

TESTIMONY OF Daniel D. Errotabere  
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*Assessing the Impacts of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act*

Presented to the  
Subcommittee on Water and Power  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Resources

March 24, 2006

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee: I am Daniel D. Errotabere, a farmer in Westlands Water District, and I would like to thank you for allowing me to testify today on how the Central Valley Project Improvement Act has affected me and other farmers on the westside of the San Joaquin Valley, all the way from Tracy in the north to Kettleman City to the south.

Before I begin to describe the impacts of the CVPIA, I would like to describe my family and myself for members of the Committee. I farm along with my mother and two brothers, on about 5,500 acres in the Riverdale and Huron areas in Fresno and Kings Counties. My family began farming in the area in the late 1920's, and I am proud to say that I am a third generation farmer in the area that is now supplied irrigation water by Westlands Water District. Today my family's farm grows a wide variety of crops that include pima cottons, wheat, processing garlic and onions, cannery tomatoes, cantaloupes, market and seed lettuce, pistachio and almonds.

Stated succinctly, CVPIA has been a disaster for farmers south of the Delta that irrigate crops with water supplied by the Central Valley Project. I am told that CVPIA was enacted to, among other things, achieve a reasonable balance among competing demands for use of Central Valley Project water, including the requirements of fish and wildlife, agricultural, municipal areas and to improve the operational flexibility of the Central Valley Project. If these were among the purposes of the Act, it has been a failure. The Act has been implemented in a manner that gives environmental uses of water priority over other uses, particularly irrigation, and it has severely restricted the operations of the CVP.

Prior to the enactment of the CVPIA, south-of-Delta farmers could expect that in a normal year they would receive 100% of their CVP contract supplies. Today, because of the way CVPIA has been implemented, in normal years farmers can reasonably expect to receive only about 65% of their CVP supplies, and the way the allocations are announced makes it impossible to prepare water supply budgets. Farmers prepare their cropping plans in November or December for the following year and make substantial investments in land preparation in anticipation of planting crops in late winter or early spring. At the beginning of each contract year, in February, the Bureau of Reclamation makes its initial allocation of water, but because of export reductions at the Tracy Pumping that are forecasted under CVPIA this initial allocation is generally low, sometimes as low as 50% in a normal year. As the year goes along, the allocations are increased, but in most circumstances farmers have acquired other water supplies to meet the demand for crops that were planned the preceding November or December. We sometimes get increased allocations as late as August or September, at the end of the irrigation season, when the additional supplies are of little or no use to many farmers. The result of Reclamation's inability to forecast with any certainty the amount of water, if any, that it will be able to supply has significantly increased the cost of water used to irrigate crops. In Westlands, the final cost for water acquired on the water transfer market may be as much as \$150 to \$170 per acre-foot, compared to the approximately \$60 to \$70 per acre-foot for CVP contract supplies. There are very few crops that can be grown profitably with water at these costs.

Another consequence of the unreliable and inadequate character of CVP contract supplies is that it has become more difficult for farmers to invest in advanced and efficient irrigation techniques and higher value crops. For instance, it may cost as much as \$1200 - \$1500 per acre to install the most advanced computer controlled drip irrigation systems. A farmer is unable to make that investment if he is uncertain that water will be available to irrigate the crop necessary to recoup the investment. The uncertainty in water supplies that has resulted from the way CVPIA has been implemented actually frustrates one of the Act's purposes, to promote the efficient use of CVP water.

Another impact of the chronic water supply shortages caused by CVPIA is land fallowing. Until very recently farmers in Westlands would fallow significant portions of their lands simply because they did not have sufficient water to irrigate all of their lands. In approximately 2003, Westlands began a land acquisition program, and to date it has acquired approximately 98,000 acres, almost one-fifth of the irrigable acres in the District. Water previously used to irrigate these lands

is now allocated to other lands in the District that remain under irrigation to make up for the shortages resulting from CVPIA. Although the availability of this water is of benefit to the farmers, it comes at a significant price to both the farmers and the community. Farmers in the District pay annually a land-based charge of as much as \$22.55 per acre to repay the bonds issued to acquire the land, and as land is taken out of production there is a loss of jobs with associated economic impacts in the communities near Westlands. Over the long-term it is expected that the loss of jobs and tax revenues for local governments will be recovered because the more reliable water supplies made available by the land acquisition program enables farmers to better plan and plant higher valued crops; however, it will be many years before this recovery takes place.

Chronic water supply shortages caused by CVPIA also have negative environmental impacts. As a result of CVPIA, even in above normal and wet water years, CVP contract allocations are inadequate to irrigate all of the land that remain in production. To help replace water lost as a result of CVPIA many farmers rely on groundwater. The result of this necessary use of groundwater is that in wet and above normal water years, when the groundwater table should be allowed to recharge, groundwater is being extracted on an annual basis. This results in subsidence and a permanent loss of groundwater storage capacity. Because of water supply shortages resulting from CVPIA we are unable to practice sound principles of conjunctive use, so in the inevitable dry years, groundwater will not be available to meet needs that it could other satisfy.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this very important subject. I would be happy to respond to any questions, and I ask that my written testimony be made part of your record.