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Testimony on
“Creating Jobs by Overcoming Man-Made Drought: Time for Congress to Listen and Act”
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The end of July 2009 is forever etched into my memory. After a couple of weeks of planning, Community Food Bank held the first Disaster Drought Distribution, during the last week of that month. We were in the City of Mendota, it was above 100 degrees Fahrenheit and the line of people seeking food assistance seemed endless. We had three truckloads deliver food that day, but it was three truckloads of *hope* for more than 680 families. With every food box assembled by caring volunteers and hard-working staff, we offered a little bit of peace so that the worried mom and the out-of-work dad did not have to think about where the next meal would come from.

That same summer we held another Drought Distribution in Huron. In line that day was a young mother named Maria, whose husband (and sole provider) had been laid off in May 2009 from his job working in the fields in the area and he was struggling to find work in order to pay bills and feed their three young children. Maria was holding her 3-month-old child who was severely sick. Her clothes were soaked with vomit and diarrhea, the baby was crying that heart-breaking cry that is familiar to every mother. Through a co-worker, who was able to translate for me, Maria explained that her son had been sick for days, not eating, constantly crying, and late that night he began vomiting and having severe diarrhea. Judging by the amount of people in line it would be at least four hours before we could serve her, I asked her to go home and we would serve her later. Maria looked at me with tears in her eyes and said “No! If I go home we will not eat tonight and you won’t be back for two weeks!” Her fear of not knowing where dinner was coming from kept her in line that day despite the condition of her child. Her story is forever with me.

On a cold day in Firebaugh, I met a man named Richard who had been out of work for nearly six months. He showed up at Disaster Drought Distributions every two weeks for three months because this was the sole source of food for his wife and four children ages two through nine. He told me how thankful he was for Community Food Bank doing this, “but I only want to work, I was proud to work and feed my family and now I stand in line to do it.”

There are countless untold stories of lives that were touched by the lack of water in the Central Valley. They are people who want to work in order to provide the most basic human necessity of food.