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Water hearings hold key to Valley's future

Hearings begin this month on government proposals that will greatly impact all water users in the Central Valley.

Results of a four-year study to solve environmental and water problems in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and the San Francisco Bay are finally surfacing. The choices have been narrowed to three alternatives in what is commonly called the CAL-Fed/bay-delta process.

The nearest public sessions for Tulare County residents will be Wednesday, April 22, at the Ramada Inn at 324 E. Shaw Ave., Fresno, or April 29 at the Kern Agricultural Pavilion, 501 S. Mount Vernon Ave., in Bakersfield.

The meetings will begin at 6 p.m. with informal staff discussion. The formal hearing process gets under way at 7 p.m. Sessions will be in 10 other locations throughout the state through May.

"We at Farm Bureau cannot



stress enough the need for our members and other concerned citizens to attend the hearings and make our voices heard," said TCFB President David Sharp. "We're greatly concerned that what we see in the three proposals does not appear to meet agriculture's need for future water availability."

Need for delta fix

"We don't dispute the need to provide long term solutions to

keep the bay-delta a viable water transfer zone," Sharp said. "We just want it to be fair to San Joaquin Valley farmers."

Sharp listed several concerns and questions being raised by the agricultural community:

■ **Loss of farmland** — Up to 1 million acres of productive farmland could be lost, depending on how much land is set aside for flood control, waterway easement or storage.

■ **New water supplies** — Farm Bureau is greatly concerned that little is being said about water stability and the need for new supplies. The state's population is predicted to increase by 50 million people before 2020. This growth coupled with an existing ground water overdraft situation in the Valley makes it imperative

that new water storage must be part of the solution.

■ **Water rights** — California's farmers and ranchers depend on well-established water rights to maintain their livelihood and way of life. CAL-Fed must ensure that both surface and ground water rights will be protected and even enhanced. Area of origin rights must be fully recognized.

A 167-paged report provides a comprehensive picture of where the CAL-Fed process is heading. It can be ordered by calling the CAL-Fed information office at (800) 900-3587.

The Tulare County Farm Bureau Report appears twice a month in Thursday's Farm-Business. For more information, contact the Farm Bureau at 732-8301.