

January 10, 2023

Dear SCRD Board of Directors,

The SCFI Board of Directors would like to follow up on the letter sent on June 27, 2022 and provide this second letter in advance of the Farmer's presentation to the Committee of the Whole on January 12, 2023.

Local food Farmers were cut off from SCRD water for almost 3 months, from September 14, 2022 when farmer's two week extension from stage 4 water restrictions began to December 13, 2022 when stage 4 water restrictions ended. Last year it was determined by the SCRD that commercial farms use between 1-3% of SCRD water. Food farmers are minor water users but provide an essential human need and essential ecological services.

Non-essential indoor water users, who are some of the largest water users on the coast, concrete businesses, pools, non-medicinal marijuana and alcohol producers were cut off from water 33 days **after** farmers, on October 17, 2022 during the start of the stage 5 state of local emergency.

We respectfully request that food farmers be given the same consideration as indoor non-essential commercial water users.

The reasons are outlined below:

- 1. Food farmers provide an essential human need, fresh local food.** During global food shortages we need local farms now more than ever. As climate emergencies destroy other food producing regions it is imperative that we invest in local farms that provide nutrient dense food.
- 2. Farm water use is part of the hydrologic cycle.** Farmers borrow water and keep it on the coast in usable forms. When farmers water their crops, our living soil filters the water and returns it to the aquifers. [“Each 1% increase in soil organic matter helps soil hold 20,000 gallons more water per acre \[182,000 liters per hectare\].”](#)
- 3. Soil-based farmers provide ecological services** maintaining the soil microbiome that sequesters carbon and absorbs rain preventing floods. Healthy soil is our planet's thermostat. Farm water use keeps entire ecosystems that surround us, plants, wildlife, birds and pollinators alive. Soil based farmers hydrate the landscape creating corridors to suppress forest fires.

The Earth's [soils](#) contain about 2,500 gigatons of carbon—that's more than three times the amount of carbon in the atmosphere and four times the amount stored in all living plants and animals. [“Thinking about ways to increase soil carbon storage is a really important weapon in the arsenal \[against climate change\],” said Ben Taylor, an ecosystem ecologist and Ph.D. candidate in Columbia University's Department of](#)

[Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology](#). “The carbon in soils is greater than all the carbon in our biomass and the atmosphere combined, so even small changes in that pool are going to have really large effects for us.”

4. When farmers are cut off from water things die. When alcohol producers are cut off from water they temporarily lose business which is unfortunate but sales are not delayed and nothing dies. During [CBC interviews](#) an alcohol producer talked about having a month supply that they could sell during their water restrictions. But when farmers are cut off from water they lose their livelihood immediately, permanently and for months into the future. Crops are harvested daily, there is no month's supply of fresh food. You cannot feed the community with dead crops and you cannot plant future crops without water. 30-40% of crops are harvested after Sept 1.

Most importantly when farmers are cut off from water the soil and everything that relies on it dies. [Soil is the foundation of life on earth](#). Soils that no longer maintain living roots dry out and bake in the sun killing the microbiome. These dry dead soils become dirt and erode in the wind or wash away when the rains eventually come. Soils that die can no longer infiltrate rain preventing the recharge of our aquifers, causing floods. Soil is a finite non-renewable resource. [95% of our food comes from soil. It takes a hundred years to build one inch of topsoil.](#)

A quarter of the planet's biological diversity exists in soil. There are literally billions of microorganisms such as bacteria, fungi, and protozoans in the soil, as well as thousands of insects, mites and worms. More organisms are contained in one tablespoon of healthy soil than there are people on the planet. ["It's only been recently that we've begun thinking about soil biodiversity as a resource we need to know something about," says Diana Wall, Scientific Chair of the Global Soil Biodiversity Initiative. "Without soil and their biodiversity, there is no human life."](#) From the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, State of Knowledge of Soil Biodiversity Summary for Policy Makers (2020) attached below.

The disproportionate harm done to farmers' business, the environment, and local food security when farms are cut off from water before other non-essential businesses is not in line with the SCRD Sustainability Plan or the communities wishes. A [Coast Reporter poll](#) showed that over 77% of residents believe that farms should be permanently exempt from stage 4 water restrictions.

Please give food farmers equitable access to water and change the bylaws to permanently exempt food farmers from stage 4 water restrictions.

Regards,

The Sunshine Coast Farmers Institute Board of Directors

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