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California: Running Dry

December 27, 2009 5:20 PM
 A three-year drought in California is bringing a decades-long fight over water to a head, forcing tough choices. Lesley Stahl reports.

Why California Is Running Dry

WEB EXTRAS

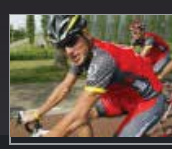


Web Extra: The Water Diet

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60 MINUTES Overtime

60 Minutes Overtime Is A Weekly Web Show That Begins Where The Weekly Television Broadcast Ends

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by **GreenGestalt** February 14, 2010 9:35 PM EST
 They are next to the ocean. How about a series of desalination plants that use solar furnaces for the heat, and solar/wind powered pumps that add more water into the system, first to service the coastal cities, then to add to

Did 60 Minutes help create the myth of Lance?

the farms? Not free, but well worth it for the long term comfort and prosperity.

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by **2985** January 8, 2010 8:23 PM EST

I live in Texas, as you probably know we were under severe drought in 2008. My business depends on water, and the water district in my area was trying to shut me down and this was my only source of income. What had me upset was everyone was threatening people with restrictions and fines instead of coming up with a solution. So, after careful thought and studies, I have come up with a solution. I am going to build a desalination plant on the Texas coast and power it with wind chargers and pump the water into the coastal aquifer, and just let me say that there are thirteen aquifers in Texas, with that in mind, after pumping into the coastal aquifer, I will drill a well on the opposite and run pipe to the next aquifer and so on and so forth until I have stair stepped all the way to the Panhandle. This will be costly, so therefore I am looking for companies or individuals who like this idea and want to get on board to solve the water problem. Just let me say that the Ogallala Aquifer in the Panhandle reaches all the way to Wyoming.

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by **larryjhanson** January 5, 2010 3:22 PM EST

The 60 Minutes episode presented an unusual bias on California's water problems. Of four interviewees, only one gave an environmental perspective for a fraction of the time given the other three. For example, you featured two farmers but not one fisherman who has been out of work for two years due to the destruction of fisheries. In addition, Arnold had most of the show with his lack of perspective on the public good.

A good environment including a balanced approach to agriculture benefits everyone, but what is good for big ag, well, benefits big ag. Follow the money. For better analysis, read articles on ncriverwatch.org and other non-profit environmental organizations where there is no big money to follow.

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by **FVBarbieK** January 2, 2010 11:13 AM EST

Fact or myth that crops grown on drainage-impaired land on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley "feed the nation" or "feed the world."

The corporate media and even some "alternative" media outlets have bought into this myth in their coverage of the California water wars, portraying the conflict as one between hard-working farmers like those portrayed in the classic Grant Wood painting who only want "feed America" versus "radical environmentalists" who want to protect a "minnow" like the Delta smelt.

However, an examination of the actual economic data compiled by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reveals that there is no basis in fact for the contention that west side farmers are the "backbone" of American agriculture. According to a USDA Chart, US gross farm income in 2008 was around \$375 billion.

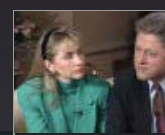
Westlands Water District, the nation's largest water district, produces \$1 billion annually in gross farm income, according to articles by Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee reporter, on November 7, 2009, and Garance Burke, Associated Press writer, on July 31.

"That means Westlands' contribution to the nation's food supply (and exports) is about a quarter of a percent," said Lloyd Carter, veteran investigative journalist.

According to this USDA website, net farm income is forecast to be \$57 billion in 2009, down \$30 billion (34.5 percent) from 2008. The 2009 forecast is \$6.5 billion below the average of \$63.6 billion in net farm income earned in the previous 10 years. Still, the \$57 billion forecast for 2009 remains the eighth largest amount of income earned in U.S. farming.



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"The US gross farm income in 2008 was \$375 billion and average net income is \$63.6 billion," said Carter. "In other words, the net is about one-sixth of the gross. That means Westlands actually is netting about one-sixth of its claimed \$1 billion in farm revenues, or about \$150 million a year."

Carter noted that if you take away the water, power and crop subsidies, you drop that true net increase quite a bit further. The Environmental Working Group estimated Westlands' annual subsidies in 2002 at \$110 million a year.

"That means the true net of the Westlands, when you take away all the government giveaways may be only \$30-40 million," he concluded. "Now, if you subtract the anticipated costs of drainage and make Westlands pay for their own waste disposal, they may actually not be generating any true wealth out there at all, except what the government gives them."

"We all keep hearing about how Westlands 'feeds the nation' or even more preposterously, 'feeds the world,'" emphasized Carter. "They continually conflate themselves with the entire San Joaquin Valley or the entire state of California, which even then (at about \$34 billion) is still less than 10 percent of national gross agricultural output."

Carter and other environmental water justice advocates are wondering why Leslie Stahl of CBS' 60 Minutes didn't examine this angle when she covered California water politics in her poorly-researched report on Sunday, December 26.

When you consider Carter's estimates that Westlands' contribution in gross income to the nation's food supply (and exports) is about a quarter of a percent - and that the true net value may be only \$30 million to \$40 million, once government subsidies are considered - the claims by corporate agribusiness and media pundits that drainage impaired land on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley "feeds the nation" are simply not true.

