

Drought prompts Valley leaders to ask for help in Washington, D.C.

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FRESNO, Calif. (KFSN) -- As the drought continues, about 20 local leaders are in Washington and will meet with lawmakers to ask for help.

Experts from cities including Fresno, Clovis and San Joaquin are scheduled to meet lawmakers in the nation's capital this week. The goal is to give senators and staff members from the Obama administration a better picture of the impact this drought will have on jobs, food prices and our local economy.

Pumps are constantly running to draw water for Keith Nilmeier's citrus orchards.

"The way I see it, this year we are going to pump almost everything and it's going to cost a lot more money," said Nilmeier.

The fourth-generation farmer expects orange prices to go up in the coming months because the dry weather paired with this year's deep freeze drove down the supply of the fruit.

Right now, a group of Valley representatives is in Washington, D.C., to lobby on behalf of growers and thousands of farm workers who are expected to lose their jobs as thousands of acres of land are fallowed this summer.

"I expect in that discussion we are going to focus on the president's visit and the water issue we are facing in the Valley," said the Latino Water Coalition's Mario Santoyo.

Santoyo plans to ask key staff members in the Obama administration to back the building of new water reservoirs in our area. Some city leaders also want to relax current environment laws, which they say keeps too much water away from those who depend on it.

"The effect on the farmers is going to trickle down to all the business and the community because agriculture is our economic engine," said San Joaquin's Mayor Amarpreet Dhaliwal.

The delegation is also expected to address other issues and projects which impact our area, including air quality and high-speed rail. The meetings are scheduled to start on Monday and wrap up on Wednesday.



Mariana Jacob