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Texas Farmers Tell Legislators to Stop Mining Our Water

AUSTIN, Texas – February 3, 2016 – The Texas House Natural Resources Committee held a hearing yesterday on the issue of water marketing, which frequently involves transferring water from rural communities to urban centers. “Not a single person from the agricultural industry was invited to testify, even though water is vital to the future of farms and local foods in Texas,” observed Judith McGeary, Executive Director of the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance (FARFA).

“Is having green golf courses worth being dependent on food from China and South America?” Ms. McGeary asked in written testimony submitted to the Committee.

One of the witnesses at the hearing referred to rural landowners’ water rights as a “gold mine,” and several of the legislators repeatedly expressed the view that money could properly compensate landowners for the loss of their water.

Colleen Waring, a landowner in Milam County, countered: “As I testified, maybe I’m sitting on a gold mine, but I don’t want to mine it. I want to be a good steward of the groundwater under my land – I’m willing to share what can be shared without detriment, but not plunder this precious resource that people, animals, and plants rely on for survival.”

Many of the legislators and witnesses at the hearing promoted a market-based approach to valuing water without recognizing the problems with economic valuation of this essential resource.

As stated in FARFA’s written testimony: “Based on market principles, it’s reasonable for someone to pay \$1.34 now to use, and often waste, water that will be worth \$1 million to our great grandchildren. This makes economic sense because \$1.34 invested at a compound interest rate of 7% would be worth \$1 million in 200 years from now. This is simply the way the economy values things: What is something in the future worth ‘today’ – not what it will be worth in the future. **Is this really a moral or ethical way to value our children and their children’s children?**”

“The legislators who are pushing expanded water marketing are taking a shortsighted and selfish approach. They prefer to draw down our aquifers – mining water that has taken hundreds or thousands of years to collect – rather than taking the necessary conservation measures. This is an egregious violation of our moral obligation to ensure that future generations have reasonable access to this basic necessity for life,” contended Ms. McGeary.

Before the hearing, the League of Independent Voters and Representative John Cyrier (R-Lockhart) held a press conference to discuss a new report showing that current marketing projects threaten to lower the level of the Simsboro aquifer below the desired future conditions, drying up residents’ wells.

“I look forward to working with my constituents and concerned citizens from all over the state to develop legislation that would promote the long-term welfare and prosperity of our communities, including exploring opportunities for conservation technologies to reduce demand and lessen our reliance on groundwater,” concluded Representative Cyrier.

FARFA’s full written testimony is posted at <http://farmandranchfreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Testimony-NR-Committee-160202-FARFA.pdf>

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About Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance

Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance (FARFA) is a national organization that supports independent family farmers and protects a healthy and productive food supply for American consumers. FARFA promotes common sense policies for local, diversified agricultural systems.