



March 14, 2014

The Honorable Felicia Marcus
Chairwoman, State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: WATER DELIVERY

Dear Chairwoman Marcus:

It has come to the attention of the Merced County Board of Supervisors that in light of the ongoing drought, the State Water Resources Control Board may significantly curtail water delivery to agricultural areas in the Central Valley.

The Board understands that the purpose of such an action would be to preserve "emergency supplies" and address possible health and safety needs in the future, but for Merced County, our need is now.

Agriculture is the driving-force behind our local economy and ripples through virtually every facet of our community. Reducing the flow of water to our region would not only reduce employment for our residents, but would also result in spikes in property crime, domestic violence and assault.

Studies show that unemployment is linked with increased crime rates. Merced County has the seventh-highest property crime rate in the State and the fourth-highest unemployment rate. County officials project these two factors to spike if water delivery is curtailed.

This is a critical time for counties throughout the Central Valley. The drought has already slowed farm operations, and Merced County is seeing more individuals turning to public assistance programs. These resources are finite and will be under significantly more demand if the available water supply is cut and more people are without work.

During this time of year, farm labor constitutes more than 14,000 jobs in Merced County, which equates to about 20 percent of the workforce. When factoring in jobs from other industries related to farm labor, that figure is significantly higher.

As your Board deliberates future actions, we ask that you take into consideration the fallout that such decisions could have for rural counties. We understand the concept of maintaining an emergency water supply, but any actions reducing the

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flow of water would create a real and immediate emergency for our county and fallow much of our farmland.

We strongly encourage you to postpone any decisions to curtail water supply and ask you to consider agriculture as a key component of maintaining health and safety.

Sincerely,



Jerry O'Banion, Chairman
Merced County Board of Supervisors
Supervisor, District Five

cc: Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Congressman Jim Costa
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Assemblyman Adam Gray
Karen Ross, Secretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture
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