

**For Immediate Release**  
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## **State Water Board to Weaken Key Nitrate Protections in Central Coast**

### ***Advocates Urge Board to Prioritize Drinking Water in Ag Order 4.0***

**SACRAMENTO, Calif.** — Today, a wide coalition of environmental and drinking water advocates filed [comments](#) urging the State Water Board (the Board) to protect drinking water from agricultural pollution through the Central Coast Agricultural Order (Ag Order 4.0).

Ag Order 4.0 governs groundwater and surface water protections in California's Central Coast, and was adopted by the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) in 2021. Fertilizer nitrogen from agriculture is the primary cause of widespread and severe groundwater nitrate contamination in the region. 25 percent of on-farm domestic wells in the region have nitrate concentrations that exceed the safe drinking level of 10 milligrams per liter.<sup>1</sup> Many rural communities in the Salinas Valley, Gilroy-Hollister Valley, Pajaro Valley, and Santa Maria River Valley basins also face high nitrate contamination. Excessive nitrate concentrations in drinking water is a major public health issue—health impacts include methemoglobinemia (“blue baby syndrome”), and an increase of cancer and thyroid disease in adults. Fertilizer nitrogen runoff also causes significant surface water nitrate contamination.

Ag 4.0 would require growers to reduce agricultural nitrate pollution over time. Unfortunately, the State Water Board has since proposed to reduce critical protections in its review of Ag Order 4.0.

First, the Board proposes eliminating Ag Order 4.0's enforceable limits on how much fertilizer nitrogen growers can apply onto farms, and how nitrogen can be discharged into groundwater.

“The State Water Board is trying to remove the primary tool the Regional Board and the public have to ensure that growers significantly reduce the amount of nitrate that ends up in our waters,” **said Chelsea Tu, Executive Director of Monterey Waterkeeper**. “Without enforceable limits, growers will continue contaminating drinking water and waterways without fear.”

Second, the Board does nothing to expedite Ag Order 4.0's long timeline that allows growers to continue worsening groundwater contamination until at least 2051.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ccwqp.org/groundwater-trend-monitoring/groundwater-reports-results/>

“The San Jerardo Cooperative has been impacted by nitrate pollution for far too long. Our residents are suffering numerous health impacts like cancer and water bills over \$100 a month to treat our water,” **said Ileana Miranda, General Manager of the San Jerardo Cooperative**. “Agricultural nitrate contamination must be addressed as soon as possible. The State Board must protect our families from polluters who are violating our right to safe water now, not in 30 years.”

Third, the Board proposes to allow growers an even longer timeline to stop polluting, as long as they offer emergency solutions, like bottled or tanked water.

“The Board’s Proposed Order violates the Board’s duty to achieve the Human Right to Water for already overburdened communities. Proposing political band-aids, like replacement water, fails to address the dire need at hand,” **said Kija Rivers, Policy Advocate from Community Water Center**. “It’s time the Board stops pollution at the source and ends the long history of passing the health and economic impacts of contamination onto low-income communities and communities of color.”

Finally, the Board fails to address surface water pollution by not requiring the Regional Board to protect wetlands and riparian areas. The Central Coast’s surface waters are at risk of pesticide toxicity and nutrient-caused harmful algae blooms unless the Board acts.

“Requiring riparian setbacks was the linchpin for the Regional Board to address surface water toxicity in the Region,” **said Sean Bothwell, Executive Director for California Coastkeeper Alliance**. “Without the State Water Board addressing the need for setbacks, Ag Order 4.0 will fail to attain fishable, swimmable, and drinkable waters in the Central Coast.”

In order to fulfill their legal obligation to further the Human Right to Water, the State Water Board must strengthen the Regional Board’s Ag Order 4.0 to protect local communities from further nitrate pollution.

Community residents impacted by nitrates in their drinking water and advocates will travel to Sacramento on September 19 to urge the Board to pull back their changes and protect drinking water.

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**Community Water Center (CWC)** works to ensure that all communities have reliable access to safe, clean, and affordable water. Founded in 2006, CWC is a not-for-profit environmental justice organization, whose mission is to act as a catalyst for community-driven water solutions through education, organizing, and advocacy.

Web: [www.communitywatercenter.org](http://www.communitywatercenter.org).

Twitter: [@CWaterC](https://twitter.com/CWaterC)

Facebook: [@CommunityWaterCenter](https://www.facebook.com/CommunityWaterCenter)

**Monterey Waterkeeper** is a not-for-profit organization that protects and restores fishable, swimmable and drinkable waters within the Monterey Region and along California's Central Coast for all to enjoy.

Web: [www.montereywaterkeeper.org](http://www.montereywaterkeeper.org)

Instagram: [@montereywaterkeeper](https://www.instagram.com/montereywaterkeeper)

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**California Coastkeeper Alliance** represents Waterkeepers programs statewide as they fight for drinkable, swimmable, fishable waters for all Californians. CCKA defends and expands California's protective legislation and strengthens the function of our State Water Board. For more information, visit [www.cacoastkeeper.org](http://www.cacoastkeeper.org) or [@CA\\_Waterkeepers](https://www.instagram.com/CA_Waterkeepers) on social media.