

U.S. Western Water Crisis Means World Food Shortage

by Marcia Merry Baker and Patrick Ruckert

March 24—The California Farm Water Coalition on March 17 issued its latest estimate of Central Valley farmland going unplanted in 2014, due to lack of water, from 500,000 to 800,000 acres (323,749 hectares). This approaches one-third of the Central Valley agriculture area, which ranks among the world's most productive. This forced fallowing results from the cut-off of water allocations to the irrigation districts, under the severe water shortage in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River management systems.

The dramatic California situation is the front-end of the crisis unfolding throughout the Western states, concentrated in the High Plains and Southwest. The Sacramento-San Joaquin Rivers watershed, in recent history, is the largest, in terms of volume of flow, of the three main watersheds of the drylands region—known historically as the “Great American Desert.” Now the flow, after three years of drought, is at a disaster level. The flow and storage in the other two river basins—the Colorado and the Rio Grande (Rio Bravo)—are likewise in crisis.

Meantime, decades of resorting to ever deeper groundwater have resulted in water shortages and major land subsidence.

No Short-Term Solution

The current crisis was decades in the making, at the least, and *cannot* be solved in the short term, although palliative measures in terms of more efficient water

usage will have to be taken. Scientists have recently reported that the lack of precipitation in the Western states is likely to be long-lasting, and even to get worse, as the recent decades have been an historically “wet” period in the region's history.

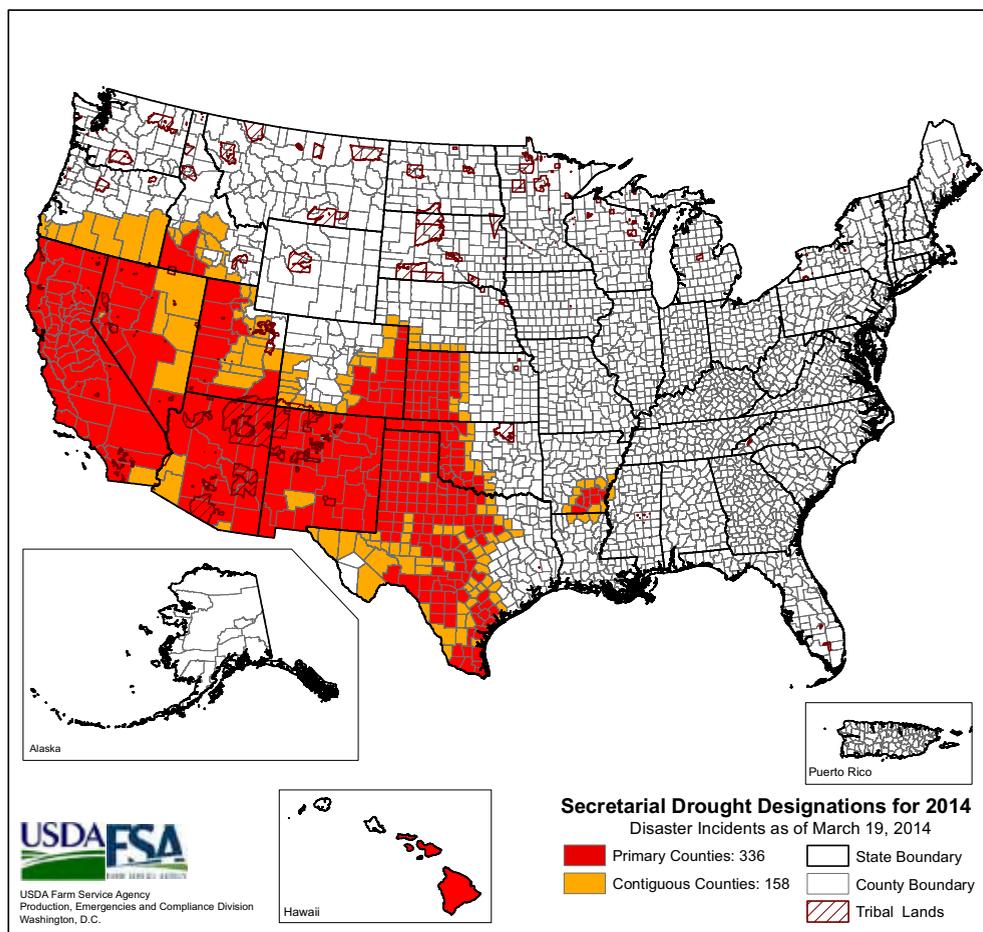
What is required is a whole new platform of economic development, specifically, a thermonuclear fusion-power economy. With the fusion platform, the United States can initiate not only the most efficient means of water desalination, allowing the use of sea water in place of scarce land water resources, but also have the power sources available for moving water from the water-rich area of the Northwest of the continent, into regions that are desperate for it.

The Scope of the Disaster

As of March 19, fully 494 counties were declared drought disaster counties by the U.S. Department of Agriculture; of these, 336 are primary disaster zones, and 158 contiguous counties (**Figure 1**). The crisis is an automatic hit on the U.S. food supply, and also internationally, because of decades of globalized “food sourcing.” All categories of food are affected. California alone accounts for nearly half of U.S. production of commercial fruits and vegetables, whose output will now be significantly down.

