

# Water options presented

## PV directors weigh importation vs. local supply option

STAFF REPORT

WATSONVILLE — Board members got their first look Wednesday at two first-phase options for the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency's Water Supply Project, the first relying on a major pipeline and the second on a series of new, deeply-driven inland wells.

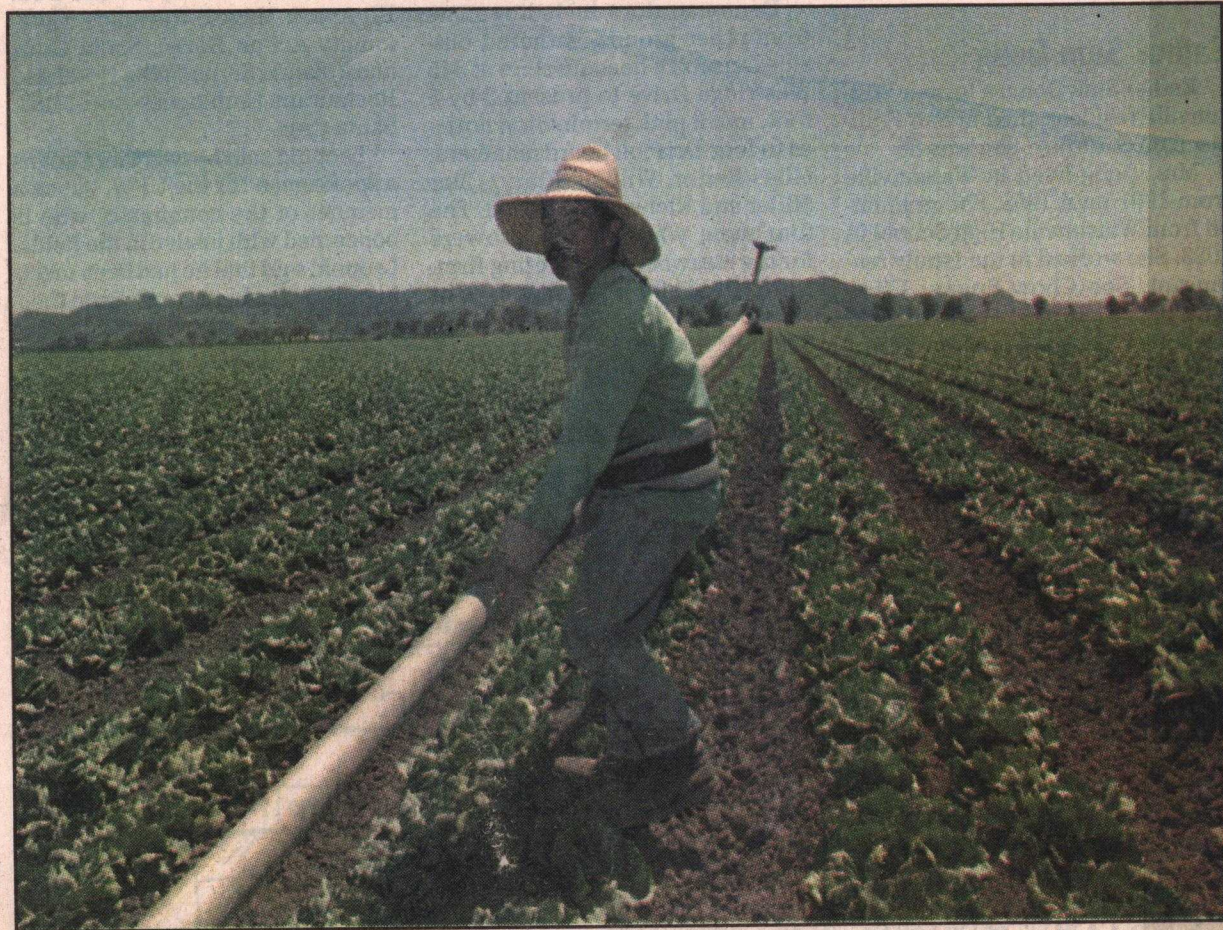
Lyndel Melton, an engineer with the Montgomery Watson engineering firm, gave a comparison of options to the PVWMA board, which will be discussing benefits and drawbacks of each at several upcoming meetings.

Howard Mauthe, the board's chairman, said it was too early to discuss the options in detail because too many other factors — including applications for local water rights and completion of environmental impact studies — remain unresolved.

"We can discuss all the things about what we might do," Mauthe said. "But we don't know yet what we can do."

