Regional Water Quality Control Board
Central Valley Region
Board Meeting – 12 December 2025

Response To Written Comments for
Treehouse California Almonds, LLC
Earlimart Almond Processing Facility
Tulare County
Tentative Waste Discharge Requirements

At a public hearing scheduled on 12 December 2025, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Valley Region (Central Valley Water Board) will consider the adoption of Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) and a Monitoring and Reporting Program (MRP) for the Treehouse California Almonds, LLC (Discharger) Earlimart Almond Processing Facility (Facility) in Tulare County. This document contains responses to written comments received from interested persons regarding the tentative WDRs and MRP circulated on 9 October 2025. Written comments from interested parties were required to be received by the Central Valley Water Board by 5:00 p.m. on 10 November 2025 to receive full consideration. Comments were received from the Discharger and Ms. Jo Anne Kipps on 10 November 2025.

Written comments are summarized below, followed by responses from Central Valley Water Board staff. In addition, staff have made a few minor changes to the tentative WDRs and MRP to improve clarity and fix typographical errors.

10 November 2025 DISCHARGER COMMENTS

COMMENT 1: Requests that dissolved oxygen (DO) compliance be limited to the effluent storage pond (ESP-001) and not every small sump, weir, or pond, as monitoring at every location is excessive. Suggests revising Discharge Specification F.5.a accordingly.

RESPONSE: Staff made the revision as requested.

COMMENT 2: The Discharger notes that it has already submitted an Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Plan for the treatment ponds, and requests revision of Provision J.6 to state that requirements for installing covers over anaerobic ponds be conditional and only required if current operational procedures fail to control odors.

RESPONSE: No changes were made based on this comment. The original O&M Plan submitted with the RWD includes procedures for general maintenance and repair of the treatment ponds but does not include procedures or explicit triggers for installing covers over the anaerobic ponds. The updated O&M Plan is intended to provide the Central Valley Water Board with a clear understanding of the Discharger's conceptual framework for managing the ponds and intended triggers

for installing the covers so that potential nuisance odors may be mitigated as soon as reasonably practical. At a minimum, the conceptual plan and triggers for cover installation should be included; however, the Discharger may also propose interim measures and timelines for managing odors within the plan for further evaluation.

COMMENT 3: Requests modification of the deadline to submit the Wastewater and Nutrient Management plan to one year from the date of WDRs adoption, instead of six months.

RESPONSE: Staff made the requested change to the WDRs.

COMMENT 4: This comment suggests a minor administrative revision to Finding 13.

RESPONSE: No change was made based on the comment.

COMMENTS 5 through 10: The Discharger requests several changes to the monitoring requirements in the MRP. These include limiting freeboard measurements to the effluent storage pond, using visual checks for unobstructed weir flow, adjusting requirements for freeboard and solids depth measurements, reducing the frequency of dissolved oxygen and soil sampling, modifying LCRS monitoring requirements, and eliminating the requirement for soil texture classification and organic matter monitoring.

RESPONSE: Revisions were made to the MRP to modify the influent wet well freeboard observation and modify the precision of freeboard observations and solids depth to 0.5- and 1-foot increments, respectively, as well as the frequency for soil texture and organic matter analyses to once (during the first soil sampling event). Additionally, Staff revised LCRS flow monitoring frequency in accordance with the comment, and the O&M Plan submitted with the RWD.

Reductions in soil sampling monitoring requirements were not made to the MRP as there is currently no data to support the claim that current soil sampling frequencies would be marginally beneficial. Reducing the monitoring to once per year would not provide sufficient data to track seasonal changes in soil conditions or detect potential nutrient accumulation trends.

COMMENTS 11 through 15: With regard to quarterly monitoring report requirements, the Discharger requests extended report deadlines, annual (not monthly) FDS reporting, use of rolling averages for BOD calculations, exclusion of lab reports from submissions, and shifting discussion of processing changes to the Fourth Quarter Report.

RESPONSE: Revisions were made to allow the use of a three-sample rolling average to calculate cycle average BOD loading rates and remove the requirement of reporting annual average FDS and the process change discussion in monitoring reports for Quarters 1 through 3. No other changes were made based on the comments.

The requirement to submit monitoring reports after one month is consistent with other recently issued MRPs for regulated facilities with similar monitoring and reporting requirements and should provide sufficient time for the Discharger to compile, analyze, and submit timely monitoring reports. Additionally, GeoTracker reporting requirements should eliminate issues with submitting large file sizes.

COMMENTS 16 through 18: The Discharger requests use of rolling averages for loading rates (total nitrogen, salinity), shifting the soil nitrogen discussion to the Wastewater and Nutrient Management Plan, and removal of calibration log submittals.

RESPONSE: A revision was made to allow the use of three-sample rolling average concentrations to calculate constituent loading rates. The soil nitrogen discussion requirements were modified to only include an annual evaluation of soil monitoring data. Lastly, the requirement to submit calibration logs with self-monitoring reports was removed; however, equipment calibration/maintenance records shall be retained onsite for a minimum of three years and be made available upon request.

COMMENT 19: This comment includes requests for various administrative clarifications and corrections to the MRP.

RESPONSE: Staff made revisions based on this comment, as appropriate.

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10 November 2025 KIPPS COMMENTS

KIPPS – Comment 1: The comment suggests revising the order to set a maximum daily effluent BOD of 100 mg/L and/or a cycle-average BOD loading limit of 25 lbs/ac/day. It also recommends monitoring BOD loading only when effluent BOD exceeds 100 mg/L.

Response: The current cycle-average BOD loading limit is based on science-based guidance and is sufficient for site-specific conditions. No changes were made based on the comment.

