

DENNIS A. CARDOZA
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CORRESPONDENCE 2

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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-0518

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WASHINGTON OFFICE:

435 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-6131

DISTRICT OFFICES:

2222 M STREET, SUITE 305
MERCED, CA 95340
(209) 383-4455

1010 10TH STREET, SUITE 5800
MODESTO, CA 95354
(209) 527-1914

137 EAST WEBER AVENUE
STOCKTON, CA 95202
(209) 946-0361

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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Honorable Tom Mayfield
Stanislaus County Executive Offices
1010 10th Street Place Ste. 6500
Modesto, California 95354

Dear Supervisor Mayfield:

I would like to take this opportunity to update you on several important issues facing California agriculture including water, agricultural labor and the upcoming Farm Bill.

On January 29th, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power held a hearing on the impact of the federal court decision directing restrictions on pumping in the Delta to protect the endangered Delta Smelt. The hearing, titled "The Immediate Federal and State Role in Addressing Uncertain Water Deliveries for California and the Impacts on California Communities", highlighted the devastating impact that this decision will have on farmers, the San Joaquin Valley and the state's economy.

The testimony presented at the hearing made it clear that, despite the fact that California has had several recent snow storms, tighter pumping restrictions in the Delta ordered by the federal court will continue to severely limit the water that the state and federal government can provide to farms in the San Joaquin Valley and urban water districts. It is important to note that these cuts are in addition to the many previous cuts that have been imposed as a result of regulation and statute, including the Bay Delta Accord, the Central Valley Project Improvement Act and other actions. The court decision, when coupled with drought conditions, will be devastating for those communities that rely upon State Water Project and Central Valley Water Project deliveries. West-side agriculture in the San Joaquin Valley will be especially hard hit. There is no economic stimulus package that can mitigate the economic free for all these agricultural and water dependent communities will face.

Some may say that we need to impose strict water conservation measures to address these shortages. We need to be clear that although water conservation and efficiency measures will help, in the end, we cannot conserve our way out of this crisis. Water conservation cannot capture the Sierra snowmelt when it floods the Sacramento or San Joaquin Rivers. There are no conservation measures that would have helped us benefit from the floods of 2005-06, and other events before that--- it was simply a matter of limited space in our existing reservoirs.

Simply put--- we need to address conveyance issues and build new storage facilities to capture flood waters and enable better management of the system for water supply, water quality, flood protection and environmental enhancement. A new water storage facility has not been built in this state in over 40 years, despite the fact that our state has doubled in population over this same time period.

It is essential that the federal government partner with and cooperate with the State to build new reservoirs, such as the Temperance Flat Northeast of Fresno above Millerton Lake and the Sites Reservoir in Colusa County, as well as expand Los Vacqueros Reservoir in Contra Costa County. These facilities will not only provide additional water supply, but will also provide greater flood protection and numerous benefits to local fisheries and provide much needed flexibility to address water quality concerns. Building

more water storage facilities is the right thing to do, and is critical to our state's future. I will continue to work with my Congressional colleagues in the Central Valley, and throughout the state, to address this important issue.

Turning to the continuing challenges surrounding agricultural labor, many Valley growers continue to express concerns regarding the agricultural labor shortage and the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) "No Match" proposal from last year. As you may be aware, last fall a federal court temporarily halted DHS from instituting its "No Match" plan. DHS has indicated that sometime in March it will unveil an alternative plan to address the plan's legal deficiencies. Similar to the previous plan, the new proposal will pressure employers to fire any worker who can't explain discrepancies between their names and Social Security numbers.

In the meantime, there continues to be a significant shortage of farm labor, and a need for the Congress and Administration to adopt an agricultural guest worker program along with comprehensive immigration reform. On February 6th, the U.S. Department of Labor announced plans to streamline the current agricultural guest-worker program--- known as the H-2A program. The current H-2A program is rarely used by farmers because of its cumbersome procedural requirements. Of the million-plus farm workers employed during the 2007 season, only 75,000 passed through the H-2A program, with less than 3,000 in California. The goals of the proposed changes are to provide farmers with increased access to a legal, more stable workforce and to reduce the industry's reliance on undocumented workers.

Although I support improving the H-2A system, I am concerned that the proposal will not provide sufficient changes to the current program to meet the high-intensity labor needs of farmers during periods of peak harvest. Simply put, for any labor program to work effectively it would need to be far more flexible and user-friendly.

Lastly, I would also like to provide you with a brief update on the Farm Bill. The House and Senate passed different versions of the Farm Bill last year, and the Conference Committee will soon begin its deliberations. It is hoped that the bill will be finalized prior to the March 15, 2008 deadline, when the current Farm Bill expires. Be assured that throughout the process, I will continue to fight for the significant gains for California that we achieved in the House version relative to investment in specialty crops, research and conservation.

Sincerely,



Dennis Cardoza
Member of Congress

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