

## Notes from the CEO

By John Krist

The Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (LARWQCB) has adopted a new five-year irrigated lands regulatory program affecting all farming operations in Ventura County.

The updated version of the "Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements" will be in effect from 2016 to 2021. Although there have been two previous versions of the Conditional Waiver – 2005-2010, and 2010-2015 (later extended until 2016), the version adopted on April 14 at a meeting in Simi Valley includes significantly more rigorous requirements

for farm owners and operators than the previous versions.

Representatives of the Ventura County Agricultural Irrigated Lands Group (VCAILG), Farm Bureau of Ventura County (FBVC) and our principal project consultants, Larry Walker Associates, spent many hours over the past year meeting and conducting conference calls with LARWQCB staff about the waiver renewal.

Those meetings and discussions intensi-

fied four months ago with release of the first draft language, and continued until the eve of the public hearing.

These discussions generally were productive, some of our concerns and objections having been addressed before the adoption hearing through modifications we requested. But there remain many new requirements that we estimate could increase program costs by 20 percent or more.

In general, the new waiver requires more reporting, analysis, data collection, outreach, tracking and special studies with an aggressive time frame. The tougher requirements are a response to seven years of VCAILG monitoring data, which

shows that although conditions have improved significantly at some monitoring sites, others demonstrate continued exceedences of water-quality benchmarks. In a few isolated cases, conditions appear to be getting worse.

Other significant new or stiffened requirements include:

■ A farm evaluation/best management practice (BMP) survey must be conducted three times over the next 5-year waiver

term. Completing each survey will be mandatory. The survey is the tool to document BMP implementation by each VCAILG member, and we will be required to report members who do not complete the surveys to the Regional Board.

■ For geographical areas that are not showing improving long-term trends in water quality, VCAILG will be required to conduct a special investigation to determine source(s) of the water quality impairments. These studies will require additional testing, including edge-of-field monitoring on some farms to investigate sources of contamination. It is unclear at this time how many studies may be required. Members in those areas will be assessed the costs of the studies, projected to occur in years 2 and 3 of the waiver term.

■ This is the first waiver that includes an assessment of groundwater quality and an analysis of the effectiveness of overlying agricultural practices to protect it. Since the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) requires an analysis and plan to protect water quality in each basin, VCAILG hopes to integrate its studies and activities with this effort to fulfill these requirements. The waiver allows for the study to be focused in areas where there are nitrate exceedances and the groundwater is used as a drinking water source. However, additional annual reports are due relating management practices to their impact on underlying groundwater quality.

■ The waiver includes long-term deadlines to meet the Total Daily Maximum Load (TMDL) benchmarks, most of which are beyond the waiver's 5-year term. If the TMDL benchmarks are not met by the deadlines, the waiver includes provisions that will require edge-of-field monitoring and individual reporting for all growers within the specific drainage areas, as well as the entire surrounding watershed and adjacent watersheds. A single monitoring site with continued impairments could thus trigger the functional equivalent of individual discharge permits for hundreds of parcels encompassing thousands of acres. Although this is unlikely to occur before 2020 at the earliest, we have already informed LARWQCB staff that VCAILG is not capable of organizing, planning and executing a program involving thousands of water quality sampling and reporting events each year.

Rigorous as the new requirements are, the outcome could have been much worse.

The earliest draft of the waiver sought to require a county-wide groundwater monitoring program (continued on page 2)

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### What's Inside?

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# Reviving the “Owner Applied Number” system

By Chip Cadman

Agriculture in Ventura County is a \$2 billion-a-year business. Agriculture-related industries add millions of dollars more to our local economy. In an effort to deter rural crime, a program has been developed and put into use throughout the state whereby farmers, ranchers and rural businesses are assigned a unique 10-digit Owner Applied Number (OAN).

