

My name is Norm Groot and I am the Executive Director of Monterey County Farm Bureau, representing family farmers and ranchers in the interest of protecting and promoting agriculture throughout Monterey County. We strive to improve the ability of those engaged in production agriculture to provide a reliable supply of food and fiber through reasonable stewardship of our local resources. Increasingly, this is becoming a difficult mission to accomplish because of overburdening and unnecessary regulations.

Our farmers and ranchers all want an environment that is clean and healthy for all citizens. We realize that clean water leads to a healthy community, that air quality impacts the growth of our crops, and safety must come first for both our employees and the food products we grow. In this day of unending litigation, we cannot afford to make any mistakes with food safety or employee welfare.

Where we seek regulatory relief is on environmental standards that are nearly impossible to achieve and set up our industry for failure. Attempting to achieve the unreasonable standards for air and water quality, as well as endangered species protections come at a cost, sometimes more than a farmer makes off his crop. Farmers are price takers and the assumption that the wholesale price will rise to cover the costs of these environmental mitigations is false; farmers placed into more stringent regulatory processes find they lose their profits, not bear this burden as a cost of doing business that is passed on to the consumer. The unintended consequence of all this regulation is that farming operations are less likely to expand and generate additional jobs to help drive the economic recovery. The contraction of farming operations will continue as more family farms are forced out of business by an uneven playing field with food imports; our farmers are forced to spend money on expensive regulatory mandates, with little reliance that those regulations will lead to a stronger business model, while competing with offshore growers that have little or no oversight in what they produce or the environment they operate in.

I have a few examples of overburdening regulations here along the Central Coast:

- Water quality of irrigated fields is facing a standard that is better than drinking water quality because the measurement of that standard is based on a small flea that only survives when the water quality is better than the drinking water standard. Please try watering your houseplants and expecting that the water that runs out the bottom of the pot will be better than drinking water quality. This EPA standard places farmers in the business of being water reclamation engineers, requiring something that even our municipalities have difficulty achieving.
- Air quality standards are currently under review at EPA and the result will be more stringent air quality standards for areas out of attainment based on the current standards. Monterey County is in an attainment zone, but our farmers are faced with expensive diesel engine requirements costing up to \$20,000 per

unit, simply because the one-size-fits-all approach to regulating air quality requires us to go along for the ride. Yes, older engines should be retired or updated, but mandating expensive retrofitting requirements in an attainment area is an instance of overreaching regulation.

- California has its own set of regulatory values that all farmers and ranchers must deal with, either when applying crop protection chemicals or protecting endangered species. This duplicative effort leads to additional costs of input, conflicting standards for achievement, and endless bureaucratic paperwork. Farmers who maintain their riverbanks along the Salinas River must deal with no less than seven state and federal agencies to obtain permits, with any one agency holding up the process should they decide to seek an EIR, as is the current case. Meanwhile, riverbanks are eroding, invasive shrubs and trees are taking over the riverbed, and levy maintenance is falling behind schedule. All this resulted in a recent flooding incident that wiped out approximately 1500 acres of farmland prepared for planting, a needless loss for the farmers and their field workers. The economic impacts of these cross-jurisdictional actions are never considered by these agencies when issuing conflicting regulatory decisions. If we are, as a society, mandate a permitting process for these types of endeavors, then let's streamline the process and allow a one-stop shop for those who have to obtain the permits.
- Conflicts with the food safety procedures used for crops grown locally are becoming more frequent. Our Regional Water Quality Control Board is proposing regulations that will require vegetative buffers along all impaired water bodies, a direct conflict with procedures required within the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement that farmers operate under. How are farmers expected to manage food safety and water quality under conflicting regulations? Clearly, any new regulations should not force a choice between clean water and food safety. New Federal regulations are currently in development for the Food Safety Act passed by Congress earlier this year; there probably will, no doubt, be more conflicts developing as those regulations are promulgated and other agencies that have jurisdiction over water quality and land use scramble to protect their authorities. We believe strongly that food safety standards should be managed on a national level, by one agency, to provide an even playing field for all producers; California has led the way on food safety and potential conflicts that jeopardize our food production processes should be avoided.
- Recruiting legally documented field workers remains an issue, especially if E-Verify is to become a mandatory requirement for employee screening. Without a guest worker program that offers our specialty crop growers a source of legalized labor, the anticipation is that there will be a labor shortage in Agriculture in the coming seasons. Programs like Ag Jobs will offer a solution for seasonal farming operations that allows workers to stay in our country for growing season but also requires them to return to their native lands when the harvests are completed. Without a solid guest worker program connected to the

