



Fresno County Farm Bureau

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New Biological Opinion sends tremors through water community

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released its final biological opinion on Thursday calling for even further reductions in Delta exports to the west side of Fresno County, another deep cut in an already hemorrhaging west side agricultural economy and rural communities.

NOAA, which oversees the National Marine Fisheries Service, is responsible for the protection of endangered, commercial fish species like Salmon, Steelhead, and Sturgeon. Its biological opinion claims that water export operations in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta by the federal Bureau of Reclamation jeopardize the continued existence of several threatened and endangered species under the jurisdiction of NOAA's Fisheries Service.

According to a NOAA news release, the Bureau has provisionally accepted NOAA's recommended changes to its water pumping operations, and said it will begin to implement its near-term elements as it carefully evaluates the overall opinion.

NOAA said federal biologists and hydrologists conclude that current water pumping operations in the federal Central Valley Project (CVP) and the CA State Water Project should be changed to ensure survival of winter- and spring-run Chinook salmon, Central Valley steelhead, the southern population of North American green sturgeon and Southern Resident killer whales, which rely on Chinook salmon runs for food.

NOAA claims the change in water operations will impact an estimated five-to-seven percent of the available annual water, on-average, moved by the federal and state pumps-- or about 330,000 acre-feet per year. Agricultural water users who rely on federal CVP water believe the amount of water lost to the west side could be even more. This comes on the heels of continual cuts in the federal contracts held by west side San Joaquin Valley water districts. Already, agricultural water users south of the Delta have lost 35 percent of the total original 1.8 million acre-feet due to the CVP Improvement Act, Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act. Additionally, significant water was lost due to the 2008 Delta Smelt Opinion. This year, west side Fresno County federal water contractors are receiving only a 10 percent supply, and that followed several months of not having any water allocation.

Frustration runs high in the agricultural water community due to the continual cuts in Delta pumping without consideration of other factors that influence the Delta ecosystem, such as invasive species, unscreened diversions and water quality impacts from non-point and urban sources.

"It's infuriating to continue to see the solutions for the Delta fall on the backs of the [water] projects when we see all these other environmental stressors continue to do what they doing to harm the Delta. The solutions always come to our door step, bringing down disproportionate social and economic impacts to parts of the state that can least afford them," said Dan Errotabere, FCFB president and Riverdale-area diversified farmer. "Moreover, there's a total void of attention to the environmental problems in our area caused by these decisions that continue to take water away from agriculture," Errotabere added.

Officials at Westlands Water District are quick to point out that Thursday's Biological Opinion has imposed an additional, new regime of restrictions, cutbacks and prohibitions on the state's water supplies without performing any environmental analysis of its potentially devastating effects. "They have rushed this Biological Opinion into place without bothering to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, without public hearings or the kind of independent public review that the law requires. This is a violation of the National Environmental Policy Act and of federal endangered species law," the District issued in a statement.

Westlands intends to join with other public water agencies in bringing a lawsuit to have this Biological Opinion set aside and to compel the National Marine Fisheries Service to go back and perform the careful analysis it should have done to assess the potential harm this plan could do to public health and safety, communities and the environment.

"Our state's agricultural community cannot bear the entire brunt of this multifaceted problem. They are always the first to suffer when environmental opinions are released or implemented. I believe that the Delta does need restoration, but not at the expense of agriculture, and especially my constituents," said Rep. Jim Costa, in a statement released immediately following the announcement.

In addition to operational changes, the NOAA opinion calls for the Bureau to develop a genetics management plan and an acoustic tagging program to evaluate programs at Folsom and Shasta reservoirs to reintroduce fish to historic habitat, as well as increasing the cold water storage and flow rates at federal reservoirs. The facilities included in the opinion are Shasta Dam at the upper headwaters of the Sacramento River, Folsom and Nimbus dams on the American River, and New Melones Dam on the Stanislaus River. The opinion also covers the state and federal export facilities in the Delta, the Nimbus hatchery on the American River, and the operations of diversion structures, including the Red Bluff Diversion Dam on the mainstem Sacramento and the Delta Cross Channel gates in the Delta.

Fresno County agriculture totals \$5.6 billion for 2008

By John Migliazzo

FCFB Membership Coordinator

For some Fresno County farmers and ranchers, 2008 was a year full of challenges, including severe water shortages, increased regulatory burdens and the beginning of a global recession reducing demand for agricultural products. However, 2008 proved to be another record-breaker with more than \$5.662 billion in food and fiber products produced in Fresno County. **The announcement confirms Fresno County remains number one in agricultural production by an estimated \$500 million.**

On June 2, Fresno County Agriculture Commissioner Carol Hafner presented the County's 2008 Agricultural Crop and Livestock Report to the Board of Supervisors, announcing the annual production value for all crops produced in Fresno County. The \$5.662 billion represents a 5.9 percent increase over 2007.

Hafner went on to mention that Fresno County agricultural producers continue to face what looks to be a dire year in 2009 due to numerous challenges. "The continuing depression that our agricultural industry is facing due to increased fuel and transportation costs, labor laws, air and water quality regulations, the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Mother Nature's miserly water allocation to California is crippling," she said. "Many [farmers] have not and will not survive in 2009."

Cotton, which once rivaled grapes for the top spot, came in at number 15 with a total harvested acreage of 69,800 acres of Pima and Upland varieties. In 1996, total cotton acreage was 401,300. This marks the first time cotton was not in the top 10 in 32 years.

Grapes continued to be number one crop in Fresno County, accounting for over \$723 million in gross value. Rounding out the top 10 crops were as follows (rounded): 2) Almonds, \$593 million; 3) Poultry, \$556 million; 4) Milk, \$458 million; 5) Tomatoes, \$452 million; 6) Cattle and Calves, \$323 million; 7) Peaches, \$190 million; 8) Oranges, \$178 million; 9) Garlic, \$170 million; and 10) Nectarines, \$152 million.

