



August 3, 2015

The Honorable Jared Huffman
U.S. House of Representatives
1630 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Drought Relief and Resilience Act

Dear Representative Huffman,

You recently introduced the Drought Relief and Resilience Act aimed at helping California respond to the worst drought in state history. We applaud your efforts to expand the public debate around this issue. While we haven't fully examined every element of your bill there are a few concepts that we find encouraging. For example, Western Growers strongly supports the need to create new innovative financing structures for water projects. The need to build new water storage capacity, whether above or below ground, is vital in California and throughout the western United States. If we married new thinking on financing as you suggest with new thinking on environmental streamlining, versions of which were offered (and later approved) in the last Congress in both the highway bill and WRRDA by Senator Boxer, then water storage and capacity projects can be built in an expeditious manner.

However, we believe Title III, Subtitle D (Improved Reclamation Crop Data) of your legislation should be deleted. This section of your bill would require the Bureau of Reclamation to determine if "water-intensive permanent crops" have been planted by agricultural users of federally-developed water supplies during drought emergencies over the past ten years. The Secretary of the Interior would be required to submit a report to Congress that details the number and location of acres, types, and projected impact of identified "water-intensive permanent crops." For purposes of your legislation, "water-intensive permanent crops" are defined as any crop considered by the Department of the Interior "to be unsustainable for an area given its expected level of rainfall in the absence of the federally developed water supply." This seems a transparent precursor to an attempt to dictate, by government fiat, which crops farmers are allowed to grow. The U.S. economy is based on free markets and the laws of supply and demand, which generally results in the most efficient and economically beneficial uses of limited resources (including water during a drought).

This language states that any crop with water demands that exceed the expected level of rainfall in a given area is unsustainable, the implication being that such crops should not be grown in that region. By this logic, civilization in the majority of western states is unsustainable. The Reclamation Act was enacted for the very purpose of managing natural resources in the West to provide flood protection, water and power for growing cities, and water supplies for farmers in areas with high food-production potential. The dams, power plants, and canals built and operated by the Bureau of Reclamation (and the California Department of Water Resources) propelled California forward as an economic giant and one of the most productive food-producing regions in the world. Nowhere else can you grow more food with as much resource-efficiency as in California, and we believe that is the very definition of sustainable.

WESTERN GROWERS

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As you continue to refine your legislation and participate in debates in the coming weeks, we ask that you remove Title III, Subtitle D.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Nassif".

Tom Nassif
President & CEO
Western Growers