The false claim that any cuts to water supplies for west side San Joaquin Valley agribusiness will prevent them from "feeding the nation" has been cited by corporate agribusiness, the Association of California Water Agencies, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and Senator Dianne Feinstein as a key reason for the "necessity" to build the peripheral canal and Temperance Flat and Sites reservoirs. This myth has also been employed by Schwarzenegger, Feinstein and Central Valley Representatives to launch their administrative and legislative attacks on the the federal biological opinions protecting Delta smelt, Sacramento River chinook salmon, Central Valley steelhead, green sturgeon and southern resident killer whales. under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The absurdity of the campaign to build more dams and the peripheral canal, a project estimated to cost anywhere from \$23 to \$53.8 billion, and to strip ESA protections for Central Valley salmon and other species becomes very apparent, now that a review of the USDA data has dispelled the myth that drainage impaired land, irrigated by subsidized water, "feeds America."

For more information about Westlands Water District, read Lloyd Carter's Golden Gate University Law Review article, "Reaping Riches in a Wretched Region: Subsidized Industrial Farming and its Link to Perpetual Poverty," at: http://www.ggu.edu/lawlibrary/environmental_law_journal/eljvol3/attachment/Carter.pdf.

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by **weEATfood** January 2, 2010 1:48 AM EST

Dear Ms. Stahl,

Your story on "California Running Dry" neglects to mention the fact that while the federal government claims to be protecting the endangered Smelt by diverting water for agriculture to the ocean, the U.S. Department of Fish and Game plants Stripped Bass in the Delta which eat none other than the "endangered" Smelt. I smell something fishy.

Sincerely,
K. Lynn Humphreys,
Fresno, CA

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by **thegreek57** December 30, 2009 7:50 PM EST

Dear Lesley Stahl, Please inform Arnold Schwarzeneger that all he has to do is build some Desalting plants along

the Pacific ocean. It would also help slow down the Pacific ocean from raising up to 10 ft / 12 ft deeper. Kill two birds with one stone (ha-ha) Nick Razes Benicia, Ca, 94510

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by **thegreek57** December 30, 2009 7:44 PM EST

If Arnold Schwarzeneger really needs water, why don't they start building Desalting plants. Installing the plants (several) along the Pacific coast, would also help to slow down the ocean's raising up. Kill two birds with one stone (ha-ha) Nick Razes, Benicia, Ca, 94510

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by **Sweetwater626** December 30, 2009 11:47 AM EST

Southern California is a desert. It is not sustainable to grow crops and live in a desert. Despite what anybody has said or written, there is no justification to continue to grow crops and live in a desert. All crops currently grown in Southern California can be imported from other regions at a lower cost. We (the U.S.) learned the purchase of imports from the Californians in particular.

Southern Californians have an entrenched entitlement mindset, i.e., we are entitled to: (a) continue our traditional lifestyle and industries and (b) continue engaging in disgustingly wasteful use of water. While at the same time, Southern Californians hypocritically claim to be more environmentally enlightened (i.e. ?greener?) than other regions.

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by **goodgreen9** December 29, 2009 1:10 AM EST

This report is a good start, however it left out several important details.

1. The reservoirs are low because the pumps have been turned off, not because of a lack of water. The water is actually being allowed to run off instead of being stored in our reservoirs to supply our farms with a necessary resource.
2. Salmon are not endangered. Salmon are farmed just like crops. Salmon are being depleted by sewage pollution not lack of water as their populations have declined since the restrictions to the farmers have been put in place.
3. There are no crops that can go a full year without water. Your Delta Smelt expert is being deceptive to intentionally damage California's economy.
4. The water bill actually dismantles dams in the Northwest. These dams produce cheap hydroelectric power. The government is not only cutting off our water supplies, but they are also reducing electric supplies in order to drive up costs for basic necessities for everyone in the state. So our food, water, and electric supplies are being eliminated by the politicians who want to wipe out generations of wealth to install socialist dependence.
5. Generations of wealth are being wiped out as the farmers are forced into bankruptcy. So all family businesses in California are in jeopardy. The water rates have doubled for everyone across the state. Productive cropland is rapidly being turned into desert which devalues real estate everywhere. The lack of water affects all businesses including machine shops, restaurants, and the boating industry.

All of America should pay close attention to the big government command and control policies of this administration. These policies are a ruse to take over our real estate and create government coops instead of free market family farms. The Pelosi Congress and Obama Administration are the most corrupt politicians in the history of our country.

Wake up America, your freedoms are at stake. If they can cut off your water, food, and electricity, they have eliminated your freedoms. The people of California will fight back in 2010. CBS would be well advised to stay tuned. California is on the front lines of the battle for freedom.

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by **godi70** December 29, 2009 12:59 AM EST

It is a shame like growing people destroys a very important problem. That is the same system used by the Republicans with our president wishes for our country.
It is not a possibility that could we try to work to together for a problem that is around America everywhere. Water and drought.
Good or bad this article gives us a blink inside a problem that should be worked by all the Americans.

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