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United States House of Representatives

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MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

I very much appreciate being given the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee to provide responses to your questions about impacts of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, particularly as they affect my community and the Friant Division of the federal Central Valley Project ("CVP"). I am testifying today as a member of the City Council of the City of Orange Cove, in Central California's San Joaquin Valley.

Introduction

My name is Diana Guerra Silva. I have been a resident of the City of Orange Cove for my entire life, having moved here from Texas with my parents when I was a baby. As an elected official and member of a community totally dependent upon agriculture, I am well aware that all of Orange Cove's municipal water use and nearly all farm irrigation water use depends upon supplies delivered from the Central Valley Project and the Friant-Kern Canal.

The City of Orange Cove has a population of 9,500 that is approximately 91 percent Hispanic. Many residents of Orange Cove are farm workers. They have jobs in the citrus and tree fruit industries, either on farms, in packing houses or in businesses like trucking and irrigation. I personally am very familiar with this. As a young and tender child of 8 years old, my parents introduced me to the life of a farm worker. I began to help my parents pick oranges at that young age, and continued to the age of 18 years. It was part of what a child and teenagers did while growing up in Orange Cove. It was our livelihood. The orange groves are and have been an integral part of not only my life, but countless others who grew up in Orange Cove and the surrounding communities up and down the valley. I have a deep respect and enduring love for the orange industry, and any other ag industry because they have not only helped to feed, clothe and pay bills for families, but also have helped educate our people, my people.

This is why water is so extremely important. It is imperative that Congress understand what a vital role that water and ag play in our communities in the valley. An adequate flow of water needs to be ensured to our communities. To receive adequate water is to ensure life to our community; to deny it is to cause our demise. I cannot think of any other one thing being so vital to us.

As our Mayor, Victor Lopez, has testified and told each of you in the past, irrigated agriculture and small family farms are the foundation for our economic activity, in Orange Cove and throughout the southern San Joaquin Valley. Without farms and related business activities, there are no jobs. Without water from the Friant-Kern Canal and San Joaquin River, there is simply no way for farming and its support businesses, not to mention its employment, to be sustained.

The Orange Cove Community

Please permit me to tell you a little about my town. Our city, Orange Cove, is in eastern Fresno County, 35 miles southeast of Fresno. We are made up of real people in the real world. There are 9,500 of us. We aren't big. Our city has about two square miles. About 51 acres are zoned for industrial use of which 35 acres are used by existing Orange Cove packing house operations. The City of Orange Cove is recognized as: 1) A HUD Federal Renewable Community (Provides tax incentives) and 2) An SBA HUB Zone (Provides Federal Procurement preferences).

Orange Cove has many challenges. We are ranked as one of the 5 poorest cities in the State of California with an average unemployment rate of 25% that is significantly above the California average. Median household income is \$22,357, a lot below the state average. Per Capita income of \$7,126 is also significantly below the California average. Some 45% of our people are below the poverty line. Orange Cove has a young population with 45% below the age of 19.

Approximately 91% of the population is Hispanic. Less than 27% of the population has a high school degree or higher. The majority of the local and school population is female.

Our city is working to develop more industrial diversification and commercial development. Present plans call for development of a 15 acre industrial site and 7 acre commercial site to create a minimum of 100 jobs within the next 12 months.

Orange Cove is rapidly growing! Currently there are 6 Residential Housing projects on line or under construction, representing 1,006 new housing units; and also 4 new Apartment projects representing 325 new apartment projects. This represents a 3,500 population increase (at 3.5 persons per dwelling unit) within the next 36 months. This housing increase continues to go on. Orange Cove's population is going to continue to grow.

The City of Orange Cove is surrounded by hundreds of acres of Navel and Valencia orange orchards that receive water from the Friant-Kern Canal system. Orange processing is a fairly year around operation. The area's citrus industry employs thousands of mostly Hispanic laborers either in the orchards or in the packing house operations. This is almost, singularly, the primary industry in eastern Fresno County and Tulare County. In Orange Cove there are four large packing house operations estimated to employ up to 3,000 regular and part time workers. These companies provide the primary jobs for the low skilled population and local workforce. They are: Sunny Cove Citrus, Boman Packing, Harding Leggett and Orange Cove – Sanger Citrus.

The City of Orange Cove receives 100% of its water delivery from the Friant-Kern Canal under a contract with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for Central Valley Project water and an arrangement for a supplemental supply with the Lower Tule River Irrigation District in Tulare.

County. Our city currently receives an allocation of 1,900 acre feet for water supply with an additional allocation, as needed.

We have a great concern that this supply of water from Friant Dam might be reduced. Any cutbacks to the water delivery system in the area will greatly impact the local economy and our community. The area citrus economy depends on a steady supply of water. Any reduction of this directly impacts community water needs; but just as importantly the economic livelihood of our community.