This 10-digit OAN can assist in identifying equipment that is otherwise difficult to identify. An OAN can be applied to virtually anything. A 10-digit OAN consists of the following:

1. CA (State ID)
2. 056 (County Code)
3. 0000 (Four digit number exclusive to property owner)
4. A (First initial of Farm / Ranch name, or first initial in property owner's last name)
5. Result - CA0560000A (OAN Number)

Due to widespread concern over the increase in the number of thefts in rural communities, Ventura County's OAN's have been entered into the Agricultural Crime Technology Information & Operations Network (ACTION). ACTION is an internet database

of statewide OANs, which allows property owner data to be retrieved immediately by multiple law enforcement agencies throughout California.

These OANs, and correlating property ownership information, are now available through Sheriff's Department dispatch, so owner information can be obtained im-

mediately by patrol personnel. In the event a property owner cannot recall serial numbers to stolen property, but knows the property

was marked with an OAN, this property can then be entered into the National Crime Information Center database.

OANs serve two basic purposes: When a person marks valuable property with the 10-digit OAN, it not only discourages theft but enables law enforcement to identify stolen property and return that property to the rightful owner. Identifiable property is crucial for the successful arrest of a suspect for possession of stolen property and prosecution by the District Attorney's Office.

It has been proven that thieves are hesitant to take items that can be readily identified. Farmers and ranchers are encouraged to place signs, decals, and other visible information warning potential thieves that their equipment has been marked and registered with the Sheriff's Office to help prevent a possible theft.

One of the key elements in marking equipment is uniformity. You can locate the OAN on the right side of equipment as you are standing behind it. On all equipment with non-removable tongues – manure spreaders, grain drills, auger wagons, etc. – an OAN should be placed on the right side, on top of the tongue, 12 inches to the rear of the hitch pin. On three-point equipment with a tool bar, an OAN should be placed on top of the tool bar, adjacent to the right hitch pin.

It is recommended that farmers and ranchers also mark their equipment in additional locations known only to them. If OANs are removed or destroyed by a suspect, the property can still be positively identified by the numbers in hidden locations. On additional equipment, such as generators, welding machines or hand tools, a farmer or rancher may mark their equipment in random locations known only to them. It is suggested that farmers and ranchers keep note of the hidden or random OANs and inform patrol staff of those locations in the event their property has been stolen.

When a farmer or rancher sells equipment to another person, they should notify the new owner the equipment has previously been marked with an OAN. The new owner should then locate their issued OAN below the previous owner's number, so that the equipment can be traced from one owner to another. The OANs should not be altered or defaced.

The Sheriff's Department also asks that large property owners place an OAN sign

paddle at each entrance to their property. When deputies enter a large property that has no obvious physical address but does have an OAN sign paddle, they can ask Sheriff's Dispatch to run the OAN sign paddle for information. The property can then be identified, and the on-scene deputy will then have contact information for the property owner or foreman and will be able to notify them of suspicious or criminal activities.

Any farm or ranch owners without an OAN should contact me at (805) 384-4726 or [greg.cadman@ventura.org](mailto:greg.cadman@ventura.org) to obtain one.

To obtain an OAN paddle sign, contact Mark O'Connor at Signs Now, (805-373-0905 or [info@signs-now.com](mailto:info@signs-now.com)). When completed, the sign(s) will be mailed to you. Individual signs cost \$20, with a discount for large-quantity orders.

— Chip Cadman of the Agricultural Crimes Unit  
Chip Cadman is a detective in the Ventura County Sheriff's Department Agricultural Crimes Unit.

## Notes from the CEO

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conducted by VCAILG at member expense, one that would largely duplicate numerous existing monitoring efforts. It also would have triggered individual monitoring, reporting and numeric effluent limits for hundreds or even thousands of parcels on a much shorter time frame – perhaps as soon as two years from now. Through our negotiations, we were able to push those requirement back, and to allow FBVC/VCAILG greater discretion in deciding how and where to address water-quality problems, whether on the surface or under ground.

Before the adoption hearing, a coalition of environmental and social-justice groups – Wishtoyo, Ventura Coastkeeper, Santa Barbara Channelkeeper, Los Angeles Waterkeeper, Center for Food Safety, Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE), and Surfrider Foundation – submitted its own critique and list of requested changes. The group's comments were harshly critical of the existing waiver program, and they argued that even the tougher new version proposed for adoption did not go far enough.

