April 18, 2016

The Honorable Lois Wolk
State Capitol, Room 5114
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 1317 (Wolk) - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Wolk:

The Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) is a statewide organization that represents both farmers and non-farm urban residents who support sustainable food and farming policies. CAFF has decided to support your SB 1317, which would restrict the issuance of permits for new wells in high and medium priority basins, and prohibit new well permits in basins of critical overdraft, while we wait for local agencies to implement the provisions of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).

CAFF supported the passage of SGMA for the same reasons that we support SB 1317: the family farmers we work with, as well as many rural residents, are being negatively impacted by the rush to drill deep new wells for new plantings of trees and vines. Well-capitalized investment groups have come in and planted on rangeland that has never been irrigated, or have drilled wells on cropland that has historically used surface water, greatly exacerbating overdraft problems in certain basins.

We recognize that SGMA was passed with a particular timeline for implementation and a promise of local control. However, we believe that many parties are not acting in good faith and are instead trying to game the law by putting in as many wells as they can before local Groundwater Sustainability Agencies take control of the basins. The counties that have declared moratoriums should be commended; those that have not and are issuing hundreds of permits for wells above impacted basins need to be reined in, which SB 1317 will accomplish.

CAFF is interested in solving the problem of groundwater overdraft while protecting the interests of family farmers and rural residents. We note that this bill does not prevent a farmer from deepening an existing well, which is important to our support, and we thank you for this effort to ensure the continued viability of groundwater basins around the state.

Sincerely,

David Runsten
Policy Director