Wes Shaffer

390 W 100 S

Central Valley, Utah 84754

wes.shaffer@mountainland.com

435-279-0889

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Water Rights Division

Utah Division of Water Resources

1594 West North Temple, Suite 220

Salt Lake City, UT 84114

Subject: Concerns Regarding the Loss of 50% of Irrigation Water in the Pahvant Irrigation Region and Its Impact on Local Farms and Businesses

I am writing to express my grave concern over the proposal to reduce farm irrigation water allocations by 50% in the Pahvant Irrigation Region. This proposal threatens not only the agricultural sector but also the broader economy and social fabric of the region. I urge the Water Rights Division to consider the profound negative consequences such a reduction would have on local farms, businesses, and the community at large.

- Introduction: The Importance of Irrigation to the Pahvant Region

The Pahvant Irrigation Region, located in the central part of Utah, is a cornerstone of the state's agricultural economy. The area is home to numerous farms that rely heavily on irrigation to cultivate crops, support livestock, and generate income for local families. Irrigation, often derived from water rights tied to reservoirs and aquifers, is essential in this semi-arid region, where natural precipitation is insufficient for year-round agricultural activities.

Farming in the Pahvant area sustains not only those directly involved in agriculture but also an extensive network of local businesses and services that rely on the agriculture industry. From equipment suppliers to local food processors, the economic structure of the region is intricately

linked to irrigation, and a substantial reduction in water allocations could result in cascading negative effects across multiple sectors.

- Economic Impact on Local Farmers

The primary impact of reducing irrigation water by 50% would be felt most acutely by farmers, many of whom depend on consistent water access to grow their crops. These farmers face the daunting challenge of balancing water needs for diverse agricultural operations, including crops like alfalfa, corn, wheat, and various fruits and vegetables. These crops require varying amounts of water, but a drastic reduction in irrigation water would make it nearly impossible to meet these needs.

Without adequate water for irrigation, farmers may face significant yield reductions. Some crops may fail entirely, while others may see diminished quality, which directly impacts market prices and profitability. The loss of crops such as alfalfa—key components of Utah's livestock feed market—would not only reduce income for farmers but also result in higher feed prices across the region. This would particularly harm the dairy and beef sectors, which are vital components of Utah’s agricultural output. Lower crop yields would also increase the financial risk for farmers, leading to a potential increase in loan defaults and business closures.

The financial losses to farmers would extend beyond the immediate revenue loss from reduced crop yields. As irrigation water supplies are curtailed, farmers may be forced to switch to crops that require less water or invest in more expensive methods of irrigation such as drip systems or increased reliance on groundwater. These investments could result in significant financial burdens, particularly for smaller, family-run operations that do not have the capital to make such changes.

- Impact on Local Businesses That Support Agriculture

The effects of reducing irrigation water extend beyond farmers to the many businesses that depend on the agriculture sector. The Pahvant region is home to a number of businesses that supply farms with essential services and products. These include equipment suppliers, seed distributors, irrigation specialists, and fertilizer providers. If the demand for agricultural products decreases due to crop failures or reduced yields, these businesses will experience a drop in revenue and may even be forced to scale back operations or shut down entirely.

Local equipment suppliers, for instance, will face reduced sales in agricultural machinery, parts, and maintenance services. Companies that supply irrigation infrastructure—including pumps, pipe, and sprinklers—will experience reduced demand for their products. This could result in

layoffs, business closures, and the eventual contraction of the local economy. In many cases, small businesses are the backbone of rural economies, and the ripple effects of a reduction in agricultural activity could lead to widespread job losses and reduced economic opportunities for workers who rely on these businesses.

Similarly, agricultural input businesses, such as seed companies, pesticide suppliers, and fertilizer distributors, would see a drop in demand if farmers are no longer able to cultivate crops as they once did. This could lead to a reduced need for trucking and distribution services, further compounding the financial difficulties for businesses that rely on agricultural demand.

- Strain on Rural Communities and Workforce

The economic consequences of a significant reduction in irrigation water would be felt throughout the entire Pahvant region, particularly in rural communities where agriculture is the primary economic driver. Communities that rely on farming for their livelihoods would see increased unemployment, as workers in the agriculture sector are laid off or find their hours reduced. In areas where the unemployment rate is already high or where job opportunities are limited, this could exacerbate poverty levels and create long-term economic hardships.

Additionally, the social fabric of rural Utah communities, many of which are tight-knit and built around agriculture, could fray as families face financial strain. Many of these communities rely on farming as a way of life, and the loss of economic opportunities could drive young people away in search of work in urban areas, leading to further depopulation and economic decline. The migration of workers away from rural areas could lead to the erosion of local culture and traditions, which have been intertwined with farming for generations.

- Environmental and Long-Term Sustainability Concerns

While the reduction in irrigation water may be presented as a necessary measure to address the region's water scarcity issues, it is important to consider the broader environmental implications. Over the years, many farmers have adopted water-saving practices, such as LEPA sprinkler irrigation and crop rotation, in an effort to optimize water usage. A sudden reduction in water allocations could limit farmers' ability to continue these practices and force them to abandon crops that are essential to local economies.

Furthermore, the long-term sustainability of the water supply in the region is a serious concern. With growing competition for water between agricultural, industrial, and residential needs, it is essential to find solutions that balance these competing interests without unduly harming any one sector. A sudden reduction of water for irrigation could be a short-term fix, but it does not

address the underlying issue of water management and sustainability. Rather than cutting allocations by 50%, it would be far more effective to focus on improving water-use efficiency, investing in infrastructure for water storage, and encouraging collaborative approaches to water conservation that involve farmers, businesses, and local governments.

- Addressing the Issue: Solutions and Recommendations

While I understand the necessity of managing water resources effectively in a region where water availability is limited, I urge the Utah Division of Water Resources to consider alternative solutions to the proposed reduction in irrigation water. Rather than enforcing blanket reductions, a more thoughtful approach could involve:

1. **Improving Water Efficiency:** Investing in technologies that help farmers use water more efficiently, such as advanced irrigation systems, water metering, and soil moisture sensors, could help conserve water without drastically affecting agricultural production.

2. **Water Storage Solutions:** Expanding and enhancing the region's water storage capabilities could help ensure that water is available during critical times of the year. This could involve investing in reservoirs, water banking systems, or groundwater recharge programs that improve the sustainability of water supplies.

3. **Collaborative Water Management:** Encouraging collaboration among farmers, businesses, and government agencies to develop regional water management plans could help ensure that water is allocated fairly and efficiently across all sectors, while also maintaining agricultural productivity.

4. **Economic Assistance for Affected Farmers and Businesses:** Providing financial assistance or tax incentives for farmers and businesses that are negatively impacted by water reductions could help cushion the blow and support the transition to more sustainable practices.

5. **Gradual Implementation:** If reductions in irrigation water are deemed necessary, it would be far less disruptive to implement them gradually, with a clear timeline and opportunities for farmers to adapt. This would allow businesses to plan ahead and make adjustments without causing major economic upheaval.

- Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed reduction of irrigation water by 50% in the Pahvant Irrigation Region could have devastating consequences for farmers, local businesses, and rural communities. It threatens to destabilize the region's agricultural economy, lead to job losses, and exacerbate economic hardship in an already fragile area. I urge the Water Rights Division to reconsider this proposal and work with all stakeholders to find more sustainable solutions that balance the region's water needs with the economic realities faced by local farmers and businesses.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your response and hope that we can work together to find a solution that preserves both our water resources and the livelihoods of those who depend on them.

Sincerely,

Wes Shaffer, AG Irrigation Sales Manager

Mountainland Supply Co.