The trans-national food processors are turning to increased imports from water-short Mexico, China, and other cheap cost-of-production regions, to cater to those

FIGURE 1
2014 Secretarial Drought Designations* (All Drought)



* Secretarial Drought Designations refer to official announcements by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

in the American markets who can be expected to still have the means to pay the hyperinflated grocery prices, e.g., Metro Washington, D.C. The poor in the United States, Mexico, and everywhere else, be damned. Already, the U.S. is a net importer of fruits and vegetables (in money terms, and also in certain commodities), because of globalization, and now this is poised to increase, to the detriment of all nations involved (Figure 2).

Dozens of localities in California and Texas are in a countdown to when their water supply runs out completely. Residents will have to vacate, or otherwise commission convoys of water-tank trucks, if someone can pay the bill. California already has contingencies for an emergency trucking delivery system to a target list of places that will go dry.

What is immediately required is a radical break with the policies that created this disaster—the Wall Street lie that “there’s no money for infrastructure”; the green lie that “infrastructure harms the environment”; and the British imperial lie that “people overrun resources”—all of which serve the intent of genocide.

Leading the charge to break with this madness, are the combined Federal campaigns of two La-Rouche Democratic candidates—Keshia Rogers for Senate in Texas, and Michael Steger for Congress in California (San Francisco). They call for a nation-building program of NAWAPA XXI (North American Water and Power Alliance), a crash nuclear-fission and thermonuclear-fusion power program, and short-term measures on the drought and other disasters, in line with that.

The Steger-Rogers team is calling for re-instating the Glass-Steagall law and a credit-based banking system; and—to be sure we’re all still alive—getting President Obama impeached, and the world pulled back from the edge of thermonuclear war. They will have a joint Western states town hall webcast event April 12, about their national program.

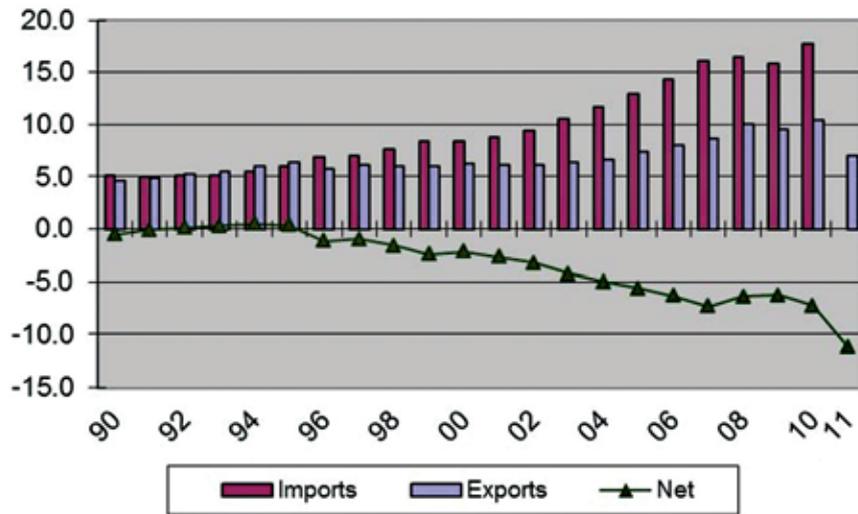
Food Losses; Worse To Come

The dimensions of U.S. food losses and worse to come are headline stories in media that deal with the farm-commodity and food-processing sectors, as the indicative reports below show, listed by food category.

In general, farm operations—whether mega-monopoly size, or the remaining few family farms—are being slammed by impossible conditions.

FIGURE 2

U.S. Fruit and Vegetable Trade (Excluding Nuts), 1990-2011



Source: Compiled by CRS from data in the U.S. International Trade Commission's Trade DataWeb database (version 2.8.4). It includes fresh and processed products.

In California, both the State Water Project and the Central Valley Project (Bureau of Reclamation)—the main sources of water for Central Valley farmers and 28 million people—have announced that in 2014 they will deliver *zero* water. Farmers will have to cut back, and, if they have the means, try to rely on pumping ground water, which is more and more difficult to do, or buying water at exorbitant prices, if any is to be found.

Water prices are skyrocketing. In 2013, the price was \$135 an acre-foot; by February of this year, the price rose to \$1,350 per af. There is no relief in sight. At least 20 communities in the state will run out of water very soon, and that number may rise sharply in the coming months. The snowpack in the Sierra Mountains, which normally increases over the Winter, instead has shrunk. It now measures only 15% of the volume considered normal in the recent past.

In Texas, farm operations have had to triage areas cultivated in the Rio Grande watershed, and the Colorado River (the Texas one, not the famous seven-state river of the same name). Reservoirs are way below levels to adequately supply crops. Many farmers have received notice of no irrigation water allocations at all for 2014.

