

# Blaming farmers is no substitute for a water solution

Johnny Amaral, Fresno Bee, 10-6-16

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The Bee Editorial Board's cavalier dismissal in a Sept. 30 editorial of the hardworking farmers in the San Joaquin Valley who are turning to groundwater to keep their farms alive is not only disappointing, it completely misses the real problem – a water system that is failing everyone.

The facts bear this out.

Farmers have fallowed more than 500,000 acres of land in 2016 – which means no water is being used on those agriculturally rich lands.

Local farmers also have spent millions of dollars on state-of-the-art water conservation systems to capture and reuse water. In fact, many urban areas are still catching up to the commitment and practices farmers have been using for many years.

Criticizing farmers for groundwater pumping ignores the reason they must turn to this option: Westlands Water District and other districts have received a zero allocation year after year for water they are contractually entitled to receive from the Central Valley Project. Since farmers again were denied water in the most recent season – a wet year no less – few can reasonably deny that the receipt of absolutely no water allocation is the ultimate in water conservation.

No other California industry that depends on water for business operations received such a harsh penalty when so much water was available.

The Bee correctly states that more groundwater pumping is happening now than in the past. Unfortunately, the editorial failed to point the finger at the core reason: failed federal water policies. Rather than blaming farmers for keeping their farms from dying, where is the outrage about the federal policies that have harmed farmers, fish, and communities?

While the rest of the state is enjoying job growth and economic gains, farm communities are seeing pervasive economic stress, job declines, a decline in the standard of living and an increase in regional homelessness. Has the state become so elitist that agricultural communities don't matter in relation to environmental activist goals of denying water to communities that rely on agriculture?

Symptoms are often easier to single out as the problem. The state of California and the media have been doing that for decades and our water system is worse off now than ever before. Rather than assigning blame to affected parties, The Bee should look beneath the surface at comprehensive solutions that will solve the supply problem, the groundwater problem, the fish problem, and the economic hardship problem.