

**Headline: Fresno Co. seeks a state of emergency
Supervisors petition governor on water shortage.
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The Fresno County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday asked the governor to declare a local state of emergency because of concern over impending water supply shortages.

Citing dry years and a recent court ruling, the board approved a resolution outlining the consequences of having less water. Representatives from several west side cities and others also sketched out a potentially bleak future for farmers and communities.

Mendota Mayor Robert Silva said reduced water will devastate the city's ag-based economy: "That's a major blow to us."

Supervisor Phil Larson, who brought the resolution to the board, said he hopes it will bring federal money to help struggling communities. Among the expected problems are fewer agricultural jobs and lost revenue for schools if families dependent on the farming industry move away.

Larson said the board's action "also puts the emphasis on how important this is."

In part, supervisors are reacting to a court ruling that requires big cuts in pumping from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to protect the endangered delta smelt. An unusually dry winter also has left state reservoirs at below-average levels heading into a new water year that began Monday.

"We're starting this water year -- which could be the record year of a drought -- in a hole," Department of Water Resources Director Lester Snow said Tuesday at a news conference in Sacramento.

According to the Board of Supervisors' resolution, western Fresno County might receive no more than 45% of its usual water allocation from state and federal facilities. A lack of water will trigger changes in crop patterns and force farmers to leave land empty that might otherwise grow fruits, vegetables or other field crops.

In turn, that means fewer jobs, higher food prices and lagging business. Jose Antonio Ramirez, city manager in Firebaugh, said farmers aren't going to risk planting crops if they don't know how they'll obtain water.

Ramirez and others said farmers also will turn to more ground-water pumping. That could create other problems, such as taxing municipal water supplies in communities dependent on ground water.

The statewide figures released this week paint a gloomy picture of California's water supply. Sierra snowmelt ended early this year, and the state's overall precipitation was 35% to 40% below average, according to the water resources department.

In the San Joaquin River region, the year finished as the eighth-driest year on record, preliminary estimates show. As a result, the state's major reservoirs don't hold nearly the amount of water they normally do at this time of year.

The statistics were released as lawmakers debate ways to boost the state's water supply. Gov. Schwarzenegger's \$9 billion plan relies heavily on new dams, including one east of Fresno. Democrats favor conservation, water recycling and investments in ground-water storage.

Hearings on the plans are scheduled for Thursday at the Capitol. To get a water bond on the Feb. 5 ballot, a compromise must be reached by Oct. 16.