

Local leaders decry drought inaction

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1 Comment

Javier Guzman, member of the Water for Land Committee, speaks out against the recent decision to delay drought-relief legislation until 2015. The Fresno Area Hispanic Foundation held a press conference today denouncing the delay in drought legislation until 2015.

The group was joined by representatives from the Downtown Business Hub, Fresno County Farm Bureau, California Farm Water Coalition, California Water Alliance and several concerned community members.

"We're entering a very critical time for [Fresno County]," said Ryan Jacobsen, CEO of the Fresno County Farm Bureau. "If we don't get our act together and do something now we're going to be in the same situation as this year or a worse situation."



Many of the speakers denounced Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) for her recent decision to delay any drought legislation until next year. The legislation would have helped ease restrictions on movement of water in the Central Valley and relieve some of the strain Fresno County and its farming communities are facing.

That strain has become too much and Fresno County families cannot afford to wait any longer, local leaders said. Already, long lines have been seen at local food banks, farmland lies fallow and whole communities are having to rely on portable showers as their wells run dry.

"This choice of inaction is flying directly in the face of those individuals and organizations who are here today," said Aubrey Bettencourt, executive director of the California Water Alliance.

This year, farmers on both the east and west side received a 0 percent water allocation and little is expected to change in 2015, Jacobsen said.

The three-year drought has already had a profound impact on the local economy and is expected to get worse as the area experiences an unprecedented fourth year of drought, said Javier Guzman, member of the Water for Land Committee.

"The economic stability of our rural towns is being threatened," he said. "Children and families are being dislocated every day as people move in search of jobs."

What legislators like Feinstein fail to realize, Guzman said, is that even if the area receives better rainfall this year, it will still not be enough to cure the effects of the drought.

"The drought has already lasted for three years, but we'll be feeling its effects for the next 10 to 15," he said.

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