



**Water and the Future of the San Joaquin Valley**

**Background<sup>1</sup>**

The San Joaquin Valley – California’s largest agricultural region and an important contributor to the nation’s food supply – is in a time of great change. The Valley produces more than half of the state’s agricultural output. Irrigated farming is the region’s main economic driver and predominant water user.

The Valley is ground zero for many of California’s most difficult water management problems, including groundwater overdraft, contaminated drinking water, and declines in habitat and native species. The Valley also faces many socio-economic challenges, including a high rate of unemployment and pockets of extreme poverty. These challenges increase when the farm economy suffers.

Stress on the Valley’s water system is growing. Local supplies are limited, particularly in the southern valley. To irrigate their crops, many farmers use water imported from Northern California through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. But they also have relied on groundwater overdraft – pumping groundwater in excess of the rate at which it is replenished. The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) requires local water users to bring groundwater use to sustainable levels by the early 2040s. With the largest groundwater overdraft in the State, SGMA will have a broad impact on Valley agriculture in coming years, and will likely entail some permanent idling of farmland.

“[Water and the Future of the San Joaquin Valley](#)” is the third installment of a research project by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) Water Policy Center on solutions to the San Joaquin Valley’s water challenges. Ellen Hanak is director of the PPIC Water Policy Center and a senior fellow at PPIC. Ms. Hanak will present the PPIC’s research project, and the findings of this report on the water challenges facing the San Joaquin Valley.

This is an informational item.

**Contact**

Jennifer Ruffolo  
Assistant Executive Officer  
California Water Commission  
(916) 653-7937

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<sup>1</sup> Source: PPIC: “Water and the Future of the San Joaquin Valley,” [Summary](#) and [Introduction](#)