The 2008 Annual Crop Report is available on the Ag Commissioner's website at <http://www.co.fresno.ca.us/Departments.aspx?id=114>. The crop report also is available by calling the FCFB office at (559) 237-0263.

Riverdale Coffee Talk set for June 23

FCFB will host a Coffee Talk meeting with FCFB President Dan Errotabere, Fresno County Supervisor Judy Case and Fresno County Sheriff Margaret Mims. The event will take place on Tuesday, June 23, at 7:30 a.m. at El Rinconsito (formerly Riverdale House), 3554 W Mount Whitney Ave., Riverdale.

The informal Coffee Talk meetings provide Farm Bureau members and others a chance to get up-to-speed on current local issues and to ask any questions related to local agriculture. There is no cost to attend. Breakfast will be provided by FCFB. To RSVP or for additional details, contact FCFB at (559) 237-0263, or via email: info@fcfb.org.

Visit Fresno County Farm Bureau's new Facebook page!

By Johannah Sorensen

FCFB Intern

If you already have a Facebook account, you can become part of the FCFB group by searching "Fresno County Farm Bureau" on the Facebook website. Once to the FCFB page, simply click "*Join this group*" on the right side of the screen.

By becoming a part of the Facebook group, members will be able to participate in discussion boards, read comments and view FCFB photos. There also are links to the FCFB calendar, the Young Farmers and Ranchers home page and other agricultural sites. This can be an easy and fun way to stay up-to-date with Farm Bureau news, updates and events while being able to network with other FCFB members.

YF&R's Ag Tour is Saturday

It's not too late to participate in the Young Farmers & Ranchers' all-day tour of local agriculture on Saturday, June 6. Spots are still available to attend the tour of western Fresno and Merced county agricultural operations, which will begin at 10 a.m. from Harris Ranch Restaurant, near Coalinga.

Tour stops include the Harris Ranch, Tanimura & Antle melon operation, Tomatek processing facility, and Constellation Winery. The tour is sponsored by the YF&R chapters from the Central Coast, Merced and Fresno counties. The cost is \$50 per person, which includes the tour, transportation, wine tasting and lunch. To RSVP, contact Jonathon DeGroot (559) 352-6340.

AgSafe's Agricultural Labor Summit to be held June 17

An Agricultural Labor and Employment Summit will be held on Wednesday, June 17, beginning at 8 a.m. at the Harris Ranch Garden Ballroom, Interstate-5 and Highway 198, near Coalinga.

Sponsored by AgSafe, the summit will cover such issues as Workers' Compensation changes, managing surprise inspections, updated Cal/OSHA enforcement activities, and heat illness new compliance regulations. A breakfast buffet will be served at 7:30 a.m.

The advance registration fee is \$55 per person for AgSafe members and \$65 per person for non-members if registered before June 12. Late walk-in registration is \$65 per person for AgSafe members, and \$75 per person for non-members. Registration for this workshop is on a first-come, first-served basis. For details, contact AgSafe at (559) 447-0350 or visit the Web site at: www.agsafe.org.

Tomato production expected to top 2008 level

California's tomato processors report they have contracts for about 13.3 million tons of processing tomatoes for 2009, 14 percent higher than last year's contracted production.

It is expected that 308,000 acres will be planted statewide in 2009, with Fresno County at the top spot with 102,000 acres. Rounding out the top five counties for contracted planted acreage in 2009 are San Joaquin, Yolo, Kern and Kings. In 2008, Fresno County had more than 109,000 acres of processing tomatoes.

Fair Exhibitors Handbook is available

Individuals wanting to compete and exhibit at the 2009 Big Fresno Fair can pick up the Exhibits Handbook at the Fresno Fairgrounds, 1121 S. Chance Ave., Fresno, or at the local Chamber of Commerce offices. 4-H and FFA members, craftsmen, cooks, gardeners, seamstresses, quilters, artists, photographers, potters and others are eligible to exhibit.

Requirements, deadlines and entry forms are included in the Handbook, which is also available online at www.FresnoFair.com, or by calling (559) 650-3213. Direct questions to Dolly Brantley, exhibitor coordinator, at (559) 650-3213 or dbrantley@fresnofair.com.

Smile for the Week

(Actually it's a real "groaner" this week...)

A man is driving down a country road, when he spots a farmer standing in the middle of a huge field of grass. He pulls the car over to the side of the road and notices that the farmer is just standing there, doing nothing, looking at nothing.

The man gets out of the car, walks all the way out to the farmer and asks him, "Ah excuse me mister, but what are you doing?"

The farmer replies, "I'm trying to win a Nobel Prize."

"How?" asks the man, puzzled.

"Well, I heard they give the Nobel Prize . . . to people who are out standing in their field."

Next Week's Calendar

June 8 FCFB FAACT Class "Graduation," 9 a.m., FCFB office, 1274 W. Hedges Ave.

June 9 Common Threads Committee meeting, 11:30 a.m., Fresno State

June 10 Fresno Chamber Governmental Affairs Committee, noon, Chamber office downtown

June 11 Sheriff's Metal Recyclers Task Force, 9 a.m., Brooks Ranch Restaurant

June 12 Fresno Chamber Agriculture and Land Use Committee meeting, noon, Fresno Chamber office

This Week's Calendar

June 2 San Joaquin Valley Air District Citizen's Advisory Committee meeting

June 3 Improving the Lives of Westside Residents through Broadband Connectivity meeting

June 4 FCFB Executive Committee meeting

June 6 YF&R Agriculture Tour, 10 a.m., Harris Ranch Restaurant

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