IMPERIAL COUNTY FARM BUREAU

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My name is Larry Gilbert.

I live and farm at 945 E. Worthington Road, Imperial, California, within the IID service area.

We thank the SWRCB and staff for holding this workshop in a place more convenient to Imperial Valley than Sacramento. As a prospective participant in the proposed water transfer from IID to SDCWA and as chairman of the ICFB Water Committee, I have tried to follow procedures of this transfer effort since 1996.

The ICFB and its water committee have had many meeting on this matter throughout the process.

This statement received unanimous approval from the Imperial County Farm Bureau Board of Directors at its annual meeting on November 12, 2001.

Other items could have been covered, but these represent our principal and unanimous concerns.

Larry Gilbert

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Chairman
Imperial County Farm Bureau
Water Committee

ICFB Statement to SWRCB
DoubleTree Hotel, Ontario, California
Nov 14, 2001

Farmers and landowner in Imperial Irrigation District feel they are "between a rock and a hard place". Seven states in the southwestern part of the U.S. want California to use less Colorado River water.

IID's farmers have spent a lot of money trying to prepare a plan for keeping their farms green while transferring part of their entitlement to the MWD service area. Many obstacles are threatening the implementation of such a plan.

IID's farmers have been helping to keep the Salton Sea essentially full by tile drainage and surface runoff from their irrigation system. We suspect this water has a higher demand for domestic purposes in the MWD service area, which is anticipating huge population growth.

A large constituency wants Salton Sea to continue as a boating, fishing and birding habitat. Mexico wants to restore the Colorado River delta. Farmers on the Mexico side of the All American Canal appear to depend on the Canal's seepage, and don't want it lined. The Endangered Species Act is requiring more water for habitat on the Colorado River. Salton Sea neighbors, who have sued IID for putting too much water into the Salton Sea, are now very unhappy IID is planning flow reductions to the Sea.

IID has agreed to "rent" up to 0.3 MAF, primarily to San Diego, in addition to the 0.1 MAF it is now renting to MWD. IID has conflicts with the interests of many other entities which have made, or wish to make in the future, use of the same part of IID's water right that IID is attempting to make available to serve coastal needs.

If these problems are not daunting enough, the Water Quality Control Board doesn't want farmers to put anything in their drains except clean, clear water. So a TMDL program is concurrently in progress, which few farmers are knowledgeable as to how to economically comply.

1. We recognize that California's growing water needs already exceed its supply, and that we need to continually accomplish more with less water.
2. We are willing to do our part to help alleviate the situation.
3. We hope that a transfer can be crafted which is beneficial to all parties.
4. We cannot provide for the needs of others at the expense of our livelihoods and our community.
5. Most of our greatest concerns center on environmental factors. We think it is unreasonable for us to bear the open-ended environmental risks, such as:
    a) Potentially unlimited costs of mitigation
    b) Environmental concerns which might increase the cost of conservation beyond what is economically feasible
    c) Environmental costs could cause the contract to be canceled, leaving us with conservation investments which we could not recover

d) Future litigation that could result in judgments or regulatory actions, either in the form of mitigation measures, damage claims, or the dedication of water supplies to purposes not covered in the agreement. IID farmers and landowners cannot afford to bear these costs.

6. We are concerned that at the termination of the contract we will be denied both the use of the temporarily transferred water and fair compensation for the water no longer available for our use; in other words we would lose our water right to the water temporarily transferred.
7. While this transfer has been billed as voluntary for landowners, even a non-participating landowner may become liable for environmental consequences even though he had nothing to do with the changes and has no control over them.
8. Many are also concerned about the future price/compensation uncertainty that could be caused by implementation of Exhibit E. While the prospect that conservation costs will decrease is extremely remote, there seems to be considerable chance that our revenue will drop substantially.
9. The lack of specifications or conditions to govern landowner conservation also causes us concern about whether it will be economically feasable for landowners to conserve "wet" water.
10. We are also concerned whether all will have an equal opportunity to participate in the conservation for transfer.
11. Many think it is not even feasible to maintain the Salton Sea throughout the next 75 years even if the transfer never takes effect. Yet the maintenance of the Sea seems to be a pre-requisite for implementation of the transfer.