

Valley Edition: Why Are Almonds At The Heart Of California's Water Wars?



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California's drought and last week's mandatory water cutbacks announced by Governor Jerry Brown have ignited a national controversy over valley agriculture. Brown called for a mandatory 25 percent reduction in water use by residents in cities, but his order left out agriculture.

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Of course, many farmers have already had their water deliveries cut to zero this year, but instead, they've turned to pumping groundwater to keep their orchards alive. That's angered many who claim the state's precious groundwater is being squandered to produce crops like almonds for foreign consumption.



So why have almond orchards become the latest political lightning rod over water in California? And how long can local growers continue to pump groundwater to keep their orchards alive?

We talk the politics and business of water and almonds on Valley Edition with:

Joe Del Bosque, a San Joaquin Valley almond grower

DEL BOSQUE: "We have to try and protect our permanent crops. When we don't have sufficient water, like we haven't had for many years, we have to cut back on the annual crops. With almonds and some of the other permanent crops that we have large investments in the orchards that have been established, we are trying the best we can not to lose them."

DEL BOSQUE: "Out on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley and the Central Valley Project we have had an unreliable water supply now for about 25 years, but we have adapted. For the first 10 to 15 years we went to efficient irrigation systems, we changed crops to higher valued crops . . . but since 2009 the game has changed and our water supply is quite uncertain now and although we plan our water literally a year in advance, next year looks like the end of the road."

Anja Raudabaugh, Madera County Farm Bureau

RAUDABAUGH: "Well simply put there's no more water for us to cut back. We've been denied our surface supplies for the last two years in a row. We've also received 15 percent or less from the state water project. So the reason we are even able to survive is because we're basically pumping groundwater."

Adam Scow, Director of Food and Water Watch

SCOW: "We're very concerned about the alarming rates of groundwater depletion. If we lose our groundwater, that is it. It took hundreds of years for it to get there; we need to have some sensible limits and some protection for groundwater right now. There's some legislation that past last year, but it's not up to snuff. We need Governor Brown and the water board to start having some sensible limits on groundwater pumping."

