

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 14, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor
State of California
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

As representatives of the San Joaquin Valley, we are writing to urge you to ensure that the 143,000 people in Fresno, Kings, Kern, and Tulare counties whose jobs depend directly on farms are given full consideration as your administration contemplates actions to mitigate the negative impacts of a second year of a critically severe and dangerous drought.

We understand the challenges both state and federal officials currently face in allocating extremely limited water supplies to meet all the demands of the state. There is no doubt that the agriculture industry can, should, and is playing a role in reducing water use during these difficult times. Not only have many farmers implemented more modern technology and irrigation practices to efficiently use water, but farmers across our districts have already fallowed fields and prematurely ripped out permanent crops in an effort to reduce water use further.

The decisions these farms have made in response to a zero percent allocation from the Central Valley Project and five percent allocation from the State Water Project will undoubtedly have negative impacts beyond the San Joaquin Valley, with reduced food availability for American consumers and reduced jobs for people who transport food produced in the San Joaquin Valley. Moreover, if history is a guide, because of the lack of surface water supplies there will be substantially lower employment, increased property crime, domestic violence, and hunger in the San Joaquin Valley districts we represent. Food banks will struggle in the face of skyrocketing demand, while also facing increasing food prices and a decrease in food donations. The last drought showed us that lower crop production has a doubly negative impact on farmworker communities who lost jobs, received lower hourly wages, worked fewer hours per year, and paid more for the food they purchase.

In light of this past lived experience, it is critical that the human impact of drought – particularly on the health and safety of the people in Central Valley’s disadvantaged communities – be given full and fair consideration as state and federal agencies consider their drought response actions.

This consideration is particularly important as agencies contemplate actions that are intended to support at-risk fish species. For example, the State Water Resources Control Board recently ordered the United States Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to maintain water in storage in Shasta Lake for the protection of salmon, which compelled Reclamation to delay all water

transfers from Sacramento River Settlement Contractors until October (the next water year). Timely water transfers are critical because they represent, in many cases, the only source of water for Central Valley farmers. Delaying the transfers until October means many farms will go without water until it is far too late for even late-harvest crops. While many supported a delay in the transfer of some of this water, the requirement that all the transfer water be delayed past the growing season was especially disappointing given that a delay of some but not all of the water until August or September would have served many of the same purposes without the devastating effect on the Central Valley. The only certainty tied to the October delay is the certainty of further harm to the communities in the San Joaquin Valley.

To be clear, we believe in making decisions that support both the environment and the economy; we fully recognize that environmental uses of water are beneficial, too. But we must find a balance between all the unmet needs during this drought and cannot sacrifice the health and safety of our region's most vulnerable families and communities.

Agriculture plays a vital role in every community across the San Joaquin Valley. When agriculture suffers, every community here suffers – especially farmworkers and disadvantaged communities. For these reasons, we strongly urge you to please keep these hard-working people at the forefront of your administration's decision-making in the weeks and months ahead.

Sincerely,



David G. Valadao
Member of Congress



Melissa Hurtado
California State Senate (Sanger)

Cc:

The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
The Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior