the Imperial Valley and the southern part here and San
12 Joaquin Valley. Yeah, those are recognized. But the rest of
13 the state is not recognized for the vulnerability of our
14 systems here.

15 And I somehow feel that we need to get that kind of
16 interest put back on our -- the entities that ended up deciding
17 how to divvy up the funds in the program. Forty-one million
18 (\$41 million), heck, we have that and very easily use that for
19 our EQIP program. How can we look at that as being adequate to
20 cover the whole Unites States.

21 And also the fifteen percent. No way can NRCS end up
22 doing a just job of managing this program if they are held to
23 such a minimal amount of funding to cover their expenses. And
24 I don't think it's fair, just, or even a workable situation.

25 MS. FLACH: Someone else?

1 MR. JACK: Albert Jack. I just wanted to reinforce
2 the aspect of soil quality in relation to western farming. As
3 was mentioned earlier, we don't have quite the water erosion
4 issues, but we do have wind erosion and salinity issues that
5 should be taken (inaudible).

6 MS. FLACH: Thank you. Others? We can't be finished
7 before the food arrives.

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I think there's somebody here.

9 MS. FLACH: Okay, if there's no one else, do we
10 need -- Nadine?

11 MS. SCOTT: Coming up.

12 MS. FLACH: Okay.

13 MS. SCOTT: My name is Nadine Scott. I'm on the
14 board of directors for the Resource Conservation District of
15 California, Greater San Diego. My brother lives out here in
16 (inaudible) so all of you here today are near and dear to me as
17 well, as are your wonderful products.

18 How many on the CSB program from the local
19 (inaudible), from my district are highly concerned that these
20 will be based on national priority watersheds. How is
21 Washington D.C. going to know which watersheds are important to
22 us and will, as discussed earlier, how will that money ever get
23 out here to California? We have severe concerns about that in
24 Southern California.

25 The benchmark inventory concerns us because we're

1 already not getting as much partnership assistance from NRCS as
2 we feel we deserve. And we feel that this -- his inventories
3 and a highly erodible land compliance measures are going to be
4 extremely labor-intensive and take away from those partnership
5 efforts and indeed other things that are not in this particular
6 program will suffer as a result of this intensive labor
7 requirement. Highly erodible lands, that's another issue that
8 we're highly concerned with is (inaudible) in compliance, we
9 have to go, have NRCS go back out and start citing people who
10 are not being in compliance. Are we going to start causing
11 some regulatory pressures on people who don't normally need
12 that, that just want to participate in a program that's really
13 designed quite well for Californians.

14 In particular tier two, I'm extremely concerned,
15 especially in the Southern California area, we must address all
16 resource concerns. How are we going to address air resource
17 concerns when we're in containment areas in Southern
18 California. If my farm is going to comply and work on all
19 resource concerns, what about the twenty thousand or forty
20 thousand acres around me that just got purchased that might be
21 fallowed. How am I going to control in my airshed or my
22 watershed all resource concerns? That seems pretty unlikely.

23 We all have shared watersheds and airsheds in
24 California. They overlap in regulatory between the Cal EPA and
25 the Federal EPA for air quality is particularly difficult in

1 Southern Californian areas. So those are my top concerns.

2 Another is that this may be looked at as an
3 entitlement program much as Social Security, you reach sixty-
4 five you get money. Well if this is a true entitlement
5 program, if you're a farmer, you should get money as long as
6 you can have an (inaudible) NRCS staff and personnel come out
7 and certify your land before you actually apply. And then they
8 have to come out after you apply and make sure you're doing the
9 right thing.

10 How in ones name are we -- we're so short staffed in
11 California, going to get anything else done on any of our other
12 programs like EQIP, like partnership work, like WIB, like the
13 air quality initiative. We simply don't have enough staff to
14 make this a really good program in California.

15 So one suggestion that several people have discussed
16 in southern California is making this a pilot program, make
17 sure money comes to California, and that we have a lot of state
18 input on where those funds go. Thank you very much. Again, my
19 name, Nadine L. Scott, S-C-O-T-T, (inaudible), Greater San
20 Diego County.

21 MS. FLACH: Thank you. Okay. Other comments? Pete?

22 MR. LOUNSBURY: Pete Lounsbury again with the Mojave
23 Desert RCD, and that's L-O-U-N-S-B-U-R-Y. And I guess I have a
24 major problem too with the term "all" in the all, in your tier
25 three there, because that is an ongoing term and it's one of

1 those that if -- it's not fully defined and reasonably defined,
2 then basically that could knock you out just for the -- having
3 a toothpick on the floor or something like that. I mean it's,
4 it's a -- just too broad of a term to be put into legislation.

