



March 16, 2023

The Honorable Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, chair
Assembly Committee on Water Parks and Wildlife
1020 N Street, Room 160
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 1563 (Bennett) – Wells -- SUPPORT

Dear Chair Bauer-Kahan and Members:

The Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) has represented small and mid-scale family farmers in California for over 40 years, seeking to preserve family-scale agriculture, promote local food systems, and advance environmental sustainability.

CAFF is pleased to support AB 1563 as we have seen the disastrous consequences for rural residents and small farms of allowing the unlimited drilling of new and deeper wells throughout the agricultural regions of California. In Yolo County, where CAFF is based, in a 10-year span 800 new wells were drilled and 47,000 acres of perennial crops were planted, with 72% of this acreage planted on historically non-irrigated land. Many drinking water and shallow agricultural wells dried up in the process.

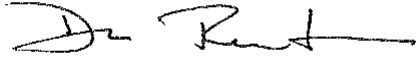
This bill's effects are limited to the critically overdrafted basins, where the problems are the most severe. Though we would prefer to see these regulations cover all medium and high priority basins as well, this is the logical place to start.

We would ask for clarification of the definition of "replacement well" by restricting the allowable distance from the well that is being replaced. Is it 300 feet? 500 feet? We believe this will satisfy some of the concerns of drinking water advocates, as making sure the replacement well is close to the original well would prevent it from having any additional consequences for residential wells.

Last year we requested that replacement wells not be subject to the costly requirements in AB 2201 and we are pleased that request has been granted in this bill. We work with many small farmers growing fruits and vegetables for local markets in California. It is common that they have only one well. If the well goes dry because the groundwater levels fall, as during a drought or due to excessive pumping by neighboring farms, they need to immediately lower the pump, deepen the well, and perhaps switch to a larger pump. Otherwise they likely will be put out of business. Farmers need to be able to replace an existing well without undue delay in order to save their crops.

CAFF supports this bill because we find the disregard for the consequences to neighbors, the aquifers, and the environment of planting permanent crops and drilling deep wells to be unacceptable. There needs to be better review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Runsten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

David Runsten
Water Policy Director
CAFF

CC: Assemblymember Steve Bennett