



Westlands Water District

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For Immediate Release
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Current Water Policies Impacting the Central Valley Create Uncertain Future for Central Valley Ag Communities, New Report Details

FRESNO, CA – A new [Report](#) entitled “The Implications of Agricultural Water for the Central Valley” by Professor Michael Shires warns of impending economic decline in the Central Valley if water supplies continue to decline for farmers in the region. “This report connects the critical role of agriculture in the region,” said Johnny Amaral, Deputy General Manager, External Affairs. “It provides elected officials with a picture of the future, where water is available, and agriculture supports the Central Valley and provides food for California and the nation. It also analyzes a potential future where continued reductions in water supplies diminish agriculture as the Central Valley region struggles to find replacement jobs and businesses.”

Professor Shires’ analysis found that the Central Valley can thrive with an adequate water supply that historically supported irrigated agriculture and food processing industries. And, when water deliveries met the contracted levels, the Report showed that overall output increased by 17 percent and employment opportunities increased by nearly 20 percent.

Conversely, Professor Shires’ analysis warns that continued cutbacks to water supply would devastate the local economy, forcing jobs and economic activity associated with agriculture to fall by at least 80 percent. The reduction in agricultural production would double the unemployment rate and leave the region in a condition similar to Detroit, following the relocation of automobile manufacturing. The economic decline would also result in the loss of millions of dollars in tax revenue annually, deepening the dependence on government assistance programs, and further contributing to higher than average regional poverty rates.

Latino families in particular will be disproportionately impacted by reductions in water supplies, with 80-90 percent of the affected families being Latino. In addition Latino restaurant owners, trucking companies and retail businesses will suffer when farmland is taken out of production and income and jobs are lost.

According to the Report, agriculture plays a major role for immigrants and individuals who are the first to enter the workforce, and the reduction in those opportunities could have a generational impact on the region. Dr. Michael Shires, author of the Report stated, “The ‘American dream’ is embodied by the ability of individuals to find opportunity in hard work and perseverance, especially for migrant or minority populations. This report confirms that agriculture is the primary source of that opportunity in the Central Valley.”

The Report also reveals that no viable alternative to agriculture has been identified by those who advocate for the permanent retirement of vast amounts of farmland, thereby reducing demand for water supply. The theory that irrigated agriculture and associated jobs can be replaced by green jobs and new manufacturing facilities is simply not feasible. Replacing agricultural jobs in Fresno County would require \$6.24 billion in solar farm investment annually—a level that is highly unlikely. Likewise, the predominant manufacturing industry in the Central Valley involves food processing, so any reduction in irrigated agriculture would impact current manufacturing and would chill the region’s ability to attract new manufacturing facilities.

“It is clear from this Report that the future of our region and the well-being of Central Valley residents are inextricably tied to agriculture,” said Johnny Amaral. “Decisions about water supply and the operations of the water systems not only impact farmers, they impact the entire state. Investments in infrastructure improvement to the water system and the adoption of policies that promote the delivery of adequate, affordable water supplies will be of great benefit to the State and the Nation.”

To read the entire report, visit:

<http://wwd.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/implications-of-agricultural-water.pdf>.

Additional materials, visit: <http://wwd.ca.gov/news-and-reports/economic-impact/>

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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. Westlands has federal contracts to provide water to 700 family-owned farms that average 875 acres in size. These farms produce more than 60 different high-quality commercial food and fiber crops sold for the fresh, dry, canned, and frozen food markets, domestically and abroad. More than 50,000 people live and work in the communities dependent on Westlands’ agricultural economy. The family farms in the Westlands Water District are among the most productive and water-efficient in the world, largely due to improved access to cutting-edge technological innovations.