5 MR. YOUNG: My name's Duane Young with the Young
6 family farm. We farm here in the valley and also in Imperial
7 Valley. I, I applaud the ideology of the program if it is in
8 fact to help the small family farms, but if it is to promote
9 overall conservation, I think that the (inaudible) has to be
10 adequately looked at in order to have more funding for larger
11 farms. If you farm a thousand acres or so there, there's not
12 enough funding there to do the paperwork to -- it just doesn't
13 make any sense. So if, if the purpose of the program is for
14 overall conservation, then they're going to have to look
15 towards a different way of marketing the funding. If it is
16 just to -- or the purpose of it is to help the small family
17 farmers, then more power to them. I think that's great.

18 MR. NUNEZ: Hi. Al Nunez, (inaudible) if it's
19 possible the people from this area will go to Sacramento and
20 discuss all these things with the government (inaudible)?

21 MS. FLACH: Yes, is that directed at A.G. or at me?

22 MR. NUNEZ: Probably. It's just (inaudible) program
23 (inaudible) --

24 MS. FLACH: Okay.

25 MR. NUNEZ: -- (Inaudible) question more people from,

1 from the valley can go to Sacramento to (inaudible) with the
2 government.

3 MS. FLACH: A.G., would you like to answer it?

4 MR. KAWAMURA: I would say that that is exactly how
5 the system is meant to work, is we need to be able to put a
6 group together, come up and let's -- come up to our office as a
7 starter, and then we will certainly go and petition to be in
8 front of the Governor again with his, his schedule. He does
9 depend upon the department to be able to come to the rescue as
10 we play that -- that, that role between industry and
11 government. We are there with that responsibility. So I would
12 encourage you to do just that, come, come on up.

13 MS. CORRALL: My name is Kimberly Corrall, it's
14 C-O-R-R-A-L-L. Oasis Date Gardens. We grow organic dates and
15 we've been actively involved in the (inaudible) program. I
16 think in doing these programs, we've seen some of the things
17 that other people have mentioned, that our soil problems are
18 different here in the west than they are in other parts of the
19 country. We have a lot of issues with salinity and erosion.

20 I see that there are a lot of people in this valley
21 who are doing really good things and working together with the
22 Resource Conservation District to be good stewards of the land.
23 And I think it's very important that that is recognized as part
24 of this program.

25 I have issues with Washington deciding where the

1 money will go. I think the money that does get here to
2 California needs to be looked at on a local level with the
3 agencies that are working with the farmers to determine what
4 work has been done, what level they're at. There are people
5 here in the state that are going to know that.

6 And I think that it should also be considered in the
7 program when evaluating different tiers and how the money is
8 appropriated, that there are people in these different
9 watersheds that are already doing quite --

10 (End of Tape 1, Side B; Beginning of Tape 2, Side A)

11 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: -- exclusion, keeping the votes
12 out of the rest of this nation. California is the porthole for
13 the rest of the country and we're, our programs are (inaudible)
14 right now. We're -- thirty-five percent of our general funds
15 in California state, Department of Agriculture had a big loss
16 over the last four years. We're going to need help from
17 Washington to make sure that people (inaudible) will affect
18 whether (inaudible) or whether it's (inaudible). All of these
19 things that affect not only California (inaudible) something
20 that the entire citizenship of the country has at stake. It
21 might affect food, it might affect (inaudible). Those are the
22 kinds of issues that (inaudible).

23 MS. FLACH: Thank you. Are we working again?

24 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Yes.

25 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Yep.

1 MS. FLACH: Okay.

2 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: They might as well keep on
3 (inaudible) --

4 MS. FLACH: Could you start with your name and
5 spelling your name please, sir?

6 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Excuse me. (Inaudible). And but
7 I noticed that the young farmers, that they don't come anyway
8 because all the older farmers they are dying off and
9 (inaudible) every year. We should have some (inaudible) in
10 California to bring young farmers (inaudible) farming. So --
11 and also there's a lot of Mexican farmers. They are also
12 disputing and they don't have enough resources and they can't
13 do good marketing and marketing is big problem. You take
14 (inaudible) market they don't get anything back. So you should
15 give -- bring some program to California so we can bring young
16 farmers to here.

