

## **Action Required to Secure Reliable Water and Safe Food**

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Water is the key to the American West. Food security is as vital to our homeland security as our nation's other strategic interests, and the production of food and fiber on Western irrigated lands is critical to our nation's ability to feed itself. At a time when other countries are banning tainted food imported from China – the world's largest food producer – the importance of our nation's ability to provide safe food cannot be overstated.

And a reliable water supply is essential to providing the foundation that support's our country's food production capacity.

As the West has grown, water issues have become increasingly polarized. We face a number of significant challenges in the Western water arena. Growing urbanization and increased public demand for available supplies to provide recreational and environmental benefits are placing heavy demands on Western water, the key ingredient in the production of agricultural products.

Environmental enhancement and mitigation programs are competing for existing sources of water. Across the West, environmental activists have attempted to redirect water to environmental uses through litigation and negative media campaigns, without adequate public process or regard for prior commitments. These actions have caused major conflicts, costly lawsuits and delayed benefits for endangered species and the environment.

There is a better way. Solutions to these complex issues can be found by reasoned, well intentioned people. Water users care about the environment. Creative, successful solutions can be found by motivated, unthreatened parties. Incentives that create reasons to succeed will do more good for the environment in a shorter period of time than actions that rely on threats of government intervention. Successful incentives will ultimately reduce occasions for judges to be forced to substitute their own judgment for that of professionals and stewards of the land.

Some argue that Western irrigated agriculture uses too much water. Others insist that a healthy rural economy is driven by farmers and their production of food and fiber. Everyone can agree, however, that reallocating scare water supplies from farms to cities and instream demands will alter the rural West's fabric. Although the debate is often divisive, these challenges can be addressed by thoughtful, motivated and reasonable parties.

Inaction in this regard really is action. By not seeking creative ways to streamline the regulatory process associated with repairing existing water storage and delivery facilities and creating new water infrastructure, the inevitable and foreseeable action that will follow is a deterioration of the status quo. Lack of active planning will allow water-short cities and new recreational and environmental demands to absorb farmers' water supplies. It will significantly diminish domestic food production at exactly the same time climate change may severely and adversely impact food production worldwide. We must plan for that now, and not wait until we are forced to make decisions during a crisis.

Solutions will not come easily. They will require visionary leadership and a firm commitment to a balanced, workable policy. But opportunities exist, if we are prepared to seize them.