Rice. In California's Central Valley, production from 150,000 acres of rice will be lost, as water deliveries to growers will be down 60%, and for some, 100%. Rice farming here, and in the Sacramento Valley, provides employment to 25,000 workers. In Texas, March

is the rice-planting season, and it is clear that production will be drastically reduced in the Lower Colorado River Basin, which has traditionally made Texas the fifth leading rice producer in the nation.

Fresh Produce. In Texas, the water shortage is forcing onion growers in the Rio Grande Valley to cut back significantly. Statewide, the onion output could be down at least 20%, estimates *The Packer* trade journal. Onions are ranked third in importance in the Valley, after sugar cane and citrus, in priorities for water allocation. Uncertainty hangs over all of it.

In California, the devastation is extensive. An estimated 200,000 acres of citrus trees will die, or be deliberately uprooted. The president of California Citrus Mutual, Joel Nelson, reckons this will wipe out 10,000 jobs and close 80 packing houses.

Seasonal row crops are being drastically cut back in area. Lettuce production this Spring and Fall in the San Joaquin Valley could drop up to 30% this year. Since California produces over 90% of U.S. strawberries, the supply crunch and price rise for this fruit will be dramatic. The same goes for other crops. Monterey County alone produces nearly half of all the fresh lettuce and broccoli consumed in the United States.

Nuts. California is a major world producer of nuts. With more than 800,000 acres of almond trees, the state accounts for more than 80% of world production, for example. Almonds are California's second-largest crop, after grapes. But now growers are triaging older—still productive—trees, to try to save scarce water and maintain their groves. Thousands of almond trees are being uprooted this Winter and Spring, as the water to maintain them doesn't exist. Almond trees produce harvestable crops for 25-30 years. Trees with less than five years to go, are being taken out. There's no guarantee of enough water for the remaining groves.

Reality Slams Congress

Congress has been slammed by the reality of the Western drought, which has blown apart their usual Capitol Hill b.s. "narratives" about the virtues of fiscal austerity, conservation, "market forces," river restora-

tion, and other lies and delusions. So far, a string of ineffective bills and proposals has come forward, including two House and two Senate bills. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, said she will introduce yet another bill in April, in a speech she gave March 20 at a water symposium in Palm Springs, titled, “Running Dry.”

In brief, in the House of Representatives on Feb. 5, HR 3964, the “Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley Emergency Water Delivery Act” was debated and passed (229-191). The bill is limited to lifting environmentalist regulations—a worthy plank, but not a policy for restoring the economy, resource-base, and future for the nation. The 68-page bill otherwise authorizes new dams on the Upper San Joaquin River (east of Fresno), and in Colusa County, by non-Federal funding; raises the Shasta Dam; and repeals the San Joaquin River restoration law.

In the Senate on Feb. 11, the 31-page “California Emergency Drought Relief Act of 2014” was introduced by Senators Boxer and Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) (the House version was introduced by Rep. Jim Costa [D-Calif.]). The bill allows water officials the flexibility to relax environmental laws, to keep scarce water flowing.

All this just dramatizes the reality: *There is not enough water.* New water supplies must be created. This is the point of the August 2013 special report, “Nuclear Nawapa XXI (North American Water and Power Alliance),” issued by *21st Science & Technology* (<https://www.21stcenturysciencetech.com/>).

This programmatic outlook was grabbed up at the most recent water crisis rally on March 18 in the Central Valley. Candidate Michael Steger circulated the “Nuclear NAWAPA XXI” perspective among the 2,500 protestors jammed into the rodeo grounds at Firebaugh, near the San Joaquin River. Otherwise, many rally speakers could only rant at the do-nothings or save-the-smelt faction in the state, but offer no leadership to get out of the crisis.



White House Photo/Pete Souza

President Obama surveys the drought damage in California, Feb. 14, 2014. With him are Gov. Jerry Brown (left) and farmers Joe and Maria Del Bosque, in Los Banos. PR trips won't solve the problem, and Obama is standing in the way of the actual solutions.

Obama Killer Policy: Biofuels, Fracking

Where there is an unprecedented unity of focus, is anger at Obama. He visited the state on Feb. 14, to view the drought, then proclaimed a renewed greenie commitment to act against global warming! Otherwise, he announced a \$300 million sham aid plan. Well over a third of it comes from disaster aid already in the newly enacted five-year farm law, as well as various relief measures for livestock and other actions; and another \$60 million is for Summer food aid for the thousands of poor farm labor families, now made destitute by inaction on the U.S. economy.

Adding fuel to the fire, the Obama Administration is backing food-for-biofuels and water-for-fracking. At present, 40 to 45% of the U.S. corn harvest is processed for ethanol for the gas tank. The corn itself and the agricultural capacity behind its production, constitute a huge loss to the food chain.

Nearly half of oil and gas wells opened by hydraulic fracturing—fracking—in the United States and Canada are in areas of high water stress. Texas leads all states in the number of such wells, with over 9,000 opened in extremely water-short areas, and another 9,000 in locations prone to dryness.

marciabaker@larouchepub.com