

John P. (Phil) Larson  
Fresno County Board of Supervisors

Testimony before the Subcommittee on Water and Power  
Committee on Natural Resource  
United States House of Representatives  
*“Creating Jobs by Overcoming Man-Made Drought: Time for Congress to Listen and Act”*

April 11, 2011

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Phil Larson, and I am the elected representative of District One and the Chairman of the Fresno County Board of Supervisors. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today regarding the economic impacts on the agricultural industry and families in the Central Valley as the result of multiple years of federal water allocations.

My district includes the western portion of the City of Fresno and the westside agricultural region of our county all the way to the San Benito County line. As a farmer and businessman, I study water issues because they are vital to my economic survival. As a past farm bureau president, I advocated for additional water storage for our region because our organization saw the need to establish safe, clean and reliable water supplies for our industry and community in the future.

As a Fresno County Supervisor, I continue to fight for safe and secure water supplies in our region because I know without additional water supplies the social, cultural and economic impacts to our region could be devastating.

Over the past eight years, Fresno County's westside agriculture has been paralyzed because of water shortages due to environmental regulations. The economic reality was never more real than in 2008, when the Fresno County Board of Supervisors were forced to declare a local emergency, request a Presidential Declaration and request for State and Federal Assistance to deal with statewide drought and water restrictions.

In 2009, the reduction of water supply deliveries continued the severity of the economic hardship. Fallowed farmland caused severe unemployment. Those restrictions caused the idling of thousands of acres of crop land and resulted in substantial economic impact to agricultural crops, the industries that support agriculture and the people who work within the agricultural industry. An estimate 24% of the entire farmland in Fresno County was fallowed or farmed in low productive dry crops. Our estimated loss of \$74 million resulted in loss of jobs and significant loss of direct and indirect crop revenues. The impacts of those devastating losses have created deep issues with our economic recovery.

We are indeed an area of excessive governmental regulation that has been underserved because of government inaction in recognizing the economic issues created by federal water decisions.

There is an irony that one of the World's most productive farm areas and the leading agricultural County in the State of California has as many as 51% of its population in need of food assistance. In 2009, our Community Food Bank needed \$3.352 million per month for local food assistance to purchase, store and distribute food to those in need.

It is unfair that citizens of smaller communities and lesser populated areas are discriminated against by not receiving the same attention or support received by larger population centers like the Bay Area or Southern California. It is intolerable that governmental decisions have created over 40% unemployed in western Fresno County. The communities of Firebaugh, Mendota, Tranquillity, San Joaquin, and Huron continue to be impacted by onerous governmental regulations that have place "critters" above human needs. The result is that once vital communities are simply trying to survive.

Where is the parity when a wildlife area in western Fresno County is given 100% water allocation when the adjacent bureau contractor will only receive 65% in one of the wettest years in history? This is even more questionable when you ask how many people the wildlife area will put to work. Contrast this to the agricultural operation as a bureau contractor who with a 100% allocation would put hundreds of people to work. Add to this the multiplier impact of the idle land that could have produced a crop that would have supplied food and economic stimulus to our valley, the state and the country. The cost becomes significant. Often overlooked is the collateral impact on jobs in the area created by small businesses like the hardware store, grocery stores, mini marts, fuel suppliers, parts stores and the list goes on.

Another water issue not usually considered is the loss of public ADA (Average Daily Attendance) funding in our local schools. The region school districts whose funding is most significantly impacted are Golden Plains Unified, Mendota Unified, Firebaugh-Los Deltas Unified, Riverdale Unified, and the north portion of West Hills College. As jobs leave the area, so do families and the students that once populated the schools. This translates to multiple job losses including teachers, support staff, and maintenance workers. In 2005, the biggest concern for those school districts was where they would be housing the growing student populations. By 2008 with water supplies being impacted, instead of planning for growth they were preparing for layoffs and reductions in curriculum. Those job losses then are passed on to retail businesses and down the food chain to local, state and federal taxes.

I believe its time for the Federal Government to return to the table and give full consideration to the economic impacts past governmental decisions and practices have created in our large geographical area. Our residents deserve the same considerations and assistance received by those in more populated areas.

The solution is simple; the Federal Government needs to honor what was agreed on back in the 1960's when the water agreements first began. Allow our farmers to do what they do best – create jobs, economic growth, and produce food and fiber to feed and clothes the World. It is time to reconsider past decisions and take corrective action to match the reality of today.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be honored to accept questions from you at this time.

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
Disclosure Form  
As required by and provided for in House Rule XI, clause 2(g) and  
the Rules of the Committee on Natural Resources

**“Creating Jobs by Overcoming Man-Made Drought: Time for Congress to Listen and Act”  
April 11, 2011**

For Individuals:

I. Name:

2. Address:

3. Email Address:

4. Phone Number:

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For Witnesses Representing Organizations:

I. Name: **John P. (Phil) Larson**

2. Name of Organization(s) You are Representing at the Hearing: **Fresno County Board of Supervisors**

3. Business Address: **2281 Tulare Street, Room 300 Fresno, California 93721**

4. Business Email Address: **jbarlow@co.fresno.ca.us**

5. Business Phone Number: **(559) 600-1000**

a. Any training or educational certificates, diplomas or degrees or other educational experiences that are relevant to your qualifications to testify on or knowledge of the subject matter of the hearing.

**Not applicable**

b. Any professional licenses, certifications, or affiliations held that are relevant to your qualifications to testify on or knowledge of the subject matter of the hearing. **Past Board member – California State Farm Bureau; Past President – Fresno County Farm Bureau; Past Board member – California Production Consultants Association.**

c. Any employment, occupation, ownership in a firm or business, or work-related experiences that relate to your qualifications to testify on or knowledge of the subject matter of the hearing: **45 year owner/operator of family farm.**

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d. Any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) from the *Department of the Interior (and/or other agencies invited)* that you have received in the current year and previous four years, including the source and the amount of each grant or contract. **Not applicable**

e. A list of all lawsuits or petitions filed by you against the federal government in the current year and the previous four years, giving the name of the lawsuit or petition, the subject matter of the lawsuit or petition, and the federal statutes under which the lawsuits or petitions were filed. **Not applicable**

f. Any other information you wish to convey that might aid the Members of the Committee to better understand the context of your testimony. **Not applicable**

In addition, for witnesses representing organizations:

g. Any offices, elected positions, or representational capacity held in the organization(s) on whose behalf you are testifying. **Currently elected member of the Fresno County Board of Supervisors – District One**

h. Any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) from the *Department of the Interior (and/or other agencies invited)* that were received in the current year and previous four years by the organization(s) you represent at this hearing, including the source and amount of each grant or contract for each of the organization(s). **Not Applicable**

i. A list of all lawsuits or petitions filed by the organization(s) you represent at the hearing against the federal government in the current year and the previous four years, giving the name of the lawsuit or petition, the subject matter of the lawsuit or petition, and the federal statutes under which the lawsuits or petitions were filed for each of the organization(s). **Not Applicable**

j. A list of any countries from which the organization(s) you represent at the hearing have received foreign donations and the total amount of donations received from each country, for the current year and the previous four years, by each organization. **Not Applicable**

k. For tax-exempt organizations and non-profit organizations, copies of the three most recent public IRS Form 990s (including Form 990-PF, Form 990-N, and Form 990-EZ) for each of the organization(s) you represent at the hearing (not including any contributor names and addresses or any information withheld from public inspection by the Secretary of the Treasury under 26 U.S.C. 6104)). **Not Applicable**