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April 13, 2021

Mr. Ernest Conant
Regional Director
California-Great Basin
United States Bureau of Reclamation
2800 Cottage Way – MP-100
Sacramento, California 95825-1898

SUBJECT: Delivery of Surface Water Supplies to Westside Fresno County

Dear Mr. Conant:

On behalf of the County of Fresno Board of Supervisors (Board), we are requesting your agency take all steps within your authority to make available, at the earliest possible date, water to farmers on the westside of the San Joaquin Valley served by the Central Valley Project (CVP). The Board is aware and concerned that the 2021 water year will be the third driest water year on record and that the Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau) is limited in its ability to make water available to farmers because of the dry hydrology conditions and its obligations under federal and state regulations, which limit operations of the CVP. However, the San Joaquin Valley is poised to experience a repeat of the economic, social, and environmental catastrophe that occurred in 2014, 2015, and 2016, when the CVP was unable to make any water available to farmers on the westside of the Valley. It is the Board's fervent hope you will take immediate action to mitigate this looming disaster.

Farmers in western Fresno County served by the CVP have received only a five percent allocation for this irrigation season and have been told they will not have access until further notice. Moreover, the ability of these farmers to obtain water through transfers for immediate use is very limited because south-of-Delta sources of transfer water are generally unavailable in a critical water year and transfer water from areas upstream of the Delta cannot be conveyed to them until after June. As a consequence, numerous farmers will have no access to other surface water to irrigate their crops, including permanent crops like almonds, pistachios, and grapes, and many of these farmers have reported that they will fallow all their open ground and will abandon thousands of acres of permanent crops.

Farmers' inability to plant, cultivate, and harvest crops affects not only those farmers, but people who would otherwise work on their farms. Westlands Water District estimates that for every 10,000 acres fallowed, approximately 197 on farm jobs are lost, and this year it is likely more than 300,000 acres will be fallowed in areas of western Fresno County served by the CVP. In addition, people who work for businesses that support irrigated agriculture, including businesses that sell autos, farm equipment, seed, and chemicals, and people who live in western Fresno County communities, most of which are either disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged communities, will suffer because these farmers have no water to irrigate their crops. It is unimaginable that the hardship experienced in 2014, 2015, and 2016, will be repeated, particularly when these same people are suffering hardships because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Farmers need access to water immediately, not in the late summer. We implore you to investigate all possible means by which water can be made available now. One potential action would be to provide farmers access to CVP water now, in exchange for water that will be transferred on their behalf after July 1st. There are undoubtedly other actions that can be taken to make water available to farmers now, and the Board is eager to work with you to identify and implement those actions.

Sincerely,

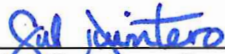
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cc: Fresno County Board of Supervisors
Fresno County Legislative Delegation
Congressman David Valadao
Senator Diane Feinstein
Governor Gavin Newsom
Paul Yoder, Legislative Advocate