Orange Cove is already a distressed community, based on our demographic/social statistics and poverty and educational statistics. According to the 2000 Census, approximately 39% of the adult population is employed in agriculture. Agriculture is the mainstay of the local economy and provides the only existing venue for regular work, in the area, for the local and immigrant farm worker population. The majority of the Orange Cove population are low skilled due to lack of education. Any loss of water would make things worse with losses of jobs that are vitally needed in the struggling Orange Cove community. Without regular work and employment, the situation for local families and mothers becomes harder to survive.

Effects of the CVPIA

I must tell you that although I know that we must continue to have CVP water from the Friant-Kern and am aware of what that water means to all of us, I am not an expert on how the system works. I can tell you that since our city is a Friant contractor, Orange Cove has to deal with the same sorts of things caused by the Central Valley Project Improvement Act that others will be speaking about in more detail here this morning.

I know that the CVPIA was passed to help make the environment better. I doubt there is anyone who doesn't want to improve the environment. Our city and other contractors that get Central Valley Project water are concerned that the CVPIA is too unwieldy, has too many mandates, has been plagued by too many missed deadlines and has been way too costly. Millions and millions of dollars have been paid by Friant contractors into the CVPIA environmental restoration fund. I don't remember seeing any of that money doing anything to help our region but it has reduced our impoverished community's spending power.

Somewhere along the way Congress needs to straighten this law out and make its money go to work to improve things for the region where it originates. The CVPIA needs to be made more workable. Right here in Friant, the CVPIA should be helping us make water transfers simpler and encouraging groundwater recharge in wet years. It shouldn't be holding back good water management and making it too expensive to put water back into the ground when supplies are available.

The City of Orange Cove firmly believes that the CVPIA must be improved to recognize that water is our economic and social fuel. The government long ago made a decision to put the San Joaquin River to work to supply communities and districts such as ours with water. Millions of dollars have been spent in Orange Cove by people who have invested in homes

and businesses. Millions more have been spent by our city to improve the community. Why? Because all of us want to make things better, and we were willing to invest in our future because the government promised water would always be available. We can't survive if the water supply we must have simply runs down the river, especially if any such decision is not well reasoned and scientifically sound. We can't survive if the environmental fees we have to pay get so high that we can't afford the water we must have.

Friant Division

This isn't only true in the City of Orange Cove or in the Orange Cove Irrigation District that surrounds the city. It's true everywhere in the CVP's Friant Division, from Friant Dam and Millerton Lake right on down the 152-mile Friant-Kern Canal to Bakersfield and the 36-mile Madera Canal.

It is important to note that the Friant Division delivers an average of about 1,500,000 acre-feet of water. Many areas within the Friant Division are better off than Orange Cove because groundwater is available. Orange Cove relies fully on canal water.

We are not alone. The Cities of Fresno and Lindsay are also municipal and industrial contractors. And some other towns get Friant water, too—including Friant, Strathmore and Terra Bella. Friant and Terra Bella, like Orange Cove, are 100% dependant upon Friant water. Friant provides 40% of Fresno's city supply.

Friant Division Conjunctive Use and Water Management Efficiencies

The CVPIA was passed, at least in part, to encourage water conservation. That's exactly what Orange Cove's farmers have been doing for a long time. Along with extensive on-farm use of low-volume irrigation systems (like micro-sprinklers and drip) and return systems that are extremely effective at conserving and efficiently managing water, Friant water agencies have set up all sorts of efforts to conserve water. Right here in Orange Cove, the Orange Cove Irrigation District rebuilt all of its water distribution system to eliminate major problems, including water losses. Some 1,100 water meters were installed. New efficient pumps were developed.

A Tool For The Future

It is well known that the San Joaquin River is going to be restored. That was also one of the goals of the CVPIA in 1992.

Today, it is time for Congress to make the CVPIA work for the future. What do I mean? Just look around the valley, including our city. This is California's fastest growing region. We need to be making it easier to meet future water needs rather than harder. We need the CVPIA to be changed so we can get back to managing water wisely here in the valley. We need you to help us get what the river environment and the valley really need—a new dam, like the one being planned at Temperance Flat. We just can't let the CVPIA put fish ahead of people. There has to be a balance. Our community, our jobs, what we have—they all depend on it.

Conclusion

The Central Valley Project Improvement Act is a reality. It has been affecting the City of Orange Cove and other CVP contractors for nearly 14 years. It is a law with good-sounding aims but to those of us here in the valley all it has meant is a lot more restrictions, red tape and water costs—with not much in return. That needs to change.

Orange Cove is entirely dependent on the orange industry, and the orange industry and our community are completely dependent on water from the Friant-Kern Canal. Until now, we've lived with the CVPIA but it hasn't done anything to help us and has actually harmed us in some ways. President Bush has put into effect the "No Child Left Behind" act. I will add to this, with the CVPIA and other things going on that affect our water, let's make sure there is "No City Left Behind."

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.