



Westlands Water District

3130 N. Fresno Street, P.O. Box 6056, Fresno, California 93703-6056, (559) 224-1523, FAX (559) 241-6277

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Gayle Holman
(559) 905-6736
Westlands Water District

Statement from Westlands Water District on 100 Percent Allocation Announcement

FRESNO, CA – Today's announcement by the Bureau of Reclamation of an allocation increase for south-of-Delta Central Valley Project (CVP) agricultural water service contractors from 65 percent to 100 percent is certainly good news. For farmers with permanent crops, the increase is a real blessing. Those farmers will have sufficient, good quality surface water to irrigate their orchards and vineyards that suffer damage when irrigated with poorer quality groundwater. This allocation decision will enable all farmers to avoid pumping an overdrafted groundwater basin.

But today's announcement helps underscore a fundamental problem; under existing regulations the CVP is unable to operate as originally designed. The last time Reclamation allocated 100 percent to south-of-Delta agricultural water service contractors was more than a decade ago, in 2006, another exceptionally wet year. In the interim, the State of California has experienced wet years, average years, and dry years. The CVP was designed to deliver full supplies in all types of water years, and the contracts between the United States and the public water agencies that supply farmers stipulate allocation announcements will be made in mid-February. This is intended to enable farmers to make timely planting decisions. However, in the decade since 2006, we have experienced allocations ranging from zero to 80 percent. For three consecutive years, 2014, 2015, and 2016, the allocation amounted to zero. (In 2016, the allocation was 5 percent, but farmers were told the allocation could not be used during the irrigation season.) For farmers who had to make planting decisions several months ago, today's announcement of an increase in supply comes too late in the season to aid their operations.

For much of the past two and a half decades, farmers have been forced to make all too familiar and unfortunate decisions to lay off employees, cancel farm plans, and idle much of the most productive farmland in the world, simply because the water delivery system in the state has been paralyzed by laws and regulations. Policies that prevent the CVP from making adequate water supplies available for farmers, except in the most extreme wet years, must be reexamined.

One last positive note, the water unused from this year's allocation will remain in storage for next year. We look forward to a timely, adequate allocation for the next growing season.

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Westlands Water District is the largest agricultural water district in the United States, made up of more than 1,000 square miles of prime farmland in western Fresno and Kings Counties. Under federal contracts, Westlands provides water to 700 family-owned farms that average 875 acres in size.