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What California agriculture would like from Calfed

By Daniel K. Macon
Special to The Bee

THIS YEAR WILL mark some of the most significant decisions about California's water supply to be made in a half-century. Our success depends upon finding a water policy that ensures that California's farmers, cities and environment get better together. The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is at the heart of that solution.

Much of the state's most productive farmland is irrigated with water flowing to or through the Delta. More than two thirds of California's urban population depends on water exported from the Delta. Numerous plant and animal species, including the chinook salmon and the Delta smelt, depend upon the estuary for habitat.

Calfed, a consortium of state and federal agencies, is completing a plan to rehabilitate the Delta while provid-

ing sufficient water for farmers and cities. As with any planning effort of this magnitude, the Calfed process has been controversial. Farmers and rural communities both upstream and downstream from the Delta are concerned that they would have to relinquish water, damaging local economies. The agencies that supply urban California with water for drinking and industrial uses are similarly concerned. The environmental community fears the Calfed agencies will not go far enough in restoring the Delta ecosystem.

Despite these mutual fears, the concept that we must all get better together has kept each party at the table.

The California Farm Water Coalition believes any solution to managing the Delta must be based on the assumption that agriculture is crucial to the state's economy and environment. With more than \$24 billion in on-farm receipts and more than \$70 bil-

lion in related economic activity, according to the 1997 California Agriculture Resource Directory, agriculture is a leading economic force in California. In addition, farmers provide habitat for plants and animals that continue to be pushed out of growing urban areas. Indeed, farming and ranching make the state's open spaces economically feasible.

We also believe that the Calfed solution must increase storage capacity, both north and south of the Delta. The state has not increased storage significantly in 30 years, yet our population has skyrocketed with projections placing the population at nearly 50 million by 2030. We cannot expect to meet these increasing demands by carving up the same water supply pie.

Finally, Calfed must provide assurances about the quantity and quality of water for farmers. Growers need to

know how much water they will receive to obtain financing and to engage in long-term business planning

The importance of water to every Californian makes the decisions we face in 1998 complex indeed. As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the discovery of gold here, we have the opportunity to prove Mark Twain's adage wrong: While water may have been for fighting over during the Gold Rush, let us hope that 1998 brings a solution to the state's water wars that will benefit all of us.

Daniel K. Macon is the executive director of the California Farm Water Coalition, a nonprofit, nonlobbying organization dedicated to informing the public about the contributions of irrigated agriculture to California's economy and environment

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