Several speakers representing this coalition addressed the LARWQCB on April 14, repeating their criticism, accusing VCAILG of violating the existing waiver, and calling for the board to impose ground- (continued on page 3)



## Notes from the CEO

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water monitoring, edge-of-field monitoring, filing of farm-by-farm pesticide and nutrient application reports, and other onerous conditions.

We anticipated this, and had focused our presentation to the board on the positive accomplishments of VCAILG and our program over the past decade: statistically significant decreases in exceedences of water-quality benchmarks for some contaminants, documentation of improving water quality at several monitoring sites, widespread implementation of best management practices, high levels of group enrollment, thousands of hours of educational workshops and field tours.

We also urged the board to approve the many changes we had negotiated with staff over the preceding five months. And I warned them that the continuing failure to take effective enforcement action against the approximately 340 landowners who have never joined VCAILG, never complied with the waiver and are contributing an unknown share of the contaminants contributing to water-quality impairments posed a continuing threat to VCAILG's viability — particularly as membership and compliance grow more costly.

Our strategy was largely successful. The board unanimously adopted the waiver as presented, granting none of the changes sought by the environmental groups. And individual board members grilled staff on the reason for the lack of enforcement, and pledged to develop a strategy for expediting it.

Unfortunately, the board also turned away our request to remove new language that had been inserted into the proposed waiver just a few days before the hearing. That language said it was the intent of the Executive Officer to "issue Water Code section 13267 orders within two years to Individual Dischargers that will require direct sampling of all supply wells on the Discharger's irrigated agricultural lands that provide drinking water; and will require the Discharger to notify the well users of any exceedences of drinking water standards (for nitrates), or report the information to Ventura County so that the County can notify the well users."

It is unclear why this language was included in the waiver, because the Executive Officer's authority to issue and enforce Water

Code section 13267 orders is independent of the irrigated lands regulatory program. Potential nitrate contamination of drinking water wells is a legitimate public-health concern and an appropriate subject for Regional Board scrutiny, but elevated nitrate levels in groundwater can have many sources, including agricultural operations, faulty septic systems, livestock operations and certain geological features. We argued that if the board wishes to impose a testing and reporting requirement, it should apply countywide to all wells used for drinking water, irrespective of whether they are on agricultural irrigated land.

Although we were unable to persuade the board to remove that language, we plan to continue working with LARWQCB staff, the county, and perhaps even some of our critics in the environmental community, to broaden that testing requirement. There's no reason agricultural landowners should unfairly be singled out in this manner.

The new waiver took effect on April 15, the day the previous version expired. In coming months, VCAILG and FBVC have a lot of work to do, and we'll be asking VCAILG's members to jump through a lot of hoops. Everyone who is currently enrolled will be asked to re-enroll. We need to develop a new budget, based on ramped-up reporting and analysis requirements. We must remodel our online BMP survey to gather a great deal more information, design and launch a new educational program, analyze groundwater data from a wide array of sources and develop a plan for linking farm activities to observed trends.

And that's just for starters. Our objective over the next five years also will be to design and implement an effective plan to address the county's remaining water-quality problems and thereby remove the long-term threat of extremely costly individual monitoring and reporting.

We have a strong team in place, and I am confident that they're up to the challenge. As we have for the past 10 years, Farm Bureau and VCAILG intend to continue enabling Ventura County farmers and ranchers to comply with state and federal water-quality regulations in the most efficient, sensible and cost-effective manner possible.

— John Krist is chief executive officer of the Farm Bureau of Ventura County. Contact him at [john@farmbureauvc.com](mailto:john@farmbureauvc.com).

