

97-472

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23443 S. Hays Road  
Manteca, CA 95337  
December 14, 1997

The Honorable Pete Wilson  
Governor of California  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Water policy versus food supply

Dear Governor Wilson:

I urge you to address the disconnect between long range planning for development and allocation of the State's water supply versus long range planning for the food supply. I applaud your effort, and that of Secretary Veneman, to market abroad our current surplus production of food. However, it is not clear to me and to others in agriculture that this surplus won't become a deficit when the population rises to forecasted levels in the State and Nation in less than three decades. This is particularly worrisome in view of current proposals to transfer very large quantities of water from agriculture to urban and environmental uses, and in view of the degree to which current food supplies are being grown with unsustainably overdrafted groundwater in both the State and elsewhere in the Nation. My concern is related to my role as a member of BDAC, as a County Farm Bureau Director, as an engineer, and as a grandfather.

We are not aware of any thoughtful analysis of the amount of water that will be needed to grow adequate food and fiber for the state's future population in a year such as 2025, while also continuing to contribute California's present share of the Nation's food supply for the forecasted future U.S. population. How does this future agricultural water need compare to the agricultural water supply that would be available at that time if current Cal Fed, CVPIA, and other water supply proposals prevail and if current rates of groundwater overdraft can not be sustained? If there is insufficient water available to meet that need, even with no net food exports, we will then have to compete for food on the world market. Would we then be vulnerable to a political cutoff of supplies? What will be the probable price and availability of food and fiber on the world market at that time?

Unless we are willing to become dependent on imported food and fiber we will always need more water per capita to grow food than to meet the population's other consumptive water needs. However, current plans for water supply and water allocation in California will clearly result in a very substantial reduction in the per capita allocation of water to grow food, probably to half or less of the present level. Most crop scientists believe it is very unlikely that we can achieve any such increase in the amount of food grown per acre foot of water consumed by crops. (In the

Central Valley unconsumed water is nearly all recaptured and reused). We cannot conceive that such a large reduction in per capita allocation of water to grow food is in the long range best interest of future Californians.

We believe that prudent long range planning should include careful examination of this relationship between water policy and the future food supply. Neither the Cal Fed program nor our State and Federal administrative institutions with their divisions of responsibility, have evidenced much interest in this assessment. We believe this is a very important and fundamental issue that is not likely to be addressed without your personal attention.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,

  
Alex Hildebrand

cc Secretary Douglas Wheeler  
Secretary Ann Veneman  
David Kennedy  
Lester Snow