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Advocating for growers as SGMA moves forward

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regular board meetings, saving some time, but still, it's a lot of water meetings.

The GSAs and the county are now working on developing GSPs. An analysis of the data gaps has been done, and consultants have been hired to determine what the sustainable yield is in each basin and create GSPs that take into account drought, average and wet years. There is still a lot of work to do.

As far as support from the state — I think they've been really good. You go and you have questions — and maybe they don't have everything in place, and there aren't defined responses yet, but they've tried very hard to lead me in the right direction or provide me with as much information as they can. The biggest hurdle for everyone is that SGMA implementation is an ongoing thing — it's been building, with the rules and guidance coming out slowly but surely.

people often bring up, is when the county Board of Supervisors approved a plan for 3,000 new homes that would be entirely dependent on groundwater, and then at their next meeting they proposed a moratorium on new agricultural wells. That moratorium didn't pass (and the housing developer later agreed to limits on groundwater extraction), but there's generally just a concern that the county may not represent the farmers well when those issues come up again. Unfortunately, ag will always be outvoted at election time, as municipal water users significantly outnumber ag land owners. Though I will say that currently we have a good board, all of whom are pretty mindful of agriculture.

Do you think growers in Madera County are really confronting what a future with less groundwater extraction will look like?

The conversations are definitely happening, though there hasn't really been any movement yet.

In the Chowchilla subbasin, the GSAs have said that the last thing they want to do is take land out of production, which I think is a common goal throughout the entire county. Everyone is looking for solutions, trying to be creative. In a lot of areas, landowners went above and beyond last winter to recharge as much groundwater as they possibly could. Conversations are also happening about ways to set up some sort of water credit or exchange system.

But, it's in the back of everyone's mind that some land is going to have to be fallowed. There's going to be an allocation set, and there's not going to be enough water to go around.

Closing thoughts?

I think it's just important that stakeholders remain engaged, and for the governing bodies to understand the importance of listening to stakeholders. We've had a lot of bumps in the road to get to where the county, the GSA governing body for much of the county, hears our voice. At the end of the day, municipal users will always outvote ag water users. Being engaged, having a voice, is still so important.

Also, I still get some farmers that tell me they're just now hearing about SGMA, or that they don't understand it. The other day somebody told me that they were thinking about putting in a permanent crop, and I asked about their source of water, and they said, "We have wells, we're OK." But those are the first people that are going to be subject to the regulations! So, I can't stress enough the importance of being engaged and asking questions. [CA](#)



Lance Cheung, USDA

Irrigation in an almond orchard. Almonds are the leading crop in Madera County, with the 2016 harvest valued at \$593 million.

Do you feel agriculture's interests are being considered fairly in the SGMA implementation process in your region?

Overall, I would say yes. In Madera County, agriculture is the driving force of the economy, and all of the water districts that have formed GSAs are primarily agricultural water suppliers.

My main concern in Madera County is the white areas that don't receive surface water and are governed by the Board of Supervisors.

There has been a history of conflict over water for agriculture versus water for urban development in the county. On the east side of the county in particular, there's a lot of planned development. One case that