KIPPS – Comment 2: Requests clarification on the type of crop irrigation system used in the LAA fields and whether the new fields are subdivided. Suggests updating monitoring locations to reflect multiple, individually managed fields.

Response: Finding 26 was revised to clarify that flood irrigation is used to convey blended fresh irrigation and effluent to the LAAs. Additionally, the MRP requires identification of discrete fields within the LAA for consistent irrigation and constituent load monitoring. No changes were made to the monitoring locations.

KIPPS – Comment 3: Asks for a description of the function of several surface impoundments shown on the site plan and whether they are all on Discharger-owned property.

Response: The identified impoundments are on Discharger-owned property, with the exception of one square impoundment northwest of the wastewater treatment facility, which is not associated with the discharge. The impoundment at the northeast corner of the southern LAA is an irrigation pond and is used to hold supplemental irrigation water. It is staff's understanding that the impoundment south of the new proposed stormwater pond will also be utilized for stormwater management. Of the two impoundments east-adjacent to the Facility, one is reportedly a fire-suppression pond, and the other a former wastewater pond. The aerial photo (Attachment B) depicts the Facility prior to completion of the new wastewater treatment facility, and the Discharger has stated that the former wastewater pond east of the Facility is no longer in use.

KIPPS – Comment 4: Requests disclosure of when the new wastewater treatment system will be fully operational.

Response: Staff revised Finding 11 in the WDRs to clarify that new wastewater treatment system became operational in spring 2025.

KIPPS – Comment 5: Recommends revising Table 5 to include hydraulic load in inches/day and crop water demand in inches/year for clarity.

Response: The draft WDRs provide sufficient information on hydraulic loading at the Facility. No changes were made.

KIPPS – Comment 6: Requests confirmation that the nitrogen balance assumes a 10% loss via ammonia volatilization and that nitrogen from screened solids is included in the balance.

Response: The Report of Waste Discharge states that the nitrogen balance assumed a 10% loss via ammonia volatilization (see Finding 29). During the 24 September 2025 inspection, the Discharger indicated they would determine the nitrogen content of the screened solids and account for it in their calculations to determine nitrogen loading on the land application area. Nitrogen loading from the screened solids had been added as a requirement to the MRP (Table 7 in the MRP).

KIPPS – Comment 7: Suggests reconsidering the nuisance-odor potential of uncovered anaerobic digester ponds and agitator pumps, and revising requirements to address odor control, dissolved oxygen monitoring, and possible need for pond covers.

Response: The WDRs sufficiently acknowledge the concern for odors associated with the anaerobic ponds, and the Discharger has installed anchor trenches around the ponds in case they need to be covered. Furthermore, the WDRs include adequate requirements for addressing nuisance odors from the

anaerobic ponds should they become an issue (see Discharge Specification F.5 and Provision J.6)

KIPPS – Comment 8: Recommends revising the order to include screened solids as a nutritive source in management practices and process flow diagrams, and to disclose disposal methods for removed pond solids.

Response: Revisions were made to LAA Specification G.2, Provision J.7, and the process flow diagram (Attachment D) based on this comment. Finding 20 and the Information Sheet provide summary descriptions of the reuse and disposal methods for screened solids and wasted sludge from the treatment system.

KIPPS – Comment 9: Suggests revising soil monitoring requirements to include nitrate-nitrogen (NO_3-N).

Response: Nitrate (as nitrogen) was already required in the "Standard Fertility Assay" parameter for soil monitoring; however, Table 8 and the Glossary in the MRP were revised to clarify that nitrate is required to be monitored

KIPPS – Comment 10: Requests clarification that Tier 1 Pond design meets hydraulic conductivity standards and is defined per regional dairy orders.

Response: References to Tier 1 pond design in the WDRs are in naming convention only, as the document the Discharger submitted was titled "Tier 1 Pond Design Report, Construction Quality Assurance Plan." All ponds are double-lined with 60-mil high density polyethylene synthetic liners consistent with Discharge Specification F.3.a.

KIPPS – Comment 11: Recommends adding monthly influent BOD sampling to confirm the treatment system achieves the projected 95% removal rate.

Response: Staff made the change as recommended.

KIPPS – Comment 12: Suggests revising wastewater quality tables to include potassium, as discharge concentrations are relatively high, and to disclose whether projected potassium loading is reasonable for LAA crops. Also recommends revising Finding 22 to include language from R5-2018-0066 that states the discharge is elevated in potassium if projected concentrations are not available.

Response: The anticipated effluent potassium concentrations for the new treatment system are not available. Staff did not include the requested language from R5-2018-0066 in Finding, as it pertains to effluent from the previous

treatment system and may not be reflective of effluent quality from the new treatment system. FDS includes potassium and the WDRs include sufficient requirements for managing salt loading as FDS. No changes were made as a result of this comment.

KIPPS – Comment 13: Recommends increasing effluent BOD monitoring frequency to generate representative values for reporting, or revising definitions to match sampling frequency.

Response: Staff believe the proposed monthly effluent BOD sampling is adequate to characterize the effluent quality of the discharge. No changes were made based on this comment; however, Staff revised the loading calculations in the MRP to consider rolling average concentrations (see responses to Discharger comments).

KIPPS – Comment 14: Suggests revising monitoring tables and headers to refer to multiple LAA fields, streamline language, and include screenings in nitrogen and FDS loading.

Response: See previous responses.

KIPPS – Comment 15: Recommends specifying the minimum number of soil samples per field, allowing composite sampling, and requiring a soil monitoring protocol prior to first sampling. Also suggests reporting PAN in each field and background at each depth interval.

Response: Staff revised the MRP to include submission of a soil monitoring protocol 60 days prior to the initial sampling event. No other changes were made based on this comment.