



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

April 5, 2021

PRESIDENT
Dennis Rodoni
4TH DISTRICT

The Honorable Jared Huffman
U.S. Representative
1527 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Thompson
U.S. Representative
406 Cannon Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

VICE PRESIDENT
Judy Arnold
5TH DISTRICT

The Honorable Mike McGuire
State Senator
1303 10th Street, Room 5061
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Marc Levine
Assemblymember
P.O. Box 942849, Room 5135
Sacramento, CA 94249-0010

2ND VICE PRESIDENT
Damon Connolly
1ST DISTRICT

The Honorable Jim Wood
Assemblymember
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0002

Katie Rice
2ND DISTRICT

Stephanie Moulton-Peters
3RD DISTRICT

RE: Aid for California Ag Producers Due to Extreme Drought Conditions

Dear Representatives Huffman, Thompson and Wood; Senator McGuire; and Assembly Member Levine:

Matthew H. Hymel
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
CLERK OF THE BOARD

On behalf of the Marin County Board of Supervisors, I write to request your support to provide state and federal aid for California agricultural producers due to extreme and worsening drought conditions.

Diane Patterson
ASSISTANT CLERK OF THE BOARD

California and several other western states are currently experiencing extreme drought conditions that will continue to worsen throughout the 2021 season. Many ranchers are comparing the current conditions to the [1976-1977 California drought](#), which was the worst drought in California history.

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San Rafael, CA 94903
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415 473 6172 TTY
www.marincounty.org/bos

Respectfully, we request the following:

1. There is an immediate need to support ranchers, primarily dairies, to source, purchase, and transport water now and throughout 2021. Multiple, regional water sources should be considered.
2. There is an immediate need to support ranchers, primarily dairies, with the purchase of feed now and throughout 2021, especially organic feed. Most organic dairies rely on their own certified organic pastures as the primary feed for their cattle, but the lack of water has meant far less grass on the ground and the need to import feed from elsewhere at extremely high cost.
3. There is a longer-term funding need for improved water capture, storage, and supply systems to help ensure drought resiliency in the future, including incorporating new technology to better assess existing drought conditions. Much of the long-term structural needs should be provided through programs sponsored by FSA, NRCS, and Resource

Conservation Districts, but the potential scale of need is very concerning and requires additional support. Cooperation from State agencies like the Water Resources Control Board will be necessary to facilitate water development projects, and partnership with Cal Trans will likely be required for trucking of water.

In Marin and Sonoma Counties, the situation for ranchers, especially dairies, is grim and is progressively deteriorating. To date, the area has only received 41% of average rainfall. Many other parts of California are experiencing similar conditions, or will be in coming months. A state-wide approach to support the ranching industry, especially dairies, will be most impactful and provide the greatest opportunity for needed state and federal aid.

To provide context for this drought's current severity, several Marin and Sonoma County dairies have been importing water by truck since the fall of 2020 to keep their animals alive. More dairies will be forced to do the same in coming months. Without adequate state and federal aid, there is great concern about the viability of many of these dairies and cattle ranches, and the dairy industry overall. In our region, fresh vegetable production in 2021 could be cut by half due to lack of water.

Many reservoir levels are already very low due to the 2020 drought. Locally, most public reservoir levels in Marin and Sonoma Counties are approximately 50% overall, with Lake Sonoma at 40% capacity. As of April 5, 2021, Shasta was at 53%, Trinity Lake 53%, Oroville 41%, Folsom 37%, Millerton 34%, San Luis 54%, Don Pedro 70%. These numbers are extremely concerning as they speak to the overall lack of available water that will last through the entirety of 2021. Local agricultural producers in Marin and Sonoma Counties have described their surface water storage capacities as being 10-40% of expected volumes. See [Department of Water Resources - California Daily Reservoir Storage Summary](#) for additional detail.

Lessons Learned from 1976 and 1977 Drought

In the 1978 report titled, [1976-1977 California Drought – A Review](#), the following cautionary statements were made under the section titled, “The Lessons Learned” (page 174 on report, or page 188 of the pdf):

- *“Drought has often been referred to as “a creeping phenomenon”, and this characteristic was partly responsible for the delay of the Federal Government in providing assistance. Because the Federal Government was initially slow to mobilize, what might have become “mitigation” measures actually became relief efforts. More effective drought contingency planning and sound management practices can reduce those drought costs incurred as a result of relief.”*
- *“Short-term federal mitigative efforts were criticized for being slow to respond, initially inflexible, and lacking communication with the public (again initially). There is a need for improving State and federal “trigger mechanisms” for mobilizing short-term mitigative activities.”*

Accordingly, drought relief programs, feed purchases, long-term low interest credit, and tax relief programs should all be part of urgent solutions to help

mitigate the drought conditions before they worsen. There is very real potential this drought will rank among the worst in California history. We respectfully urge that we begin to collaborate now for the worst-case scenario and prepare to provide support to agricultural producers.

Our food system is the life blood of our society. Our agricultural producers provide critical commodities, value-added products, and ecosystem services to the region. As livestock herds are reduced due to drought, the ability to effectively manage invasive species and wildfire fuel loads on rangeland is hampered and increases the risk of deadly wildfires. We have a responsibility to ensure our producers receive the support needed to stay viable and continue providing local and regional products to our communities.

We urge the state and federal government to collaborate with California's counties in the form of mitigation and relief funds as soon as possible. Thank you for your prompt attention to this pressing and deteriorating issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dennis Rodoni". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Dennis Rodoni, President
Marin County Board of Supervisors

cc: Marin County Board of Supervisors