

The Fresno Bee

JIM COSTA: A response to critics of Valley's economy

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By Jim Costa

A lot of people who live outside our Valley are attacking our local economy and our way of life. Their arguments ignore the facts, distort reality, and oversimplify the water-supply crisis that is devastating our farms, businesses and communities.

On editorial pages and across the airwaves, these critics would lead you to believe that water limitations are having little effect on the Valley. Even worse, many individuals continue to assert that attempts at aiding the Valley are merely backroom schemes aimed at stealing resources from other regions without regard to the Delta's health.

It's now more critical than ever for all members of our communities to come together to take on our critics and fight for our Valley. Step one is doing away with these dishonest and misguided claims once and for all.

The first page out of our critics' playbook is to dismiss the impact that water limitations have had on our economy while, at the same time, stereotyping Valley agriculture as a single corporate "agribusiness."

First, untold local jobs are dependent on our agriculture industry. Agricultural employment is not simply a number of farmers and farm workers. From the producers, transporters, and sellers all the way to local businesses, countless Valley jobs are tied to the success of our \$36 billion agricultural sector.

Second, the implication that Valley agriculture only represents corporate agribusiness is a direct insult to the generations of families, who, like my own, came to the Valley to start family farms, make a living and put food on America's dinner table.

A short visit to the Valley would quickly expose this shallow generalization, and I challenge any critic of the Valley to look me in the eye and mischaracterize our community after seeing the food lines and 30% to 40% unemployment plaguing some areas.

The catastrophic impact of the water supply crisis on Valley job losses is clearly illustrated by respected economists with the University of California, Davis, who estimate that because of reduced water supplies in 2009, the San Joaquin Valley lost more than 21,500 jobs, and calculate that the current restrictions are reducing regional economic output by \$8 million a day.

These trends are directly correlated to the restrictions on water movement to the San Joaquin Valley, where greater than half a million acres have been fallowed or not farmed over the last year.

Our critics are equally off-mark with their notion that Valley agriculture is the culprit for the decline in Delta health.

For years, we've operated under flawed policies and bad science aimed at restoring Delta health and protecting fish. However, the current biological opinions in place have neither restored fish populations, nor strengthened the health of the Delta. So, as critics continue to point fingers at the Valley, other regions continue to dump nitrates, ammonia and other pollutants into the Delta.

Placing the blame on the Valley for degrading the Delta is both disingenuous and a full-scale attack on the people who call the Valley home. Of all people, Valley farmers know the value of a healthy Delta as you cannot use polluted water to grow crops.

Last, but not least, a number of vocal individuals continue to imply that our Valley's farmers and farm communities seek relief from the water crisis at the expense of others.

With snowpack well above normal, the Valley's farmers and farm communities do not seek relief from the water limitations at the expense of other areas. While other regions benefit from a full supply, the Valley simply continues to call for its fair share of contracted water.

Bringing more water to our Valley is a matter of survival. It is unfortunate that some individuals remain blind to all of California's water challenges and are incapable of the thoughtful consideration this issue deserves. Simply put, when fighting for our way of life, we should not have to continue fighting one-sided and ideologically driven politicians.

Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, represents the 20th Congressional District.

Read more: <http://www.fresnobee.com/2010/03/11/1855977/jim-costa-a-response-to-critics.html?storylink=misearch#ixzz0iGI91Nq7>