## Member Benefits

### TICKETS & DISCOUNTS

*Farm Bureau members qualify for discounts on admission to many of Southern California's most popular theme parks and other attractions. To take advantage of any of these special offers, drop by the Farm Bureau office at 5156 McGrath St. in Ventura. You can also place an order and pay by phone, and have the tickets mailed to you. For more information, contact Cissy Perez-Haas at (805) 289-0155. Have your membership number handy. We accept Visa and MasterCard.*

**Aquarium of the Pacific** — Adult (12+ yrs): \$19.95 (save \$9); Child (3-11 yrs): \$12.95 (save \$4). Valid thru 12/31/16.

**California Adventure and Disneyland "1-Day Park Hopper"** — Adult (10+ yrs): \$165 (save \$6); Child (3-9 yrs): \$144 (save \$5). Valid thru 12/31/16.

**Cinemark & Century Theatres** — Platinum ticket, valid all show times at all Cinemark & Century locations: \$8.75 (savings \$2.75). Additional premiums may be applied for specially priced films and/or events priced higher than normal box office. No expiration.

**Hurricane Harbor** — General Use Ticket (3yrs.+): \$28.95 (Save \$13.04) Valid any 1 day of the 2016 Season.

**Knott's Berry Farm** — Buena Park. Adult (12+ yrs) \$37.95 (save \$34.05); Junior (3-11 yrs) Senior (62+ yrs) \$34.95 (save \$7.05). Valid thru 12/31/2016.

**Legoland** — "E" tickets only. Adult (13+ yrs) \$78.95 (save \$14.05); Child (3-12 yrs) \$72.95 (save \$14.05). Includes 2nd day free ticket within 90 days of 1st visit.

**Resort Hopper Ticket** — "E" Ticket only. Adult (13+ yrs) \$87.95 (save \$29.05); Child (3-12 yrs) \$80.95 (save \$30.05). Includes 2 visits to Legoland, including new Waterpark (seasonal) and 2 visits to Sea Life Aquarium. Valid thru 12/31/2016.

**Magic Mountain** — \$45.50 (savings \$27.49) General use ticket (3+ yrs). Valid thru 9/25/16.

**Raging Waters** — General Use Ticket (3+ yrs.) \$29.95 (Savings \$13.04). Valid any 1 day of the 2016 Season

**Regal Cinemas** — Unrestricted tickets \$8.75 (regularly \$12.50 Sun-Thu, \$10 Fri.-Sat). Good at Edwards, Regal, Signature & United Artists. No expiration.

**San Diego Safari Park** — (Formerly Wild Animal Park) Adult-African Tram Safari: \$42.95 (save \$7.05) (12+ yrs); Child-African Tram Safari: \$33.95 (save \$6.05) (3-11 yrs). Valid thru 12/31/16. Africa Tram Safari includes admission, unlimited use of the Journey into Africa Tour, Conservation Carousel and other shows/exhibits.

**San Diego Sea World – 1 Day Visit.** Adult (10 yrs+) \$65 (save \$24); Child (3-9 yrs) \$65 (save \$18). Valid thru 12/31/16.

**San Diego Zoo** — Adult (12+ yrs): \$42.95 (save \$7.05). Child (3-11 yrs): \$33.95 (save \$6.05). Valid thru 12/31/16.

**See's Candy** gift certificate — One-pound box \$15.95 (Save \$2.05). No expiration.

**"E Tickets" — Disneyland:** 1 Day 1 Park, 2 Day 1 Park, 2 Day Park Hopper, 3 Day 1 Park, & 3 Day Park Hopper. Ask about SoCal Resident specials. **San Diego Sea World:** Buy 1 day, get a year of unlimited visits: Adult \$84 (10+ yrs) Child \$84 (3-9 yrs) Save \$5. Valid thru 12/31/16. Blackout dates apply. **Universal Studios:** 12 Month Pass (3+ yrs) \$109 (save \$40) Exp. 12/31/16. Valid 12 months from first visit. First visit must be by May 26. Blackout dates apply after 1st visit and are subject to change.



# FARM BUREAU OF VENTURA COUNTY

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We represent the broad and dynamic interests of the agricultural industry through our diverse membership. We serve members by delivering services, promoting policies, developing coalitions, and fostering community action that will ensure the long-term success of agriculture in Ventura County.

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