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Fresno County Farm Bureau issues statement on water supply for County's federal water contractors

Fresno County Farm Bureau has issued the following statement in response to today's announcement of the federal surface water supplies for farmers in Fresno County:

Statement by FCFB President Dan Errotabere, a Riverdale-area diversified farmer:

Today's announcement of a 10 percent water allocation for west side Fresno County agriculture generates a mixed response from farmers, farm employees and rural communities. Although there's some benefit from having at least a 10 percent surface water allocation this year, frustration levels remain high and we are far from being out of the woods. A 10 percent allocation amounts to about 2.5 inches of water per acre -- a typical crop requires about 24-36 inches. This allocation will not make a significant difference in the planting of additional crops this year, nor will it generate increased employment opportunities for farm workers, but it will help by lessening some demand on the groundwater aquifer, provide some water for the needed post-harvest irrigation in almonds, and provide a limited amount for carryover into next year.

The meager allocation shows just how misguided the current water policy is in California and how our water system has all but been destroyed. To allocate only 10 percent water for the production of food and value-added products, jobs and economic activity, while the government provides wildlife refuges with a 100 percent supply and sends hundreds of thousands of acre-feet of fresh water into the ocean, is short-sighted and thoughtless. Agriculture has long supported a balanced approach to addressing California's water problems, meeting the needs of all stakeholders – urban, agriculture and environment. But, where's the balance now?

Since 1992, federal environmental regulations, including the Endangered Species Act, have reallocated more than 3.2 million acre-feet of federal and state project water annually away from agricultural and urban users to the environment. In just the first three months of this year alone, nearly 300,000 acre-feet of water has been lost to the sea. Clearly, current policies place human needs second to those of fish and wildlife. Every year is going to be a struggle until this State's and Nation's leadership intervenes to stop this regulatory nightmare and builds the new storage and conveyance facilities that California needs.

(more)

Background: *The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation issued an update of its 2009 water allocation for Central Valley Project water contractors, including the west side of Fresno County and certain areas of the County's east side through the Friant Unit.*

Fresno County's surface water supply comes from many sources — the Sierras (Kings and San Joaquin River watersheds) serve the east side of the County and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and Shasta Reservoir serve the west side of the County. For the west side, dry conditions in Northern California and implementation of a series of environmental regulations and pumping restrictions in the Delta created an unprecedented 0 percent allocation for CVP water users south of the Delta up until today. The new allocation of 10 percent affects Fresno County-based districts such as Westlands, Panoche, and San Luis water districts and Tranquillity and James irrigation districts, and 17 other districts along the Valley's west side.

In a county where every \$1 produced on-farm generates another \$3.50 in the local and regional economies, not supplying an adequate supply of water for crop production is incongruous. Not only is 25 percent of Fresno County's \$5.3 billion agricultural production at risk, but so is the long-term ability to feed the nation. Without water for agriculture, we leave ourselves vulnerable to relying on food produced off-shore with fewer food safety regulations and less environmental considerations in cultural practices. Because consumers across the world are the ones who most benefit from irrigated agriculture's use of water through the purchase of safe and wholesome food and fiber products, ultimately they are the ones who will feel the impacts.

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