Why Water Matters:
The Importance of Westlands Water District to California and Its Economy

A new study by Dr. Michael A. Shires highlights the impact of agricultural operations within Westlands Water District on the local and regional economies and the wide-reaching consequences of water restrictions on farms, local communities, and the nation’s food supply.

A Major Economic Engine

On an annual basis, agricultural production within Westlands:
- Generates over $4.7 billion in economic activity
- Supports 35,115 jobs across the regional economy
- Produces wages, tax revenues, and consumer spending

The Impact of Water

A “striking” correlation between water supply and poverty in Fresno and Kings Counties:
- When WWD receives little to no water, poverty levels increase
- When WWD receives a higher water allocation, economic stability improves

Water availability is critical to production and value added. A decrease in water supply means higher expenses, increased fallowing, and more highly productive land left unplanted, resulting in a significant decline of economic output. An analysis comparing 2019 fallowing levels with years of higher CVP water allocation shows an 18% decline in employment and economic activity.

National Footprint & Uncertainties

- The combination of weather and soil conditions of the District are unique, which is why Westlands farmers are able to supply 3.5% of the country’s fruit and nut crops and 5.4% of the country’s vegetables and melons.
- Growers in Westlands continue to be a key national resource for a quality and safe food supply.
- Agricultural production in the Central Valley is critical to meeting the food supply and food security needs of the United States. There is no domestic alternative that can replace the Central Valley’s production of these critical products.
- Today’s economic chaos creates more uncertainties that reverberate across the agriculture industry in Westlands and the country:
  - Changing precipitation patterns necessitate planning ahead.
  - Supply chain disruptions make domestic production more critical.
  - Labor market shifts and government policies have directly disrupted labor markets.
  - The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified and accelerated these disruptions.