

State Water Resources Control Board

Honorable Board Members:



I urge you to reject the current proposal to increase water flow by 35 percent along the Merced, Tuolumne, and Stanislaus rivers from February 1 to June 30 each year, for the reasons listed below.

Agriculture is vital to the economic health of California, and the Central Valley is the heart of California's agriculture. We have the right soils, the right climate, the infrastructure, equipment, labor, science & technology and so on. But if you take away the water it starts to dry up, and it eventually dies.

Irrigated lands create local jobs and are a crucial component of California's economic engine. Without water, it no longer requires a tractor driver, an irrigator, or someone to care for the crop. Fewer tomatoes and peaches will be picked, hauled and canned. Less almonds will be harvested, processed and sold. Equipment and supply purchases will decrease. Manufacturing and deliveries will decline as will service calls for equipment repairs. The list goes on. Fewer, less, decline and decrease are all code words for higher unemployment.

Agricultural land without water can't produce food. Not even in the Central Valley, one of the most productive growing regions in the world. For lack of water, we won't be able to purchase and eat the highest quality, healthiest foods that could have been grown right here. Nor can we export it around the world and help feed others. Because it won't exist. However, humanity's need for sustenance won't decrease, only our ability to feed ourselves. We'll need to replace a growing food demand with that grown elsewhere, most likely from a region that doesn't apply to our strict food quality and safety regimens, or our environmental and social concerns. We'll be competing for food instead of producing it. As supply and quality go down, food demand and prices will go up.

Valley residents not associated with agriculture won't be unaffected. Residential water comes directly from our local irrigation districts. If 35 percent or more spring runoff is left to run down the rivers, there will be less water to go around, and residential water bills will increase. Less water during summer months also means the districts' ability to generate electricity during peak demand times will be reduced. Electric rates will increase. Even recreational users of local reservoirs will be affected when water levels fall and stay below boat ramp levels.

Certainly there is more irrigated land now than in the past, and agricultural water requirements have increased. But it is productive land, and it requires water to stay productive. Productivity is a good thing. Water needs of high density urban areas in Southern California have also increased, yet there is no talk of reducing diversions there. In fact the tunnel plan will divert additional water south, beyond valley farms. Perhaps we should stop watering 210,000 acres of Southern California grassy areas before we stop watering the land that feeds us.

Please, reject the current proposal to increase annual water flow by 35 percent along the Merced, Tuolumne, and Stanislaus rivers.

Sincerely,
Chuck Dirkse
La Mancha Orchards
Denair, CA