

Yes on M, GE-Free Sonoma County

Press release

Nov. 4, 2005

Farm Bureau head lies in ballot argument

When Sonoma County voters read their ballot pamphlets for Tuesday's vote on Measure M, they read an outright lie by the Farm Bureau.

Sonoma County Farm Bureau executive director Lex McCorvey signs the No on M ballot argument as "organic farmer and rancher." McCorvey, who raises beef cattle in Petaluma, in fact has no acreage registered as organic with the state or any organic certifying agency.

When confronted in public debates McCorvey has admitted that he is not a certified organic farmer.

Deputy Agricultural Commissioner Alexis Ramey said it's a violation of state food and agricultural code to misrepresent yourself as an organic farmer.

"To represent yourself as an organic producer, you have to be registered with state of California's organic program," she said. "If make more than \$5,000 a year, you also have to be certified" with a state-approved certifying agency, such as California Certified Organic Farmers.

Though farmers who misrepresent themselves can be fined up to \$2,500 per violation, Ramey said, "We usually try to educate people first, give them the information to register."

She said the county is currently taking action against several farmers who persistently misrepresented themselves as organic producers.

Yes on M campaign director Dave Henson said that in debates McCorvey regularly speak of about his use of Roundup on his farm.

Roundup is Monsanto's synthetic glyphosate-based herbicide not approved for organic use anywhere in the U.S.

Farm Bureau leader Steve Dutton also claims to be organic

In the official ballot pamphlet, Steve Dutton, a spokesperson for No on M, also calls himself an organic farmer in his No on M rebuttal statement.

The Dutton family farms more than 1,300 acres, 1,150 acres of grapes and 150 acres of apples all within the Russian River Valley appellation. The family has 11.5 acres of certified organic apples — less than 1 percent of their operation. In 2004, Dutton Ranch Corp. used 2,624 gallons of liquid pesticides and 21,263 pounds of

dry pesticides (a third of which was non-sulphur synthetic pesticides, herbicides and fungicides). That's according to pesticide use records the Duttons filed with the Agricultural Commissioner's office.

"For Steve Dutton to call himself an organic farmer is misleading to voters, a deliberate attempt to make voters think the No on M camp is supported by local organic farmers," said Yes on M campaign director Dave Henson.

Yes on M is sponsored by the California Certified Organic Farmers, the oldest, largest private organic certifying agency in the country. The measure is endorsed by more than 75 organic farmers and nurseries in the county.

"The Farm Bureau's claim that organic farmers support M is a cynical ploy," said Healdsburg organic winegrower George Davis. "Lex claims to be organic then uses herbicides on weeds. Steve Dutton, although he's a fine farmer, has less than 1 percent of his farms in organic — and that's because the absentee owner of that parcel wants it that way."

"Lex also likes to claim that M is only supported by fringe farm groups," said Davis. "The oldest, second-largest farmers group, the Farmers Union, is calling for a moratorium on GE crops with a lot more teeth in it than Measure M."

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