

**Testimony Before the United States House of Representatives
House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Forum**

**Examining Drought in the American West
*How Western Drought Affects Every American***

May 11, 2022

Good afternoon. My name is Bill Diedrich, and I am a fourth-generation California farmer. My wife Karen and I have raised three sons, two of whom work on the farm.

On behalf of all the Western farmers who deliver a safe, affordable, domestic food supply to our grocery shelves, I want to thank you for having me here today.

You may have heard some of us say that 80% of our country's fruits, nuts and vegetables are grown West of the Rockies. That is a statistic, and an important one, but I live that statistic and want to address how important it is, why we need to protect it, and what needs to be done to make that happen.

It is not an accident that so much of our food supply comes from the West and in particular, California. California's climate is unique and not replicated in any other state. Most other states have more significant weather extremes, higher altitudes, oppressive humidity, and in some cases, too much water.

If we abandon California food production, we're accepting food shortages, higher prices, and more imports from foreign countries, many with significantly lower safety standards.

When people talk about taking millions of acres of California farmland out of production, those are just numbers. Let me put them in perspective for you. For every acre that is left unplanted because of a lack of irrigation water, it is the equivalent of 50,000 salads that will not be available to consumers.

Our food supply is just as much a national security issue as energy. If we fail to recognize that, we put the country at risk.

But protecting our domestic food supply won't happen without government deciding to aggressively prioritize domestic food production.

The current drought in California illustrates the cumulative impact of decades of flawed policy and neglect.

We have utterly failed to adapt to our changing weather patterns. Because more of our precipitation now comes in the form of rain, instead of snow, we need to build both small and large storage projects to capture the water when Mother Nature delivers it.

Both the federal and state government have allocated money for water infrastructure, but it moves too slowly. A clear example is Sites Reservoir which was specifically designed to capture rainfall from extreme events, and if it was in place now, 2022 would not look so bleak.

In addition to lack of storage, our water policy has also failed to adapt and remains mired in outdated science and cumbersome bureaucracy.

And I want to be clear: We are not asking people to choose between a domestic food supply and a clean environment. We need both and that is achievable if we make the necessary adjustments.

Immediate action is necessary because by the time the grocery shelves are empty it will be too late.

Thank you.

Bill Diedrich is a fourth-generation California farmer who, with his wife Karen, has raised three sons, two of which work on the farm. Diedrich Farms grows cotton, almonds, walnuts, Sunsweet prunes, pistachios, raisin grapes, and pomegranates in the Fresno and Madera County region of California's San Joaquin Valley. Bill also serves as President of the California Farm Water Coalition.