



Drought-Plagued Western Agriculture Hopes for 2015-2016 El Nino, Is It the Answer?

No one will doubt how big our agriculture industry is in the Western U.S., and how big of a contributor it is to our nation's economy.

California remains the nation's leading milk producer, and our great state's contribution from our "salad bowl" is also the best in the nation. We are also the world leader in almond, pistachio and walnut producers.

We are in at least the fifth straight year of drought conditions in the West, from the Mexico border up to Canada. California, Oregon, Idaho and Washington have been especially hard hit with reduced yields in many crops and reduced ground water reserves have prompted further drilling of wells in search of deeper ground water at an unprecedented level. And this summer, wildfires are raging across the West as a result with little or sometimes no resources to combat them.

While our Governor and state legislators have mostly and historically ignored one of our best resources and industries by not constructing reservoirs (which sometimes take years to construct), not furthering exploration into desalination plants and liberal environmental policies have resulted in significant rainfall just running to the ocean, where it is lost forever.

Notwithstanding this rant on government and unfriendly, irresponsible policies and projects, good news may eventually be on the way. This winter, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is predicting greater than a 90% chance that El Nino will continue through the Northern Hemisphere and continue through the end of spring 2016. Strong indicators such as sub-surface ocean temperatures have been rising all summer in the central and east-central equatorial Pacific and down-welling currents have helped enhance the pending El Nino. With that being said, whether the entire West receives a large amount of rain remains to be seen. Each El Nino and winter season is different; we'll just have to wait and see.

Although El Nino may help, it has al-

ways been just a temporary solution for the West, as drought years will continue to persist in greater numbers than wet years. Water management practices and new technological solutions are the only real answer.

Desalination plants are finally coming of age both here and worldwide. New technology in reverse-osmosis plant design has given plants the ability to create the most pure water right from the sea. The first state-of-the-art plant is opening in Carlsbad, CA, this fall and with over 38 million people in California, my opinion is that there should be new desalination plants constructed in all the major city centers from San Francisco to San Diego. The new Carlsbad plant will immediately produce over 50 million gallons of water for San Diego County. Desalination plants have been widely in service supplying Australia, Chile, Israel and Saudi Arabia and in 2019, Beijing will be supplied over one-third of its water by a new plant.

Modern desalination technology seems to be the answer to me. Our practices of hijacking water from the precious resources in the Sierras and shipping it down to coastal cities is becoming abominable. This

water should be used for nature and our agriculture industry in the West. The farming industry is continuing its part in research and development of underground drip systems and water handling practices and the coastal regions should be doing their part by building these reverse-osmosis plants and building reservoirs, both in the cities and out in the agricultural zones for best storage practices.

Is El Nino a solution? I believe it offers temporary help, but our practices and systems currently will just allow most of this rain to run into the ocean. Our major

cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego are wealthy regions, ones that have profited tremendously in the last decade and should do their part to improve technology and get with the modernization of the rest of the developed world. Then the entire West can continue its domestic and worldwide leadership in agriculture for years to come. *

Gulling is a CPA and partner with *Frazier, LLP*, in Brea, CA. Contact him at tgulling@frazierllp.com.