

Mark Watte

"Creating Jobs by Overcoming Man-Made Drought: Time for Congress to Listen and Act"

April 11, 2011

Thank you Chairman McClintock, Chairman Hastings, Ranking Member Napolitano and other members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today. I appreciate your interest in solving the California water crisis. I hope this hearing will result in action rather than just an exercise in listening.

Let me take a moment to introduce myself. I am Mark Watte, a third generation farmer (with a fourth generation learning the ropes). We have 4,000 acres in production that include a mixture of permanent and row crops. We also operate two dairies and two calf-raising facilities. I also sit on four different water boards, including the Friant Board of Directors, two cotton boards, and I am an elected member of the Tulare City Council.

The San Joaquin Valley has been blessed with good soil, a long growing season, and (in the past) an abundance of water. Together they created the most dynamic agriculture economy in the world. The San Joaquin Valley is the first in the world in dairy, pistachios, almonds, processing tomatoes, asparagus, navel oranges, lettuce, garlic, and many more specialty crops. The products of the valley are truly American-made – the cheapest, safest, and most reliable food in the world. However, if Congress does not change the direction of water policy in California, we will soon have cantaloupes grown in Mexicali rather than in Mendota.

Our farm is located near Tulare, in the central portion of the San Joaquin Valley, where we have historically sourced 50% of our water from surface supplies through Friant and the Kaweah River and 50% pumped from a significantly over-drafted aquifer. As the years pass, the reliability of our water supply dwindles. Other than an over-prescribed groundwater source, our major challenge to our water future is the surface water reductions associated with the San Joaquin River Settlement.

After fighting for nearly two decades and saddled with millions of dollars in legal fees, the farmers were left with no other option but to settle. During this legal struggle, Congress stood by and refused to take legislative action to resolve the legal dispute. This unwillingness to get involved resulted in a flawed solution – a solution that will not bring back a long-dead salmon fishery, nor will it bring back all of our lost water.

Promises were made during the negotiations that are not being fulfilled. For example, there continues to be a lack of substantive action on the water management goals. The farmers were promised that restoration and water management would be “co-equal goals”. While restoration moves full steam ahead, with significant water releases down the river yet the water management goals are stuck in neutral. Another example is that third parties were promised they will not be impacted. Yet, the interim flows are damaging farmland of third parties and no action is being taken to provide relief. The future of the settlement is at risk if all parties do not hold up to their part of the deal, including the federal government.

A more commonsense solution would be to extend the existing San Joaquin River warm water fishery and connect it at Sack Dam. This will restore the river in a more fiscally responsible and environmentally sustainable way. It also provides Friant the ability to recover its water and use it twice – once for the environmental purposes, and once for raising food and fiber for our fellow citizens.

For years, our livelihood in the San Joaquin Valley has been under threat by drive-by tourists from the Bay Area, who don't understand or care about our way of life. They have filed lawsuit after lawsuit to ensure the

government enacts water policy based on junk science. This has resulted in a 65% water allocation in a year of record rainfall and snow pack. While this is much better than the past two years, it remains disturbing in a year in which we will most likely see flood damage. We have done better in the past. The proof is in the numbers.

I call your attention to this chart which shows CVP storage versus Ag Service Allocation since 1952. Initial allocations are signified with a red square and final allocations with a green triangle. You can clearly see that chaos ensued after the enactment of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act in 1992; and only became worse. Even with the strangling impacts of CVPIA, the Westside still received 90% of their allocation in 1997 – a water year that could easily mirror this one.

There are two ways to solve most of the economic problems in the San Joaquin Valley. First, Congress must take action on the water issue. For the past four years, we heard a lot of talk about the problem while Congress did absolutely nothing. Quite honestly, we are tired of talk. We want action. Congress needs to fix the situation in the delta, it needs to revisit CVPIA and streamline a number of troublesome provisions, and we need to make sure that restoration of the San Joaquin River can actually be accomplished in a sustainable way with the least amount of impact.

Second, we need the government to get out of the way. The regulatory process of trying to get a water project approved in the valley is a nightmare. A good example was the raising of Terminus Dam. It took 25 years and \$50 million – \$20 million going to environmental mitigation – to get the permits to raise the dam 21 feet. The problem we have is a bureaucracy that is imbedded with activists who have their own agenda. We no longer see the Bureau of Reclamation as a partner in solving our water problems. They have taken on the roll of obstructionist. We are willing to follow the rules and even pay our own way; but we need a good faith partner in the process. That is certainly not what we have today.

Thank you for your time and effort in addressing our California water issues. You have heard, and will hear from, many “experts” that know more specifics about the ills and cures for our issues than I do. But make no mistake: I am the face of an average person, who uses the wonderful resources that God has given us here in California. Through hard work and risk taking Californian’s created a bounty that benefits a nation. We understand and respect the risk-reward associated with Mother Nature. I would hope that you will assist us with lessening our risk burden with regards to our water supply.

What we need is inspired leadership from Congress to provide a balance to the unrealistic demands of environmental zealots who have no sympathy or compassion for the economic devastation that resulted from the starving the valley of water.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.