



Westlands Water District

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For Immediate Release

Economic Opportunities Commission Receives \$22,000 from Westlands to Support Food Banks

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(Fresno, CA – April 6, 2009) The Westlands Water District is contributing \$22,000 to support food bank operations in valley communities that have been hard hit by ongoing water shortages. The district's gift takes the form of a challenge grant and local farmers, business leaders and community organizations are being asked to match it.

Students at the West Hills College, North District Center in Firebaugh, with support from the colleges in Coalinga and Lemoore will participate in responding to the challenge grant by donating food and cash in special repositories on campus.

“Our young people are the real stakeholders in Fresno County's future,” said Frank Gornick, Chancellor of West Hills College. “I'm confident the students on my campus will join with residents throughout the area in meeting the challenge this grant from Westlands represents.”

Experts at the University of California estimate that more than 35,000 Ag related jobs will be lost south of the Delta in the Central Valley this year because of the effects of three years of drought combined with environmental restrictions that have reduced the state's water supply by over one third.

Unemployment in Mendota alone has reached 41 percent according to the latest estimates; Firebaugh 35 percent; Huron 35 percent. More than a thousand people have turned out at recent food bank distribution centers in Firebaugh, Mendota and the Cantua Creek area. But even though the EOC reports that 500 meals were given out at each event, hundreds more people had to be turned away because there was not any more food available.

“It should offend us all, deeply, that people are going to bed hungry here, in the midst of some of the most productive farmlands in the world. And yet, the government requires us to waste hundreds of thousands of acre feet of water into the ocean for environmental purposes that were not even imagined when these fields were first planted,” said Jean P. Sagouspe, President of Westlands Water District.

EOC works with the Community Food Bank and other local organizations to distribute food to individuals and families in need. A typical meal box given away at one of the food banks will include 2.5 pounds of beans, rice, and macaroni; poultry; ground turkey; juice; chicken bullion; chili powder; mayonnaise; cereal; snacks; and fresh vegetables.

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