



Westlands Water District

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 17, 2013

CONTACT: Gayle Holman
(559) 241-6233

Westlands Water District Supports Congressional and State Efforts to Fix Immediate Water Crisis

FRESNO, CA - Westlands Water District supports federal and state government efforts to address California's water crisis and the conditions that are causing both near- and long-term water supply problems.

"We applaud the leadership of elected officials to bring attention to California's water crisis and the ramifications of current conditions and policies," said Thomas W. Birmingham, General Manager, Westlands Water District. "State and federal government action is needed to resolve the immediate water supply shortages and provide farmers and communities with reasonable assurance that they have the water resources needed to operate their businesses and keep people at work."

The San Joaquin Valley is facing the prospect of a record low water allocation, an historic low point in water supply reliability, and yet another year of severe economic hardship. Without substantive action to address water supply problems, agricultural production will be greatly impacted, which will have negative consequences for numerous industries and thousands of jobs that all indirectly rely on agricultural activity. This is a problem not just for the Central Valley, but also for the whole state of California.

Westlands encompasses more than 600,000 acres of farmland in western Fresno and Kings Counties. The District serves approximately 700 family-owned farms that average 875 acres in size. Westlands farmers produce more than 60 high quality commercial food and fiber crops sold for the fresh, dry, canned and frozen food markets, both domestic and export. More than 50,000 people live and work in the communities dependent on the District's agricultural economy.

If the drought is not addressed, the potential economic impact to the region could exceed \$1 billion dollars. There will be indirect ripple effects of an economic downturn in agricultural production that impact related businesses including food processing, goods movement, retailers, grocers, banking, and other financing entities.

“We cannot afford another year of uncertainty that will harm an industry that generates billions of dollars in economic activity and plays such an important role in the lives of the people that depend on agriculture,” said Birmingham.

Low allocations in recent years have already had a major impact on farms, food production, and families. The previous water crisis in 2009 caused farmers to fallow more than 300,000 acres of land and change their crops and production levels. There were high levels of unemployment and communities were left in financial peril. Statewide, income losses were estimated at \$2.8 billion and more than 95,000 jobs were lost. Westlands is calling upon policymakers to learn from those lessons of the past.

Now, the same water supply conditions are creating the same ramifications that devastated communities in the San Joaquin Valley just four years ago. However, it is likely that the impacts will be even more severe this time because there are fewer options and coping mechanisms available now -- groundwater supplies are low, land is subsiding, reservoirs are far below average levels. It will be impossible to create enough makeshift solutions to protect the agricultural economy in 2014. Therefore, Westlands is encouraging state and federal policy changes to provide water now.

“Westlands strongly supports federal and state efforts to implement a long-term solution to improve water reliability through the Bay Delta Conservation Plan. We will continue to work with the agencies and officials to make that plan a reality. However, the current crisis demonstrates the need for a near-term solution. We cannot wait any longer. The time is now to recognize the importance of a reliable water supply and to take action to protect the hardworking families of the Central Valley, and the broader California economy,” said Birmingham.

#