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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER
HEARING ON VALLEY'S WATER NEEDS UNMET DUE TO INADEQUATE STORAGE

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FRESNO, CALIFORNIA

The Meyers Farm Water Banking project (Bank) was created to store surplus surface water supplies available during wet years for later extraction from underground storage during dry years. The project provides a supplemental water supply so that agricultural operations can continue during drought periods when water becomes scarce and prohibitively expensive. A sustainable water supply is essential to Meyers Farming because the majority of its lands in San Luis Water District are planted to permanent crops (primarily almonds) that require irrigation every year.

In addition to direct agricultural benefits, the Bank plans to achieve several economic and environmental objectives. Some environmental benefits of the project are already apparent. Since water-banking activities began in 2002, approximately 11,000 acre-feet of water have been pumped from the Mendota Pool and infiltrated to the shallow aquifer for storage in an area where groundwater levels had been depressed due to heavy pumping during drought periods. Meyers Farming has pledged to leave five percent of the stored water in the aquifer in perpetuity. The project will raise the level of the water table, reduce the potential for overdraft, and improve groundwater quality. The recharge ponds also provide habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife.

Supplemental water pumped from the Bank will provide continued economic and employment security during dry years due to increased sustainability of agricultural operations. A critical economic problem facing San Joaquin Valley farmers is that when extreme water shortages occur, water costs escalate and many farmers are forced to fallow large areas of land. By extracting stored water as needed from the Bank, Meyers Farming can ensure continued agricultural operations and associated benefits to the local economy. The Bank will allow Meyers Farming to continue to support local businesses and its employees to continue to support their families even during drought years.

The Bank project also includes plans to create educational opportunities focused on the beneficial use of water for agriculture and wildlife habitat. A key goal is to demonstrate how responsible agricultural practices and sound water management can coexist and improve conditions for local wildlife. Educational outreach programs at the Bank are being coordinated by the Fresno County School District and Fresno State University.

Meyers Farming is practicing sound water management by storing water so that agricultural operations can be sustained during future water-short years. With the cooperation and support of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, San Luis Water District, and Spreckels Sugar Co., Meyers Farming has instituted a program that promotes conservation, efficient water use, groundwater recharge, wildlife habitat, educational outreach, and groundwater quality improvement. This program is unique in that all funds were generated privately; no public funds were used in the project's creation or continued operation.