

Eric Larson's January 21, 2009 testimony to the State Board of Food and Agriculture on water supply

Secretary Kawamura, Chairman Montna and Members of the Board

All of the testimony you have heard here today is about the water that is needed to sustain the farms in this state's great Central Valley. But there is more to hear.

For more than one year, growers in southern California who participate in the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California's interruptible water program have been under a mandatory 30 percent water use restriction.

To give you an example of the impact that has had on producers, avocado growers alone suffered production losses of \$32 million last year and the prediction is a loss of \$39 million this year according to the California Avocado Commission. That is \$71 in lost production in two years within a relatively small California farm commodity. When you add to that production reductions in our other leading crops such as nursery, tomatoes, strawberries, citrus, and vegetable crops, the combined losses are monumental. Those losses are not sustainable.

This year we are certain that every grower in southern California that receives imported water will face drastic mandated water use restrictions, whether or not they participate in the interruptible water program.

I want to emphasize that I am talking about the water supply that flows through the Metropolitan Water District's system. Too often the water that flows through that system is seen solely as urban water. It is important to know that thousand of farmers and tens of thousands of acres of farmland rely on that "urban" source. As goes that urban supply, so go the farmers.

So, the state's farm community must voice its support for what is commonly seen as urban needs that, in turn, sustain an important farming region.

In addition to providing voices for what is traditionally seen as ag water in the state, there must also be support for urban programs as well. Programs such as landscape conservation, water recycling, and desalination.

Augmenting urban supplies and supporting programs that may appear to be strictly urban will mean fewer restrictions on the portion of the urban water supply that must flow to farms.

Thank you.