

# Petition in Aromas to withdraw from PV water agency

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Aromas residents dissatisfied with the services of the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency are circulating petitions to withdraw from its jurisdiction.

The petitions, available at local grocery stores, list the following claims as the basis for the drive:

- In the past five years the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency has spent \$2 million and not yet delivered its water management master plan;

- The agency has not completed a comprehensive inventory of the current and future water needs of the Aromas County Water District;

- The Aromas County Water District wants to maintain local control of its water supply;

- The long-term planning of the agency is focused on bringing subsidized federal water to farmers while ignoring the needs of the Aromas district; and

- Withdrawal from the agency will mean lower taxes for the residents of the Aromas district.

Aromas water district manager George West said petition supporters also worry that continued control by the Pajaro Valley water district could restrict land development.

Real estate agent Pete Herrlich shares that concern.

"We would not want an agency outside Aromas telling us if we

could grow," he said.

Petition leaders, who began gathering signatures earlier this month, are rushing to meet a March 15 deadline they set for themselves. If they gather valid signatures from 5 percent of the water district's 584 registered voters, the matter can be presented to the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, because the area in question lies in Monterey County.

If half the registered voters sign the petitions, however, withdrawal from the water agency will be "automatic," West said. As of yesterday afternoon, the signatures of more than 50 people had been gathered, West said.

About 500 households are served by the Aromas water district. Each parcel pays a minimum annual fee of \$10 to maintain the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency, which is entrusted with managing existing basin water supplies and provide, through importation if necessary, future water supplies for users within its boundaries, which stretch from south of Aptos to Highway 101. About 80 percent of the water within agency boundaries is used for agriculture.

Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency Manager Michael Armstrong said he learned of the petition drive when he arrived unannounced at an Aromas water district meeting last week.