



Deran Koligian
Supervisor, District 1
Board of Supervisors

Comments by Supervisor Deran Koligian
District One, Fresno County

CALFED Bay-Delta Program
Public Hearing
April 22, 1998

My name is Deran Koligian, Supervisor for District One in Fresno County, which for the last four decades have been the number one agricultural county in the nation. Fresno County literally feeds much of the nation and the world. For the last five years, our County has produced more than \$3 billion worth of farm commodities each year, with a record \$3.4 billion produced last year alone. This represents the highest gross production value of farm products over a 20-year span. This \$3 plus billion contributes more than \$11.9 billion annually to Fresno County's gross domestic product. From artichokes to zucchini, bok choy to turnips, Fresno County grows it all -- over 200 commercial commodities.

Fresno County's impressive agriculture is dependent on the fertile soils of the Valley floor, a long growing season, and a water delivery infrastructure that provide for the year round ability to irrigate crops. Those of us who have been involved with farming understand the importance of water to the production of our food and fiber products. In this Valley -- as in the rest of California -- water is life. If we run short of water or if it is reallocated away from agriculture, our economic base will literally dry up and wither away like the last leaf on an almost dormant grapevine.

I support a statewide effort to protect our water supplies, ensuring that a significant part of our county's agriculture does not dry up and wither away. The CALFED Bay-Delta Program presents an opportunity to fix the environmental problems in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the source of water for a large part of my Supervisorial District. The ultimate goal is to create a solution that will achieve environmental objectives in the Bay-Delta and improve water quality, water supply and reliability, thereby maintaining California's economy.

Farmers on the County's west side, which makes up about 25 percent of the county wide gross farm output, have seen reduced water supplies in seven of the last nine years -- in part because of the inability of getting water through an environmentally fragile Delta. The draft environmental impact report outlines options in a manageable set of alternatives that will lead to negotiations for an ultimate solution. We want to emphasize the importance of developing an integrated, balanced program that will address the water quality and environmental restoration issues, and restore the water supply reliability necessary to sustain our vital ag economy.

To be successful and provide a balanced workable solution, the preferred alternative of the CALFED Program must include the best elements of the three submitted proposals. Water conservation and recycling, and water transfers are elements included in the proposals. These approaches are already in place, and have been a common practice for our farmers for many years. We know that these elements alone will not solve the problems in the Delta and are not enough to meet California's growing water supply needs.

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The ultimate solution must include new water storage and conveyance facilities. Surface and groundwater storage facilities in various sizes are critical to a Bay-Delta solution. Added storage north and south of the Delta will provide more flexibility in meeting ag, urban, and environmental needs. Without additional water storage and conveyance facilities, we will only exchange problems without creating solutions.

There is great concern for the CALFED component of farmland retirement as a tool to reduce demand for water. Taking farmland out of production to free up a water supply creates deep concern for the economies of the Valley. Removing thousands of acres of crop land -- upwards of 200,000 acres on the west side of Fresno County would result in lost jobs, impacts to groundwater, and a reduction in property tax revenues. Our fiscally strapped counties would feel the adverse impacts from retiring farmland.

My District has already seen what can happen when water leaves the area. A Study by the California Institute for Rural Studies accurately presented impacts from on-farm water reductions and the trickle-down impact that occurred in Mendota during the early 1990s from the drought. Ag land values dropped 30 percent compared with increases in land values in other areas of the County. Retail sales in Mendota dropped 11 percent, at a time when the county wide retail sales showed a four percent gain. And up to 720 farm workers were affected, as cropping changes resulted in a net decrease of 362,000 hours of ag field labor, or about \$2.2 million in lost wages.

Actions that result in lost jobs at a time to double digit unemployment in the County are absolutely unacceptable. With one job in six dependent on agriculture in our County, farmland retirement and conversion would have additional negative impacts on employment.

With increased unemployment comes increased demand for social services. City and county governments provide many of these services. Any reduction of local tax revenues would make this increased hard pressed to manage. Also, recent welfare reform requires aid recipients to find employment within a given period. A reduction in the demand for labor will impede the ability of people to make the transition from welfare to work.

Taking farmland out of production while proactive discussions with local leaders from agriculture, business, and the building industry are formulating plans to keep farmland in production is incongruous. The loss of farmland is already occurring as our Valley's population continues to grow. It is projected that Fresno County could lose almost 19 percent of its irrigated farmland by the year 2040. We cannot afford to lose any more due to insufficient water supplies.

All water savings must remain within the water district boundaries or be transferred to other water district's within the originating county boundary. Fresno County is on record that it opposes any water transfers outside its boundaries.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the CALFED Program. Fresno County has a vested interest in developing a balanced solution that will benefit all of the State. CALFED's success in developing a fair deal for all Californians will directly determine our economic future.

