

Regulatory Issues Update: STRs AND HOOP TUNNELS

On Tuesday, June 6th, EconAlliance Board President Steve Pepe and Initiatives Director Victoria Conner appeared at the Board of Supervisors' meeting in Santa Barbara to speak about the potential impacts of proposed new regulations on Short Term Rentals (STRs) and Hoop Tunnels.

The Planning Commission had banned STRs on all county lands except AGII lands (40+ acres). EconAlliance spoke about the positive benefits to the Ag community of STRs on farm land of any size. STRs can provide, especially for smaller farming or vineyard operations, a supplemental source of income to help even out the cyclical cash flow of farming and enable urban residents to better appreciate the challenges farmers face. There were over 50 speakers on STRs, most from AG I (5-20 acres) and residential areas. Almost all speakers spoke against the ban and urged the Board of Supervisors to permit STRs on AG I lands and in residential neighborhoods. A few speakers pointed out the potential noise and parking impacts of STRs in residential areas. The Board of Supervisors approved the Planning Commission's recommendation with two minor modifications. The Supervisors' decision was only "conceptional" as at a future meeting the Supervisors will need to approve the definitions and statutory language. Of importance to the Ag Community will be the provisions regarding Williamson Act lands. EconAlliance will continue to monitor this issue.

Hoop Tunnels have been an important innovation for berry growers and other farmers. County Long Range Planning had proposed five options for hoop tunnels. EconAlliance pointed out the advantages of Option One, which would treat Hoop Tunnels as farm equipment and not require a zoning permit, thereby creating the least impact on a grower's ability to use this important tool. The Staff recommended Option Four, which was the most onerous option in terms of economic and operational impact on growers. Supervisors Lavagnino and Adam favored Option One and Supervisors Hartman and Wolf supported the Staff's recommendation of Option Four. Supervisor Williams noted that use of Hoop Tunnels required less water and pesticides than open air farming and also increased production. Supervisors Adam, Lavagnino and Williams all voted to

support the Ag community and treat Hoop Tunnels as farm equipment without the requirement of zoning permits.