

# No, Farmers Don't Use 80 Percent of California's Water

by [Devin Nunes](#) April 14, 2015 12:45 PM

The statistic is manufactured by environmentalists to distract from the incredible damage their policies have caused.

As the San Joaquin Valley undergoes its third decade of government-induced water shortages, the media suddenly took notice of the California water crisis after Governor Jerry Brown announced statewide water restrictions. In much of the coverage, supposedly powerful farmers were blamed for contributing to the problem by using too much water.

"Agriculture consumes a staggering 80 percent of California's developed water, even as it accounts for only 2 percent of the state's gross domestic product," [exclaimed](#) *Daily Beast* writer Mark Hertsgaard in a piece titled "How Growers Gamed California's Drought." That 80-percent statistic was [repeated](#) in a *Sacramento Bee* article titled, "California agriculture, largely spared in new water restrictions, wields huge clout," and in an ABC News [article](#) titled "California's Drought Plan Mostly Lays Off Agriculture, Oil Industries." Likewise, the *New York Times* dutifully [reported](#), "The [State Water Resources Control Board] signaled that it was also about to further restrict water supplies to the agriculture industry, which consumes 80 percent of the water used in the state."

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This is a textbook example of how the media perpetuates a false narrative based on a phony statistic. Farmers *do not* use 80 percent of California's water. In reality, 50 percent of the water that is captured by the state's dams, reservoirs, aqueducts, and other infrastructure is diverted for environmental causes. Farmers, in fact, use *40 percent* of the water supply. Environmentalists have manufactured the 80 percent statistic by deliberately excluding environmental diversions from their calculations. Furthermore, in many years there are additional millions of acre-feet of water that are simply flushed into the ocean due to a lack of storage capacity — a situation partly explained by environmental groups' opposition to new water-storage projects.

It's unsurprising that environmentalists and the media want to distract attention away from the incredible damage that environmental regulations have done to California's water supply. Although the rest of the state is now beginning to feel the pinch, these regulations sparked the San Joaquin Valley's water crisis more than two decades ago. The Endangered Species Act spawned many of these regulations, such as rules that divert usable water to protect baby salmon and a 3-inch baitfish called the Delta smelt, as well as rules that protect the striped bass, a non-native fish that — ironically — eats both baby salmon and smelt. Other harmful regulations stem from legislation backed by environmental groups and approved by Democratic-controlled Congresses in 1992 and 2009. These rules have decimated water supplies for San Joaquin farmers and communities, resulting in zero-percent water allocations and the removal of increasing amounts of farmland from production.

One would think the catastrophic consequences of these environmental regulations would be an important part of the reporting on the water crisis. But these facts are often absent, replaced by a fixation on the 80 percent of the water supply that farmers are falsely accused of monopolizing. None of the four articles cited above even mention the problem of environmental diversions. The same holds true for a recent interview with Governor Brown on ABC's *This Week*. In that discussion, host Martha Raddatz focused almost exclusively on farmers' supposed overuse of the water supply, and she invoked the 80 percent figure twice. The governor himself, a strong proponent of environmental regulations, was silent about the topic during the interview, instead blaming the crisis on global warming.

That is no surprise — President Obama also ignored environmental regulations but spoke ominously about climate change when he addressed the water crisis during a visit to California's Central Valley in February 2014. Indeed, for many on the left, the California water crisis is just another platform for proclaiming their dogmatic fixation on fighting global warming, a campaign that many environmental extremists have adopted as a religion.

You don't have to take my word for it; just listen to Rajendra Pachauri, former head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which is the United Nations' foremost body on global warming. After recently leaving his job amid allegations of sexual harassment, Pachauri wrote in his resignation letter: "For me, the protection of Planet Earth, the survival of all species and sustainability of our ecosystems is more than a mission. It is my religion and my dharma."

Utterly convinced of the righteousness of their crusade, environmental extremists stop at nothing in pursuing their utopian conception of "sustainability." The interests of families, farmers, and entire communities — whose very existence is often regarded as an impediment to sustainability — are ignored and derided in the quest for an ever-more pristine environment free from human contamination. In the name of environmental purity, these extremists have fought for decades to cut water supplies for millions of Californians.

The drought is a genuine problem in California, but our irrigation system was designed to withstand five years of drought. The reason we have a crisis now is not that farmers are using too much water. It's not because of global warming, and it's not even because of the drought. The reason is this: Environmental regulations and U.S. law have caused huge water-flow diversions for environmental causes and have prevented us from using our irrigation system to its full capacity.

The House of Representatives has passed three bills in the last three years that would have expanded California water supplies by rolling back damaging environmental regulations. These bills died amid opposition from Senate Democrats, Governor Brown, and President Obama.

Someday the media should take notice.

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