

# Feds -- zero water for Central Valley farms

**Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee, 2-27-15**

Hundreds of farmers in the Central Valley were told Friday they can expect zero water deliveries this year from the federal government, the latest fallout from what is likely to be a fourth straight drought year in California.

The announcement came from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which operates a system of reservoirs and canals that make up the Central Valley Project. It mirrors a similar announcement last year that led to hundreds of thousands of farm acres being fallowed.

“We are bracing for a potential fourth year of severe drought, and this low initial allocation is yet another indicator of the dire situation,” David Murillo, Reclamation’s regional director, said in a statement.

Thad Bettner, general manager of the Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District, said the announcement was not a surprise given the dry weather that has stricken California again this winter.

“It’s going to be another rough spring, but I think we’ll make it work like we did last year,” he said.

The announcement also affects some urban water suppliers that rely on the Central Valley Project, including several that serve homes and businesses in suburban areas of Sacramento.

Shauna Lorange, general manager of San Juan Water District, said her agency was told it would receive enough water from Folsom Reservoir to meet health and safety needs, or 25 percent of historical use, whichever is greater.

But the district – which serves Orangevale, Fair Oaks, Folsom and other nearby communities – also has its own groundwater wells and separate water rights in the American River to draw from.

The district’s retail water customers reduced their water use 32 percent last year in response to the drought. Lorange said even more conservation likely will be required this year.

“My expectation is, based on the drier forecast, that it will become more critical this year,” she said.

The water allocation could improve if the weather brings more moisture to California. There are still several weeks left in the official winter period, and wet March storms have been known to help ease droughts in the past.

A relatively cold storm is bringing critical snow to the Sierra Nevada today and Saturday, although it is not expected to be a big snow producer.

“We’re hoping for a March miracle, but it would need to be a big March miracle to impact this drought,” Lorange said.