

## PROPOSITION 40 MAKES SENSE

**F**armland Working Group is supporting Proposition 40 on California's March 2002 primary ballot. Dubbed the "California Clean Water, Clean Air, Coastal Protection and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond Act." Prop 40 will help improve the health and quality of life of every California resident.

**Proposition 40 would provide \$2.6 billion to fund programs that will improve our water supply and the quality of the air we breathe, protect California's magnificent coastline and other natural resources, build safe neighborhood parks and recreational facilities for children and families, and help manage the impacts of growth and protect farmland from being consumed by development.**

**Proposition 40 is a balanced approach to protecting our land, air and water while also maintaining the strength of California's economy.** Preserving productive agricultural lands and sustaining the livelihoods of California's farmers and ranchers are two critical factors in promoting the long-term health of California. Prop 40 provides a commitment to protect California's valuable agricultural lands and, in doing so, will help us plan responsibly for our future growth.

According to a May 2001 report by the Agricultural Issues Center of the University of California, *the state lost approximately 500,000 acres of farmland to urban development between 1988-1998.* Proposition 40 authorizes \$75 million in funds "for the preservation of agricultural lands and grazing lands, including oak woodlands and grasslands." A large portion of this money will be used to purchase agricultural conservation easements on productive farm and ranch lands. Proposition 40 respects the rights of property owners by requiring that all land purchased with Prop 40 funds be acquired from willing sellers. Easements are voluntary agreements with landowners that ensure those lands will be preserved or available for agricul-

tural use. Agricultural easements are shaped with the approval of landowners and are written to cater to their individual business, financial and personal needs.

By protecting the land, air and water that are vital to this state's economy and quality of life, Proposition 40 strikes a responsible balance that will help ensure a better California for our future generations. Proposition 40 would enact tough new accountability standards including independent annual audits, public hearings and citizen reviews to ensure all funds are spent as voters intended. **Prop 40 will be paid for entirely out of existing general fund revenues and does not include any new taxes or tax increases.**

For additional information about Proposition 40 visit [www.voteyesonprop40.org](http://www.voteyesonprop40.org).

*Proposition 40 is supported by a broad and diverse coalition of Californians including the American Lung Association, AARP, California Organization of Police and Sheriffs, National Wildlife Federation, Veterans of Foreign Wars, California Chamber of Commerce, National Coalition of Hispanic Organiza-*

# WATER AND AGRICULTURE —

## THE CHALLENGES IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY

By Vance Kennedy Ph.D

### **Water is fundamental to life, yet there is a widespread tendency to take it for granted.**

We have been able to do this in the semi-arid Central Valley of California because of the foresight of our forebears in building mountain reservoirs to catch snow melt and by installing a widespread, gravity-flow irrigation system fed by those reservoirs. As population in the coastal cities has grown, the demand for water there has increased greatly and efforts have been, and are being, made to supply that demand by acquiring rights to water presently used for agriculture. Because precipitation in the Sierras has been above normal for several years now, urban needs and diversion of flow from the reservoirs to environmental needs of the rivers have been addressed without excessive conflict with other uses.

It is too much to expect that above-normal precipitation will continue indefinitely, so droughts of varying magnitudes can be expected in the future. When “push comes to shove” the fact that farmers make up less than two percent of the voting population will mean that agriculture will get enough water only when the general public believes it is in its own interest to have farmers get water, now and in the future.

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One of the ways utilized by farmers to reduce the use of water has been the installation of micro-sprinklers or drip irrigation. These methods supply water equal to the transpiration needs of the plant, with little in excess. Since plants commonly do not use all the salts in the irrigation water, there is a gradual build-up of salt concentrations in the soil over time. The rate of such build-up will depend upon the concentration of salts in the irrigation water and the amount of water evaporated or transpired. Ultimately, salt concentrations will build up to levels harmful to plants unless these salts are flushed below the root zone.

Wells are the normal source of water for micro-sprinklers and drip irrigation, and these techniques deplete the ground water. Hence, such irrigation cannot continue indefinitely without replenishing that groundwater which, in some cases, has accumulated over millennia. A third problem, and even more threatening aspect of minimal irrigation, is the public percep-

tion that the water saved by micro-irrigation over flood irrigation can be used by the cities. Once that “excess water” is sold temporarily or permanently to the cities, it will never come back to agriculture. So, when water is needed to flush salts from agricultural soils, it will not be available. The moral is, if we want to keep farmland in production long term, ability to flush salts from the soil must be maintained and we must continue to replenish the groundwater table.

