

# Danielle Shapazian: Stop shaming Valley farmers

By Danielle  
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A random tweet about slut-shaming recently caught my eye. The author argued that a person of such indiscretion is not capable of shame. The truly shame-prone wouldn't behave so badly in the first place.

The logic is flawed. Slut-shaming is often a power play, social class and gender creating a double-standard which undermines. When have you heard a woman of means called a slut? Or a man?

Hyphen-shaming seems the linguistic trend du jour. By now, we've all heard of almond-shaming. The concept can be easily expanded to farmer-shaming. Then there is water-shaming. Many Californians, in their acts of dowsing, wield magical sticks, hitting growers on the head with disjointed accusations. How greedy those Valley farmers! How shameful their crop choices!

America has become far removed from its agrarian beginnings. Puritans turned renegade, certain opinion leaders don't seem to understand that without the sustenance of food and water, their mouths spew nothing but arrogant dreams. Where is Thomas Jefferson when you need him?

We do have Freud, who suggested that shame is related to exposure. And exposed we are. Brown patches of lawn. Water in our gutters. Almond milk on a grocery shelf, down the aisle from stone fruit grown in Chile. Have you seen all the baby trees growing on Temperance Avenue?

I confess. I have been a shamer myself, a flaw manifesting 25 years ago when the plan was made to remove the vineyard on our family farm. I didn't like that decision. I let my opinion be known. I threw in some sentimental whining. Those grapevines were the backdrop of my youth, the soft loam a stage where my nascent dreams grew as sweet as the golden berries. No bulldozer or free market was going to take that from me.

Eventually, I conceded that it was reasonable to try something new. The odd-looking plums came first — tasty, but commercially ho-hum. Later, I didn't care so much when the plums were yanked for nectarines.

I made noise again following the decision to raze our barn. One could smell the layers of time between those walls, the fading promise of tractor oil and hay that fed horses that pulled a plow. The structure was a fire hazard on the brink of collapse. I didn't care. I remembered how, as a child, I would look from our kitchen window toward its pitched roof and see the sun rise over the Sierra. From the banks of the deep irrigation ditch that ran next to its corral, my brothers and I would launch inner tubes and float in the cool water, our hands quick rudders guiding us lazily downstream.

The simple truth is that change is difficult. In these dry days, our emotions bubble as our wells collapse. Our confidence is sinking right along with the topography.

We profess to be magnanimous. Let's face this challenge together. Live and let live. Plant what the spirit and the market demand. Yet, it doesn't take much to tip us toward the urbanites' crushing mockery: Farmers are fools. Especially the thirsty ones.

In 1787, Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Agriculture... is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals, and happiness."

Why shouldn't we stand proud as we feed the world, walking our rows, plucking a grape or almond or tomato or orange and delighting in its sweet taste?

Of course, I miss our old vineyard and the sunsets it framed. Next to the young orchard, a new vineyard came later, growing ever so strong on a plot of land that used to be a cow pasture. The irrigation canal — the floater's paradise of my youth — is bone dry for a third year. We pray for water even as we learn not to waste.

In my book of definitions, a slut is someone who shares herself with cruel takers who grab what they need in hungry indifference. They want her, they use her, they easily turn away. They harrow her heart despite their skin in the game.

We must protect our dear San Joaquin from such empty fate. Fecund and giving, she doesn't deserve the Scarlet W the shamers have placed on her chest.

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