



**PACIFIC
INSTITUTE**

Research for People and the Planet

September 22, 2008

James E. O'Banion
Chairman
San Joaquin River Water Authority
P.O. Box 2115
541 H Street
Los Banos, CA 93635

Dear Mr. O'Banion,

Thank you for your letter of September 15th. It is unfortunate to realize that you are unable to see the disaster heading for the agricultural sector and that you are unwilling to consider reasonable steps to avoid it. We believe a strong agricultural sector is critical for California – indeed it was the fundamental premise of our study.¹ But the “business as usual” thinking you represent in your letter, and pretending that nothing is, or should be changing, is going to lead to disaster.

It seems as though you failed to understand the fundamental premise of our study. Let me put it simply as a question to you: Do you believe California agriculture **will** have more water in the future? [Not should, but will?] If so, we do have a real disagreement. Independent of what we might *want*, we believe it very likely that there will continue to be constraints on water for all users. If this is the case, then what do we do?

There are two choices: ignore the ongoing reductions and let them randomly destroy farms and communities, or plan for how the agricultural sector is going to manage changes in water availability and reliability and improve production with the water that is available. We prefer the second approach, and our analysis looks at precisely that: how to grow *more food with less water*.

Some growers in California have already made enormous progress in growing more food with less water. Their experience and expertise are critical for helping the agricultural community as a whole. That was the purpose of the four scenarios we explored – all of which draw on experience from smart farmers statewide.

¹ “More with Less: Agricultural Water Conservation and Efficiency in California.” H. Cooley, J. Christian-Smith, P.H.Gleick. Pacific Institute, Oakland, California. Released September 2008.
http://www.pacinst.org/reports/more_with_less_delta/index.htm

You also seem to have misunderstood our analysis – either through accidental misreading or intentional misrepresentation. The four “goals” you attribute to us are in your imagination, not in our report. It is not a *goal* of ours to take water from San Joaquin Valley agriculture, but to explore how to best manage that outcome when it happens (as innovative farmers in the Valley are doing). It is not our *goal* to tell farmers what to grow, but to explore the potential for them to continue to make the transitions from water-intensive crops they’ve been making for decades. It is not a *goal* of ours to change California’s water rights system, as much as it is a goal to enforce the system we have now in a way that benefits all Californians. It is not a goal of ours to have no new storage projects. It *is* a goal of ours to help policy makers make water choices with complete information on the options available to them – one option is storage, another is improved efficiency, but far more effort and money have gone into the first, when more effort and money are needed for the second.

Your hyperbole about nuts and fruits disappearing from supermarket shelves and not being able to buy a gallon of milk is not worth addressing. Your invoking of “National Security” and fear mongering about importing food from other countries is not worthy of discussion – our report works from the fundamental premise that we can grow **more** food, not less. Hence the title: “More with Less: Agricultural Water Conservation and Efficiency in California.”

Your comments about fallowing *are* worth addressing. We intentionally excluded fallowing from our scenarios, despite your implication that we propose it. There is a serious debate going on about fallowing bad, drainage impaired lands – many of them are in your region. Fallowing those lands would improve water quality, reduce water use, but also cut food production – that’s why we excluded it from our assessment, which was focused on improving efficiency of water use while maintaining agricultural production. And your estimate of 7.5 million acre-feet reduction (made, it seems by incorrectly adding 3.4 and 3.9) is also a gross misrepresentation of our analysis. These numbers are not additive; we don’t propose to include fallowing. It is neither a scenario nor a recommendation. Ironically, pursuing the efficiency improvements we recommend could reduce the pressure to fallow – something you should think about.

Your assumption that our “agenda” is to “grab water from agriculture and dedicate it to the environment” is particularly sad and revealing. I know the prevalent feeling at the Authority is that anyone who isn’t a farmer or a farm lobbyist or a farm bureaucrat can’t possibly have anything legitimate to say about agricultural water policy. Unfortunately, I fear that you don’t know who your friends are – if California agriculture is going to thrive in the next few decades, it will only be those farmers who are efficient, innovative, and thoughtful. Fortunately, our analysis shows that many already are, and many more could be.

Despite all the points on which we disagree, we clearly are able to agree on one critical fact: that “there may be some additional gains to be made in some of these areas...” Fantastic! If the San Joaquin River Water Authority is willing to concede even this much, then there is a possibility for a constructive dialogue about the *degree* of additional gains

that might be available, and *how* to capture them. In that sense, our report has already been a stunning success.

In the hopes of a constructive dialogue,

Sincerely,

Dr. Peter H. Gleick
President, Pacific Institute

Cc (as per your letter):

San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority Board Members

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

Senator Dianne Feinstein

Senator Barbara Boxer

Congressman Dennis Cardoza

Congressman Devin Nunes

Congressman Jim Costa

Congressman George Radanovich

Assembly Member Cathleen Galgiani

Assembly Member Tom Berryhill

Assembly Member Greg Aghazarian

Assembly Member Michael Villines

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Mr. Timothy Quinn, ACWA