E-Verify requirement, or included any comprehensive immigration reform package, producers will be faced with uncertainty about their harvests and possible wage inflation due to increased competition for legally documented workers. Dealing with the estimated 13 million undocumented immigrants by providing a path to a legalized status should be a high priority for Congress this year.

This burden of regulation is leading to a shrinking agricultural community here in the Salinas Valley. This translates into lost jobs, depressed tax revenues, decay of urban commerce areas, abandoned farmland or converted lands to other permanent uses, and lower prospects that the economy will ever recover to its pre-depression levels. Each regulation takes an additional bite out of farm income; the cause and effect are not necessarily cleaner water or air or protected habitats, but more degradation to our free market society and our economic base as a country. We are slowly forcing ourselves out of the agricultural business in this area by the piling-on of regulations that require standards that cannot be met even in pristine natural surroundings. Recent study results show that irrigated lands have a positive effect on our climate, moderating temperatures in summer months. In this time of concern about climate change, should we not be looking to support those industries that have a positive effect on the ecology of our planet?

Agriculture is the driving economic force here in Monterey County. Nearly every local job is touched by our industry in some way. By forcing additional or conflicting regulations on an industry already challenged to be sustainable in our newly green society, we are tearing down the most important element of our society: our food supply. For every farmer here that is forced out of farming due to increase regulatory burdens, we open the door to more imports of our food supplies. We need to all realize that a reliable food supply is essential to sustaining our society, and that farmers are the ultimate environmentalists; we all live by what grows in our soil, what our water will produce, and the air that benefits from having a green ecology. We all drink the same water and breathe the same air.

Thank you for your time and providing this opportunity to be heard as farmers.

Norman C. Groot

Employment History

Monterey County Farm Bureau, Salinas CA

Executive Director, 2010 – present

Monrovia Nursery Company, Azusa CA

Vice-President of Production Planning, 2009 – 2010

Vice-President of Information Systems, 2004 – 2009

Director of Financial Services, 1993 – 2004

El Modena Gardens, Inc., Irvine CA

Vice-President of Finance, 1990 – 1992

Treasurer, 1986 – 1990

Comptroller, 1978 – 1886

Education

University of Southern California, Los Angeles CA

Bachelor of Science degree in Business, Accounting emphasis

Organizational Affiliations

California Farm Bureau Federation, Sacramento CA

Board of Directors, 2003 – 2010, 1993 – 1999

Board Finance Committee, 1996 – 1999

Chairman, 1998 – 1999

Orange County Farm Bureau, Irvine CA

Board of Directors, 1980 – 2010

President, 1991 – 1993

American Farm Bureau Federation, Washington DC

Ag Nursery & Greenhouse Advisory Committee, 23002 – 2005, 1993 – 1995

Chairman, 2005

California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom, Sacramento CA

Board of Directors, 2000 - 2003

CMA Business Credit Services, Burbank CA

Board of Directors, 2002 – 2005, 1988 – 1993

Nursery Growers Association of California, Gardena CA

Board of Directors, 1981 – 1984

President, 1984

Santa Margarita Catholic High School, Rancho Santa Margarita CA

Band Boosters President, 2000 – 2003

Awards

Credit Executive of the Year, CMA Business Credit Services, 2002

Volunteer of the Year, California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom, 2002

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Witness Disclosure Requirement - "Truth in Testimony"
Required by House Rule XI, Clause 2(g)(5)

Name: **Norman C. Groot**

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2008. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

None

2. Please list any entity you are testifying on behalf of and briefly describe your relationship with these entities.

Monterey County Farm Bureau, Salinas CA

Executive Director (full-time employee)

3. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) received since October 1, 2008, by the entity(ies) you listed above. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

None

I certify that the above information is true and correct.

Signature:



Date:

4/14/2011