The problem of a continuing loss of groundwater and resultant water table drop is well recognized, but not much has been done about it. Planned and existing studies are intended to document where there is a declining water table and limited efforts are being made to determine how aquifers are connected and how they can be recharged. Much more needs to be done. The problem of salt buildup with micro-irrigation is either not widely recognized or is simply being ignored.

Groundwater studies and conservation are extremely important because it is estimated that groundwater storage is many times as great as in all of the state’s reservoirs. It must be emphasized, however, that adding to groundwater storage during wet years and removing it during droughts is much more difficult and complex than is the use of surface reservoirs.

Any discussion of water must necessarily consider its quality, by which is meant primarily its dissolved salt level and the composition of those dissolved salts. In the past there has been widespread use of pesticides and other deleterious materials by industry, cities and agriculture. For example, although the insecticide Diazinon is commonly considered to be an agricultural contaminant, it is in fact also widely used in the cities and shows up in storm runoff from both cities and farms.

Another ubiquitous contaminant is nitrate, which occurs frequently in groundwater and is primarily due to excessive fertilizers but also can result from sewage derived from both humans and farm animals. Fortunately, the problem of water-quality deterioration has been recognized and steps are being taken to address it. However, it isn’t easy or fast to flush out groundwater contaminants once they have polluted the groundwater. This is because the groundwater is stored in tortuous rock or sediment openings, where it can be extremely difficult to flush out. This is a case where the cure can be not only very difficult but very slow. Thus, it behooves society to make every effort to avoid groundwater pollution to start with.

A very important election is coming up in March and voters need to support those people who are concerned about long-term protection of our water, since it is absolutely necessary for food protection along with prime farmland conservation.

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# FAREWELL AND THANK YOU JOEL

By Joyce Warner

Farmland Working Group has lost a valued charter member. Joel Hidahl valiantly battled cancer for several years and, thanks to advanced experimental cancer treatment, those extra years allowed him to educate many more groups and individuals regarding the need to protect this unequalled farmland of the San Joaquin Valley.

With his down-to-earth manner and extensive knowledge of agriculture, Joel was able to help others see how growth and development should be directed onto our less productive lands. Another of Joel's many talents included his relaxed and articulate responses as he made numerous guest appearances on radio and TV programs.

Joel willingly shared his knowledge with any group, service club, classroom or civic organization. In his trademark red suspenders Joel spent hours at Farmer's Markets where he loved visiting with folks who were enjoying agriculture's bounty, always reminding them that the Central Valley's unique farmland made the outstanding quality and variety of produce possible.

Because of his concern that few young people grow up on farms today, Joel initiated an interactive program that was presented to all Ceres High School seniors. As a 1944 Ceres High School graduate, Joel told the young audiences that a large percentage of his classmates were from farm families. A show of hands revealed very few of today's students live on farms. Joel's pilot program at Ceres High School will remain and another will be introduced at Hughson High School this spring. Farmland Working Group hopes to eventually take the Senior Program into every high school in Stanislaus County.

Our beloved Joel will be greatly missed by all of us who loved, appreciated and respected him. Donations may be made to Farmland Working Group in memory of Joel Hidahl.

## Message from the President...

As I reflect on the year 2001, I am encouraged by what our small *local* organization has accomplished. In the end, it will be the collective voice of *local* citizens that control their fate and future.

This year, like last year, our volunteer members will talk to groups and individuals. We will talk about our agricultural heritage, our amazing gravity-flow irrigation, our rich soil and Mediterranean climate—the perfect combination for year-round crop production. FWG will continue to promote farmland preservation, regional planning and “smart growth.”

There are changes and choices ahead for Valley communities. FWG will make every effort to inform people and to create the dialogue that promotes awareness and involvement.

There is no issue that will impact our lives more than the issue of growth in the Central Valley. If you share our concern please take the time to make a contribution. We depend on local support to keep our efforts going and *growing*.

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## Farmland Working Group Needs Your Support

FWG depends on contributions from individuals to keep our non-profit organization active and vital. Your support keeps us going!

Please take a moment to join us and be part of the solution in protecting our agricultural heritage and promoting Smart Growth in our region.

Our active members meet monthly and regularly make presentations to service organizations, clubs and classrooms. For information contact Jeani Ferrari (209) 634-4495.

Yes, I want to support FWG. Here is my tax deductible contribution.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\$35    \_\_\_\$50    \_\_\_\$75    \_\_\_\$100    \_\_\_other

**FARMLAND WORKING GROUP**  
PO Box 461  
Ceres, CA 95307

**VOTE YES ON  
PROPOSITION 40**

ELECTION  
DAY MARCH 5TH

The Farmland Working is a broad range of individuals committed to preserving the agricultural foundation of our region and promoting Smart Growth in our urban communities through education, outreach and action

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**there are no more valleys over the hill...**