

Balance for a Self-Sustaining Community

BY DOUG DEITCH

We need to implement a vision of a more diversified and improved economic, social, and environmental model for our county and region. As is readily apparent to those of us who have lived here for a period of time, our social and natural systems are being overburdened and are failing.

This failure manifests itself most obviously in our clogged schools, roads, courts, jails, housing, and more subtly in our natural systems. Our community and region, which has long been almost entirely economically dependent on the engines of agriculture and tourism, can no longer afford the social and environmental costs of the level and kind of activity, particularly in agribusiness, that have developed.

Our current economic and social model is not capable of being sustained. We are far exceeding and living way beyond the means of our community and region to support us. We must, as a community, first become aware of the serious and ruinous flaws in the way we are conducting "business" here, and then reevaluate and change our practices and model.

Nowhere is this more obvious and critical than in our planning and use of our water supply. This resource, and its health and overwhelming importance to our region, has been seriously neglected for too long.

Here in our region, our precious independent ample ground and surface waters, coupled with our remarkable lands and climate, create the foundation of our unique potential to be the global example of sustainability realized. These must be properly managed and be brought into balance. We have only been reactive to long term and serious abuse of this resource.

A long-term, proactive, strategic, and Monterey Bay Area wide vision is required. Since agriculture uses more than 80 percent of our current countywide water overdraft, our vision must include agriculture's diminished use. To accomplish this, antiquated state laws in our new and bleak California water reality like the Pajaro Valley Water Management Act must be repealed, and a new state law and regional agency created.

Our new vision must be less water, chemical, and migrant labor intensive. Agricultural revenue production will and must lessen. However, compensatory and replacement revenue production and living wage jobs and housing will be provided to our community by the new and third economic engine of "intellectual property development" which we can now see growing here. This will be our salvation.

A new kind of migrant laborer is here in our community, and there will be more of them coming. However, instead of packing berries in a carton and living with 25 in a basement in Watsonville, this new migrant is packing electrons on a CRT and creating the potential of hundreds of millions of dollars of new green and clean revenue to replace the diminished agricultural revenue.

The growth and development of our educational, research, and other resources—particularly relating to the oceans and our Monterey Bay, like UC Santa Cruz, CSU Monterey Bay, Cabrillo College, Long Marine Laboratory, Fort Ord Reuse—must be nurtured to provide the facilities and development for these new migrants and their economic activities ... but let's do it in Watsonville

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where there is ample space and need for this economic development.

This is the new type of diverse economic activity we must employ to bring our community into a more reasonable balance and assure our continued prosperity. A good and wise investor always has a diversified portfolio. Our community is no different. Let's wise up here.

When the rain is scarce, let's have something solid and vital to fall back on. Let's try living within our local social and environmental means and be gentle with our Earth here. We in this region, perhaps alone in the world, can be water and resource self-sufficient and environmentally, economically and socially sustainable in a vibrant, local and diversified economy and society.

This is a truly unique and incredible blessing in the world today, and it is our duty as a community in the world to make the most of this incredible opportunity, and to make our community the exemplar.