

AB 350

Sustainable Ground Water Management Act Ombudsman



SUMMARY

Assembly Bill 350 will ensure landowners and farmers affected by the Sustainable Ground Water Management Act (SGMA) have the tools and resources needed to transition to reduced ground water use.

BACKGROUND

California is in the process of implementing one of the most ambitious water regulations that this state has ever seen. While public outreach efforts by state and local agencies have been effective in engaging the farming community, uncertainty about future water availability remains common. The first wave of implementation for SGMA is currently in motion and will begin in the most critically over-drafted groundwater basins, many of which are in the San Joaquin Valley - one of the most economically distressed regions of the state. This program also has strategic alignment in the San Joaquin Valley where a majority of the geographic region is designated as disadvantaged communities, where the most burdened communities have been identified.

PROBLEM

The implementation of SGMA is anticipated by the Public Policy Institute of California to transition an estimated 300,000 to 1.2 million acres away from agricultural production in the San Joaquin Valley during the next two decades, which aligns with when groundwater sustainability agencies are required to bring basins into balance. The San Joaquin Valley alone is comprised of approximately 5 million acres of irrigated agriculture. Irrigated areas outside of irrigation district service boundaries, called "white areas," have no access to surface water and depend entirely on groundwater. Landowner; many of them farmers, within white areas will be significantly impacted by Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSA) regulations to reduce groundwater pumping, resulting in the loss of irrigated acreage.

SOLUTION

AB 350 would create a three-year program housed under the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) which would be responsible for creating programmatic guidelines and appropriate funds for grants up to \$300,000, to locally fund technical advisors or "ombudsmen", including but not limited to University Cooperative Extension (UCCE), Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs), nonprofits, GSAs, special districts and local government agencies, etc. The Grants would be used to assist San Joaquin Valley landowners/farmers in critically overdrafted basins create management plans specifically addressing the impacts to their agricultural property due to the implementation of the SGMA. These management plans would evaluate current and future agricultural resources and create a plan for landowners seeking assistance to address the continued economic viability and alternative management of properties in critically over-drafted locations. This management plan would also serve as a basis for landowners to evaluate economically viable alternative land uses for habitat, open space, alternative energy, and/or temporary rotational fallowing and seek further financial assistance as needed.

SUPPORT

PENDING

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