

August 24, 2022

Governor's Office of Planning & Research

Aug 24 2022

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

Merced County
Attn: Diana Lowrance
Community and Economic Development Department
2222 M Street
Merced, CA 95340

MERCED COUNTY (COUNTY), ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (EIR) FOR THE
"DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT FOR THE HILLCREST DAIRY EXPANSION PROJECT"
(PROJECT); SCH #2021090490

Dear Ms. Diana Lowrance:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Environmental Impact Report for the proposed Project. The State Water Resources Control Board, Division of Drinking Water (State Water Board, DDW) is responsible for issuing water supply permits pursuant to the Safe Drinking Water Act. A project requires a water supply permit if it includes the creation of a new water system or a permit amendment for changes to a water supply source, storage, or treatment.

The proposed Project would create a new public water system that will require issuance of a water supply permit. Water supply permits are subject to an application review. Applications for new public water systems are subject to Health and Safety Code section 116527 (aka SB 1263) which requires potential public water systems to evaluate the feasibility of consolidating with nearby water systems. Health and Safety Code section 116527(b)(1) states a preliminary technical report is required to be submitted prior to the issuance of a water supply permit.

The State Water Board, DDW, as a responsible agency under CEQA, has the following comments on the County's draft EIR:

- Please clarify if there will be a net increase in water usage for the Project (how much more water will be used than was previously used) and what that net increase amount is?
- The EIR states "With implementation of water quality mitigation measures, project-level groundwater quality effects of the Hillcrest Dairy Expansion were determined to be less than significant. However, operation of the Hillcrest Dairy Expansion would continue to contribute to cumulative effects due to the degradation of groundwater resources in the San Joaquin River Watershed..." (PDF Page 223). Please clarify in what way the Project would contribute to the cumulative degradation of groundwater resources after the Project mitigations are implemented.
- A water supply for fire flow will be needed (PDF page 56). New public water systems may also require treatment to meet water quality standards. If there are any new components (storage, treatment, etc.) that will be installed as part of the existing domestic water system, please add them to the project description.

E. JOAQUIN ESQUIVEL, CHAIR | EILEEN SOBECK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Once the EIR is certified, please forward the following items in support of the new water system's permit application to the State Water Board, DDW Merced District Office at DWPDIST11@waterboards.ca.gov:

- Copy of the draft and final EIR, including the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan, with any comment letters received, and the lead agency responses as appropriate;
- Copy of the Resolution and/or Board Minutes adopting the EIR, Findings, and Statement of Overriding Considerations; and
- Copy of the date stamped Notice of Determination filed at the Merced County Clerk's Office and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse.

Please contact Lori Schmitz of the State Water Board at (916) 449-5285 or Lori.Schmitz@waterboards.ca.gov, if you have any questions regarding this comment letter.

Sincerely,

Lori Schmitz

Lori Schmitz
Environmental Scientist
Division of Financial Assistance
Special Project Review Unit
1001 I Street, 16th floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Cc:

Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse

Tricia Wathen
Central California Section Chief / Acting District Engineer
Merced District