The Montgomery Watson report is the latest step in the PVWMA's attempt to guarantee adequate water supply to the Pajaro Valley well into the next century. Current demand is 68,000 acre-feet of water per year, or 18,000 acre-feet more than the groundwater supply's recharging capability.

The overdraft is exacerbating the



Tarmo Hannula

**Alejandro Marquez lays a length of water irrigation pipe in a lettuce field on Riverside Drive near Murphy's Crossing Wednesday. Lettuce and strawberries are two of the Pajaro Valley's heavy water-using crops.**

Pajaro Valley's seawater intrusion that was first identified in 1953, PVWMA officials say.

Agency General Manager Dave McCabe said phased system imple-

mentation will benefit users, who could expect to see maximum water use charges of about \$100 per acre-foot rather than \$180 per acre-foot that was originally projected.

"This gives us considerable breathing room," McCabe said in an interview. "This gives us a hiatus of 10 to 15 years to see how effective



the first phase will be ... and see if there's a necessity for a second phase."

As it stands, the agency's water augmentation fee is set to rise from \$55 to \$75 per acre-foot July 1. The PVWMA bills twice a year, so the higher rate won't be reflected until its January 1998 bills.

According to Melton, Option 1, the major pipeline alternative, would cost \$89 million to build and could deliver more than the valley's 68,000 acre-foot annual demand. Option 2 would cost \$68.8 million to construct, he said, but would fall short of delivering enough water to satisfy demand.

Also, while the second option is less expensive, its reliance on 24 new wells drilled about 400 feet deep in the Corralitos and College Lake areas would affect existing private wells, he said.

"The existing groundwater level will decline," Melton said to a ques-

tion from the meeting audience, adding, "You're still going to have seawater intrusion impacting you to some degree."

Building Option 2, then deciding years later that a major pipeline linking the Pajaro Valley to the Central Valley Project (CVP) water supply still is needed, would add at least \$40 million to the overall capital cost, raising the overall cost to \$109 million, Melton said.

A 20-mile-long, 60-inch-diameter pipeline, capable of delivering 19,900 acre-feet of water from the San Felipe portion of the CVP, is the major cost component of Option 1, costing an estimated \$54 million to bring water from the Santa Clara conduit. The pipeline would be linked to a coastal distribution system that would cost \$24.2 million, while another \$10.7 million would pay for CVP water entitlement and assignment, a pipeline corridor distribution system, and seven peaking wells.

Option 1 would be capable of delivering 69,600 acre-feet of water a year to farmers, businesses and homeowners in the Pajaro Valley, including city of Watsonville residents, officials said.

Option 2 includes the same \$24.2 coastal distribution system that appears in Option 1. It differs in relying totally on local water sources, with the new wells and a series of smaller pipelines costing a total of \$36.7 million.

In addition to water from new inland wells, the plan calls for pumping water from the College Lake supply, the Watsonville/Harkins Slough supply, and the Murphy Crossing supply.

Total annual yield from Option 2 would be 56,800 acre-feet, Melton said. That's about 11,000 acre-feet less than current annual demand, meaning the valley would continue to experience groundwater overdraft and deeper intrusion of salty seawater, officials said.

On another matter, the agency board approved its budget for fiscal 1997-98. The budget anticipates total revenue of \$33.2 million, but \$28.2 million of that amount would be proceeds from bond sales for the water supply project.

Whether revenue bonds will be passed remains to be seen, with disagreement evidenced by two board members voting against the fiscal year budget Wednesday. Tom Am Rhein and Bill Jensen voted no, while Mauthe, Brad Bennett, Jim Dutra and Gwen Carroll cast the deciding yes votes. The seventh board member, Jon Friesell, was absent.

The board also decided to discuss impact fees and exportation of water outside its jurisdiction at its next workshop meeting in two weeks.

Both Mauthe and Am Rhein voiced support for an ordinance banning export of water, such as is now planned for a proposed San Benito County housing project which will get its water from one of the PVMWA's customers, the Aromas Water District. The housing project will result in 300 acre-feet of water a year being exported out of the agency's jurisdiction at the same time the PVWMA is spending millions of dollars to import water, Am Rhein noted.

"How can that be reasonable?" Am Rhein said. "No wonder we have no credibility."

Assessing impact fees on new projects that burden the water supply also is a power the agency board could wield, although it has never chosen to do so. It could, for example, decide impact fees should be assessed if the city of Watsonville began a major housing project that greatly increased water demand, but doing so would give the PVWMA the dual role of a land use agency, Mauthe noted.

"It's a terrible can of worms," the board chairman said.