

Water industry leaders search for solutions at forum

Growers, agency representatives gather for meeting at Civic Plaza

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More than 50 local growers and others interested in agriculture and water attended what was called a "community dialogue effort" Tuesday morning to address the Pajaro Valley's water problems.

The forum, which occupied the Community Room on the fourth floor of the Watsonville Civic Plaza, discussed water conservation technology, possible programs to conserve water and the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency's progress on its Basin Management Plan and how it could be improved.

"We don't want to have

these meetings just so we can appear to be important; we want these meetings to be productive," said program specialist Nik Strong-Cvetich of the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County.

It was the sixth such meeting in a series that started more than a year ago. Since that time, interested parties have broken into subgroups and worked on different problems and solutions. Updates from each group were given.

Watsonville raspberry grower John Eiskamp talked about rotational fallowing. If each grower were to fallow

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25 percent of their farmland, the valley's water shortage would basically be solved. Fallowing also benefits the land.

"You really see benefits to your crop following a fallowing," Eiskamp said. "There's a real benefit to the soil."

Strong-Cvetich said that 2.5 acre-feet of water could be saved annually by fallowing 300-500 acres.

"If folks just did 10 percent, that would solve half our problems," he said.

Local Realtor and developer Chuck Allen talked about what the Recharge Committee had been up to and the PVWMA's progress with its Basin Manage-

ment Plan.

"We have screened it down to about projects for further consideration," Allen said of the BMP process. "BMP is also Best Management Practices, and that's really the solution. We all need to take ownership and implement Best Management Practices in our activities."

Most of the Pajaro Valley's major growers and agricultural interests were in attendance, including John Martinelli, Dick Peixoto of Lakeside Organics, Stuart Kitayama of Kitayama Bros. and many others.

Besides the SCCRCD, other groups involved in organizing the discussions include Driscoll's Berries, the Community Alliance for Family Farming, Santa Cruz County Land Trust and Action Pajaro Valley.