

# California Farmers Face Another Year Without Federal Water

Bureau of Reclamation decision likely to create more crop losses

**Jim Carlton, Wall Street Journal, 2-28-15**

SAN FRANCISCO—California farmers face being cut off from federal water imports for the second straight year, in an unprecedented move likely to worsen crop losses in the nation's biggest agricultural state.

Citing declining reservoir levels amid a four-year drought, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation announced Friday its initial allocation of supplies from the federal Central Valley Project would again be set at zero, as it was in 2014. The agency said the allocation amount could be revised upward if the state gets more precipitation.

But that seems unlikely, given the fact January and February – normally two of California's wettest months – have come in nearly bone dry. With the California snowpack running just a fifth of its normal level for this time of year as a result, water managers say time is running out for any reprieve from late-season storms.

“The persistent dry weather the first two months of this year underscores our need to plan for another critical year of drought,” David Murillo, a Bureau of Reclamation regional director in Sacramento, Calif., said in a statement.

Farmers, meanwhile, say they will have to continue to fallow fields and take other cost-cutting measures as they try to wait out a drought they say has been worsened by federal regulatory restrictions on how water is allocated. Many get water from alternate sources, including wells or by buying it on the private market, but often at a much higher price than the federal supplies.

In 2014, the state's agriculture economy lost more than \$2.2 billion and more than 17,000 jobs as farmers fallowed nearly a half million acres of fields, according to estimates last year by the Center for Watershed Sciences at the University of California, Davis. Barring an unforeseen deluge, the losses this year are expected to be “a bit more” than that, said Jay Lund, the center's director.

“We could get lucky, but it looks like so far we will have a dry or critically dry year,” Dr. Lund said.

One of the hardest hit areas again will likely be the Westlands Water District in the southern part of the Central Valley, which gets all of its imported water supplies from the Central Valley Project. After 220,000 of the district's 614,000 acres were fallowed last year, spokeswoman Gayle Holman said “expect the same or more” for the current year.

Dan Errotabere, for example, said his family fallowed 1,200 of the 3,600 acres on their farm in the district last year, “and it will be that much or more this year.” Mr. Errotabere said this year the Fresno County farm likely won't plant vegetable crops like tomatoes and garlic so well water can be conserved to keep its almond orchards alive. As a result, he said, the farm likely will hire only “20 to 30” of the 80 seasonal workers it normally employs.

“This is as bad a drought as it comes,” said Mr. Erratobere, 59, whose family has farmed there since the 1920s.