

# UC President Napolitano tours Valley to see drought's impact

BY HANNAH FURFARO

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On her way to visit the Kearney Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Parlier on Monday, University of California President Janet Napolitano got a bird's eye view of California cropland and rivers dry from the drought -- a sight she hopes the universities can help fix through continued research and outreach.

Flying from Oakland to first see the Sacramento River and then the San Joaquin River, Napolitano did an aerial tour of California's heartland before making a stop to meet with her top agricultural advisers about a food security and sustainability initiative she's due to unveil this spring. The university leader was mum on the details, but said all 10 UC campuses -- and its research centers -- will be part of the plan.

"There are areas that clearly are being allowed to remain fallow due to drought, there are hills that should be green that are brown, and there are reservoirs where you can clearly see the water mark," she said. "Through the extension service we will work with growers throughout the state to manage this the best way possible."

It was Napolitano's first visit to the 330-acre center -- one of nine UC agriculture research hubs that dot California -- where she took a tour of the canola, walnut and blueberry crops planted there.

Her visit comes as California faces a third year of drought and one of the driest years on record. Napolitano said the UC system will do its part to help farmers find relief.

For example, she said, UC Merced could soon play a more prominent role in agricultural research.

The UC system has a long history of conducting research and outreach to farmers in the Valley's farmlands. Kearney employees alone do between 85 and 100 agriculture studies annually, said director Jeff Dahlberg.

Ryan Jacobsen, Fresno County Farm Bureau executive director, said growers' relationship with the UC's extension field offices has historically played a big role in the success of the Valley's agricultural economy. Advances made in the lab -- whether it's new seed varieties or planting

techniques -- quickly make it to the farms, he said, in large part because of how well regional centers work with farmers.

He said the West Side Research and Extension Center, located in Five Points north of Huron, has been particularly helpful with training programs and research designed to aid Valley farmers.

"There's no secret the water supplies for our west side have been declining over the last decade, and measuring every drop has been important," Jacobsen said. "Whether it's to find new varieties, find new ways to utilize conservation and irrigation practices, they do a lot of the trials and simulations to figure out what works."

Farmers can use all the help they can get to help manage crops as the dry spell continues, said Gayle Holman, spokeswoman for the 600,000-acre Westlands Water District.

Growers that typically use water from the district's pipeline are expecting zero water allocation this summer. Holman said an estimated 200,000 acres from Firebaugh to Kettleman City will go unplanted. Many farmers will turn to groundwater --which could be saltier and a less desirable alternative in some regions -- to avoid even greater loss.

More university research on how to best use pumped water would be helpful, Holman said.

"No matter how much conservation is in place, a crop still requires water," she said. "You're never going to get around that, so trying to look at different ways a farmer can improve their operation is always welcomed."

*The reporter can be reached at (559) 441-6412, [hfurfaro@fresnobee.com](mailto:hfurfarofresnobee.com) or [@hannahfurfaro](https://twitter.com/hannahfurfaro) on Twitter.*