

Mayor Abed and members of the city council.

I'm Eric Larson – executive director of the San Diego County Farm Bureau.

I first want to thank you and the city staff for the particular attention you have paid to the water pricing issue that has been explained to you by the members of the farm community.

We ask that you support the proposal to have agricultural users receive 60% of their water from local sources, if available.

But please, don't stop there.

If you drive up into Valley Center or along the I-15 freeway north of the city, you will see the skeletons of once thriving avocado groves.

The price of water has driven those growers out.

Don't let that happen here.

While the predicted 8 and 9 percent rate hikes in each the next five years look fairly harmless standing alone, combined they result in more than a 50 percent increase. That is not sustainable for farmers.

On that point, your rate study makes the mistake of assuming agricultural water use will remain flat as the price goes up. Again, look around the region and see what is happening as the price of water rises.

Once the water is shut off on a farm property, be assured agriculture will not come back to that site.

The City of Escondido has worked hard to be an economic powerhouse in North County. Don't let a significant contributor to the local economy that you already have in your hands slip away.

We know you have few options in the setting of water rates, but we suggest we all roll up our sleeves and work for a solution.

For example, the Metropolitan Water District decided it had no vested interest in agriculture and brought an end to its ag water program.

The City of Escondido is vested in agriculture. Maybe you could structure a similar program here that allows you to offer a differential rate to farmers in exchange for accepting a lower level of service.

Maybe there are other options.

We want to work on this now, not just when it's time for another round of rate increases and certainly not after farms begin to disappear.