17 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: (Inaudible) You want to move the
18 recorder back underneath the speakers?

19 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Very good.

20 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I'm (inaudible) and I'm
21 (inaudible) conservation district. And this is a comment I'm
22 making about the bill. The biggest problem I have is making it
23 a national organization and a national (inaudible) and if the
24 watersheds are so different --

25 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Raul, would you check his mic?

1 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Can you hear me?

2 UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: That's better.

3 UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Okay.

4 To be a national situation, all the watersheds are so
5 different, the needs of the watershed here in Coachella Valley
6 and Imperial Valley are different then probably anyplace in the
7 world. So how we work in the (inaudible) monitor them I think
8 is you biggest (inaudible). The other real concern I have is
9 the idea that the farmer or the producer is able to come up
10 with the ideas, document it and define what they're gonna do.

11 I think that's a real problem. I would think if
12 there is a problem within this watershed that the people should
13 be able to identify it. We should be using some experts to
14 help identify how to resolve it, maybe some ideas that are
15 different then water here. Implement tests (inaudible). I
16 think we've done that here in the valley with EQIP using some
17 people out of (inaudible). They bring, they've brought in new
18 ideas, new ideas, different research to help solve the issues
19 (inaudible).

20 That's my major concern is that we seem, that the
21 farmer can come up with this idea on his own, document it, ask
22 for the money and (inaudible). These are facts that should be
23 implementing in (inaudible).

24 MS. FLACH: Thank you. There's one up here.

25 MS. SMITH: This is my last comment and I believe

1 it's (inaudible) really quite shocking. There are no accidents
2 in life as they say. I mis-dialed a number one day, well
3 actually Sam, and I got a young woman in the Ag Division and
4 I'm sort of a (inaudible) with Cathy as you can tell. And I
5 said, oh, what do you do? And she said we grow small products,
6 bushes, citrus, and we guarantee to the scientists and
7 universities and scientists and growers that we are delivering
8 an absolutely disease-free product. And I said, oh really,
9 what do you water it with? And there was sort of a silence and
10 she says, well what do you mean? And I said, well you know,
11 what do you water it with? And she said, well water water.

12 And as we know water is contaminated. And I said,
13 well, then you're not producing a actual scientifically-perfect
14 product. And silence again. And I said why don't you be a
15 whistle blower and said I tired that, I'll never try it again.
16 I said, well, would you tell your supervisor? She said, no, I
17 won't do that again. And I said, well then why don't you be a
18 humanitarian and let somebody know, the "New York Times," or
19 "60 Minutes," or somebody know that this is going on.

20 So this is a another very, very serious problem that
21 needs to be looked at within the organization.

22 MS. FLACH: Just one thing, can you repeat your name
23 for the (inaudible)?

24 MS. SMITH: Jane Smith.

25 MS. FLACH: Thank you.

1 MS. SMITH: A really tough name.

2 MS. FLACH: It's kind of -- won't be able to see that
3 that's the same thing.

4 MS. CORRALL: My name is Kimberly Corrall from Oasis
5 Date Gardens. I just wanted to add to all the concerns that
6 have been addressed here today that, that I think that this is
7 an excellent program and an excellent idea and something that
8 the United States needs. I think it's very important that we
9 produce our own foods, that our farmers are supported, that I
10 know where the food that I feed my child is coming from, and
11 what kind of contamination levels are in that. So I applaud
12 the whole idea of the program however it ends up being
13 resolved.

14 MS. FLACH: Are there others?

15 MR. LOUNSBURY: Pete Lounsbury again. I'd also like
16 to see this program designed in such a manner that the Resource
17 Conservation and Development Councils, as well as the Resource
18 Conservation Districts might be an actual part of the enabling
19 -- the distribution system you might say of this information
20 and see if we couldn't work those entities into a significant
21 role in the program.

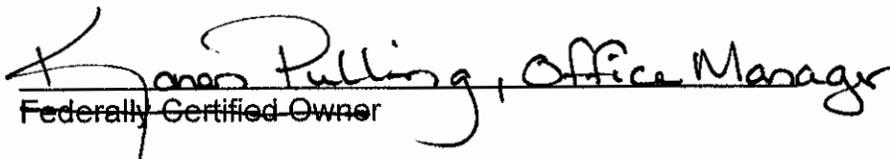
22 PUBLIC COMMENTS CONCLUDED

23 * * * * *

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