

At World Ag Expo, Jerry Brown vows to push for federal drought relief

By Robert Rodriguez

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TULARE — Gov. Jerry Brown paid a brief visit to the World Ag Expo on Wednesday vowing to push for federal relief for a record-setting drought that has plagued the state.

Brown made a quick mention of President Barack Obama's visit to Fresno on Friday where Obama is expected to discuss the drought and its impact on the region.

Three consecutive dry years have forced farmers in the San Joaquin Valley to fallow thousands of acres, resulting in fewer jobs in rural communities. Ranchers have had to pay escalating prices for hay because of the lack of grasses in the Valley's rangelands.

"We want him (Obama) to see the devastation of the drought and how serious it is and how we need the federal government to invest in water projects," Brown said. "What we need in California is to protect the quality of water and how to use it efficiently as possible."

Last month, Brown declared a drought state of emergency and directed his staff to prepare for water shortages. He also has pledged his support for drought-relief legislation introduced by California Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer and Reps. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, Tony Cardenas, D-San Fernando Valley and Sam Farr, D-Carmel.

Brown hoped partisan politics would not divide the efforts to give California's drought-stricken farmers some help. Feinstein's and Boxer's bill seeks \$300 million in aid to farmers through a variety of programs.

"The two parties like to fight," Brown said. "But that doesn't help farmers and it doesn't help California. And it does not help the country."

Along with taking a brief tour of the expo, Brown also met privately on the show's grounds with members of the Agricultural Council of California, a farm advocacy group.

Visitors at the expo said they were thankful the governor came to the expo, if only briefly. He last visited during his first stint as governor nearly 30 years ago.

"He should be here," said Carolyn Lack of Bakersfield. "Farmers are really hurting and they need water badly."

Lack, who works for Rain for Rent, a Bakersfield-based irrigation company, said her company has seen a rise in interest in water-saving solutions.

"Everyone is trying to do what they can," she said.

Tree fruit farmer Tim Thiesen said farmers are resilient by nature, but there is only so much you can do without water.

"We are farmers and we have adapted to all the regulations we have to meet," said Thiesen, who farms in the Dinuba area. "But without water we simply can't farm."

Thursday is the final day of the World Ag Expo, the largest farm equipment trade show of its kind. On tap will be a forum on water from 12:30 to 3 p.m. in the International Agri-Center's Heritage Complex. State and federal water officials along with local government leaders and farmers will discuss the state's water crisis.

47th World Ag Expo

When:

Thursday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Where: International Agri-Center, just east of Highway 99 in Tulare

Cost: \$15 general admission at the gate. Children 12 and younger free

Parking: Free on the expo grounds, but free, off-site parking is encouraged. A Park and Ride shuttle is available

Website: www.worldagexpo.com

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