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CEQA

The California Environmental Quality Act

CASE STUDY

Impact on Equity and Environmental Justice

KERN COUNTY, 2018–PRESENT

Kern County Oil Ordinance

Prioritizing Farmland and Public Health Over Oil Companies

In passing an ordinance to allow a massive expansion of oil and gas drilling, Kern County leaders ignored the devastating air, water, and noise pollution and farmland loss this drilling would cause. King and Gardiner Farms took the county to court, using CEQA to compel the county to seriously consider the effects of the ordinance on agriculture, a major sector of the local economy. A coalition of social justice non-profits also sued the county under CEQA for failing to consider the dire public health effects that expanding fossil fuel extraction would have on already-overburdened low-income communities and communities of color.

The courts ruled in favor of the farmers and residents in 2020, demonstrating how CEQA can be used to protect

public health and local agriculture. Unfortunately, the county did not make any significant changes to their new environmental review of the project. In early 2021, the Board of Supervisors accepted the new review and passed the ordinance, over the objections of thousands of residents, a coalition of social justice groups, and King and Gardiner Farms.

Now the issue will go back to the courts, where CEQA will once again give the people a tool to stand up to deep-pocketed oil companies and defend their right to clean air, clean water, and healthy farmlands.

SOURCE: CHELSEA TU, CENTER ON RACE, POVERTY & THE ENVIRONMENT

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CALIFORNIA
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JUSTICE ALLIANCE

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is an important tool for advancing environmental justice (EJ) and protecting the rights of communities disproportionately impacted by pollution and poverty in our state. The law allows a community to not only be notified of development projects that are being proposed for their neighborhood; it also provides them with a formal process to share their concerns and recommend improvements so that a project can better serve and protect the community. CEQA also provides a mechanism for holding certain projects accountable if they insufficiently analyze potential harms against local residents and neighborhoods.