

Farm Bureau lauds Pajaro water plan

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WATSONVILLE — Farm Bureau representatives Tuesday endorsed proposals for solving the Pajaro Valley's groundwater shortage.

Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau President Kirk Schmidt said the valley's Water Management Agency should be commended for its work.

"The Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency has done a very good job, but their presence is almost invisible," Schmidt said. "We want people to understand what the issues are."

The main issue, Schmidt said, is the need to provide a reliable source of water to farmers to keep agriculture viable.

"The economic base of the valley will disappear, and there won't be anything to replace it," Schmidt said, referring to the seawater creeping into wells because of overpumping.

Schmidt, however, declined to state the Farm Bureau's position on a possibility of fees charged for water pumped.

"I don't think there's going to be as much reluctance (to fees) if they see solutions. If there isn't a proposal on the table, it's a sucker's bet," Schmidt said.

The Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency board voted to study 12 preliminary proposals earlier this month.

The list will be pared in half when the board meets Jan. 13 in Watsonville council chambers. How to collect money for the construction of water projects also will be discussed.

The PVWMA plans to have a draft basin-management plan and environmental impact report completed by April.

Watsonville City Manager Steve Salomon said the city will be a participant in many of the alternatives being considered by the water

agency.

"There is a strong consensus that people want to maintain agriculture in the valley," Salomon said. Among the solutions that would require the city's participation is a wastewater treatment plant that would make water usable for crops or for recharging the groundwater supply.

The city already plans to construct a secondary wastewater treatment plant by 1998, Salomon said.

The city expects to receive federal aid for that project estimated, to cost \$5 million to \$7 million, said city Utilities Director David Koch.

For the water to be usable, it must undergo tertiary treatment, Koch said.

A tertiary treatment plant would cost an additional \$5 million to \$7 million, Koch said.

"Upgrading the treatment plant would only be a piece of the puzzle to solve the overall problem," Koch said.