



**GROWING JOBS:** Farmworkers leading the "March for Water" from Mendota to the San Luis Reservoir carried a banner saying "Farm Water Equals Jobs."

# March for water

By MIKE WADE

**T**HEY marched for 50 miles along public roadways and dusty farm roads next to unplanted fields to tell the world that the flow of water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta must be restored to San Joaquin Valley Westside farms.

They knew that without water, many of them would not reclaim jobs they had already lost. At the end of the four-day march at San Luis Reservoir, state and national officials spoke in unity with the marchers, but no words were uttered that the water would return.

## Coalition efforts

"March for Water" was organized by the California Latino Water Coalition to focus media attention on the results of environmental regulations hijacking water that was contracted for use on Westside farms. A federal court decision several years ago ordered that pumping

## Key Points

- Without water, farmworkers will not reclaim lost jobs.
- Latino coalition wants water restored to SJV Westside farms.
- Actor and comedian Paul Rodriguez co-chaired march.

operations at the south end of the Delta were threatening the endangered Delta smelt and must be curtailed. That decision resulted in 600,000 acre-feet of water being redirected from farms to the ocean last year. Another 300,000 acre-feet were shifted during the first four months of this year.

Those who gathered at Mendota on April 14 to begin the 50-mile march provided personal examples of the financial blow resulting from the water cutbacks. While some carried signs that said "Turn the Pumps On" and "No Water — No Food," one stood out in particular: "I Lost My Job to Water."

The California Latino Water Coalition formed over a year ago to publicize the effects the environmental regulations were having when used to reduce the flow of water to farms. One of the group's first actions was to name Hollywood actor and comedian Paul Rodriguez as co-chairman. Rodriguez grew up in the small farm community of Orange Cove, east of Fresno.

"Unemployment should not happen in this land of abundance," Rodriguez told the crowd at Mendota. "We are unable to work without water, and we want to work."

Rodriguez's words brought loud cheers of agreement from the crowd.

"We are not asking for charity; we just want our jobs," he continued. "Water is not a privilege or reward. It is a necessity for our lives."

An estimated 10,000 marchers began their trek from Mendota with several miles of farm equipment and tractors



**CF CAP:** Former Assemblyman Bill Maze, San Bernardino County, spoke to the crowd in an original *California Farmer* cap.

loaded on flatbed trucks slowly following behind. The march was broken up across four days for maximum participation and media exposure.

## Words but no promises

The final-day rally was conducted at a boat launch leading to a half-full San Luis Reservoir. Speakers addressed the crowd.

"The people of Mendota and Firebaugh are endangered," said Assemblyman Juan Armabula,

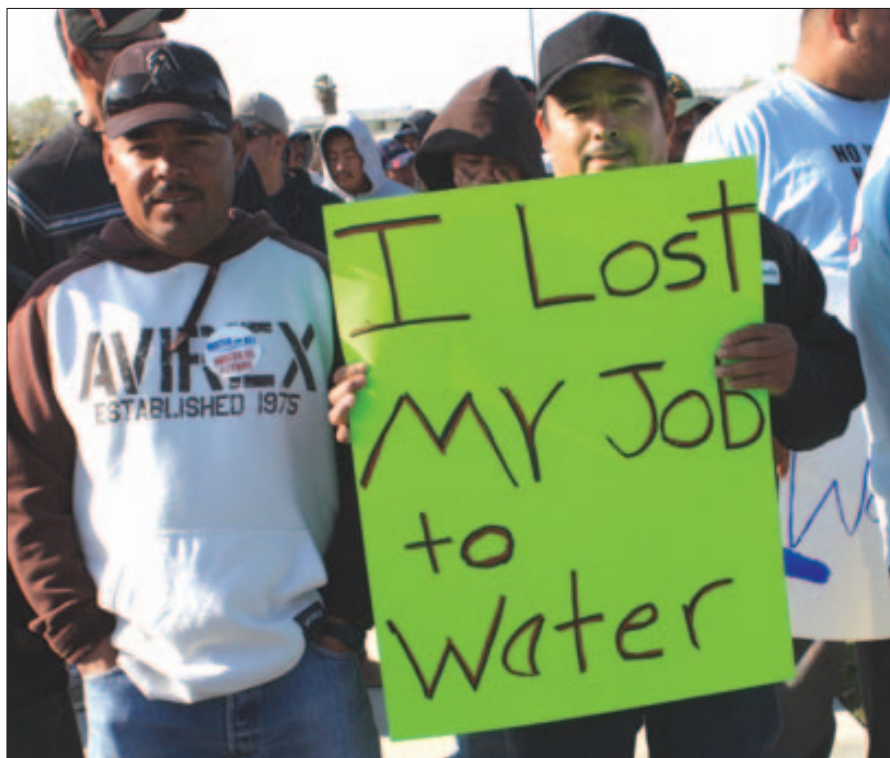
D-Fresno, who represents the two hard-hit farming communities. "We need water, and we need our jobs back."

But the crowd was waiting to hear from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in hopes he could give the order to open the Delta pumps and send the water flowing. But those words never came. As the governor stepped to the microphone, he acknowledged the seriousness of the situation and the importance for legislative leaders to work toward a water solution for California.

"We must get our act together," Schwarzenegger insisted. "We need a solution for the Delta; we need conveyance; and we need storage. Tell the legislators that we need water, and we need it now."

Mario Santoyo, coalition member and coordinator of the march, followed the governor at the microphone and told the crowd that their "battle had only begun. We must continue our efforts to provide water not just for our jobs and our farms, but for all of California."

*Wade is executive director, California Farm Water Coalition.*



**TELLING THE STORY:** Unemployed farmworkers displayed their sign for the press.



**GOVERNOR SUPPORT:** The crowd hoped Gov. Schwarzenegger would give the order to open the Delta pumps. Instead, he said, "Tell the legislators that we need water, and we need it now."

## Water allocations updated

**F**IVE days after 10,000 marchers participated in the four-day "March for Water" to send more water south from the Delta to San Joaquin Valley Westside farms, they got their answer. Bureau of Reclamation officials announced on April 21 that agricultural water users south of the Delta would see their scheduled deliveries increase from 0% to 10%.

Other south-of-Delta allocations now include: municipal/industrial, 60%; refuges, 100%; and water rights holders, 100%. Allocations north of the Delta will be: ag, 15%; municipal/industrial, 65%; refuges, 100%; and water rights holders, 100%.

The Central Valley Project East Side Division (Stanislaus River) contractors will receive 18,000 acre-feet of project water, and the allocation to the Friant Division contractors will be 90% Class 1 water and 0% Class 2 water.