

Pipeline plan would cost \$13.4 million

*Imported water would tackle
saltwater intrusion problem*

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WATSONVILLE _ The Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency is calling for an elaborate water supply project and new pipeline system to import water to the Pajaro groundwater basin.

The preferred plan would use a 60-inch pipeline to deliver water to farmers near the coast from Monterey Bay Academy to Moss Landing, including additional distribution areas proposed inland of Highway 1 in the Murphy Crossing vicinity.

The plan was presented last night by hydrologist Lyndel Melton of Montgomery Watson, an engi-

neering firm hired by the Water Management Agency, in a meeting at the Elks Lodge.

The plan, which would cost \$134 million, is aimed at tackling the worsening seawater intrusion problem, which jeopardizes the agricultural industry. The pipeline would bring water from the Central Valley through a connection to the San Felipe Water Project near Gilroy.

Melton is urging the Water Management Agency board to consider an "in-lieu program" to replenish the aquifer through recharging efforts. The agency wants to end dependence on groundwater by the year 2000 through the construction of the

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pipeline.

Planning the purchase of a new pipeline system is "like buying a car," said financial consultant David Stoldt. As in considering the pros and cons in selecting a new set of wheels, Stoldt said he believes it's all a matter of considering the ideal financing options.

The public pitched questions at the meeting to determine the benefits of the preferred plan, and the cost to landowners and growers of the Pajaro Valley if implemented.

Some growers on the outskirts of the agency's jurisdiction were also curious whether they would need boosters to get water from a pipeline supply closer to the coast.

Ted Gilbert asked whether the plan took into consideration farmers with parcels at higher elevations and distanced from the proposed pipeline.

"Some farms would require boosters," said Water Management Agency General Manager David McCabe. "We're looking at more of a gross scheme as opposed to a micro-scheme."

McCabe said the agency has yet

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to narrow its plan down to the needs of each individual and parcel.

The water is strictly for agriculture and production purposes, and would raise water charges to farmers about 6 percent.

Stoldt said there are financial paths the plan could take: one is on a pay-as-you-go basis, while the other involves borrowing.

To help finance the project, a \$20 million bond, starting in 1997, would be needed to start the project for a 30 year payoff period. "We are pursuing every potential avenue for state and federal funding," said McCabe.

The Water Management Agency plans public workshops on the issue in April. Dates have not been set.