

Restore Agriculture for People, Not Wall Street

by Marcia Merry Baker

April 10—The California and Southwestern states drought, a water supply crisis of varying danger for some 100 million people in 22 states, is also an automatic national and international food crisis. Large shares of U.S. food consumption and exports originate in California, and west of the Mississippi River. The extent and severity of the Western dryness are shown in **Figure 1**, a weekly snapshot compiled by Federal agencies. California stands out, with 44% of the state in the category of “exceptional” conditions or worse, while 98% of the state is suffering some form of drought. Likewise, the High Plains region of parts of Texas and western Oklahoma and Kansas is desiccated.

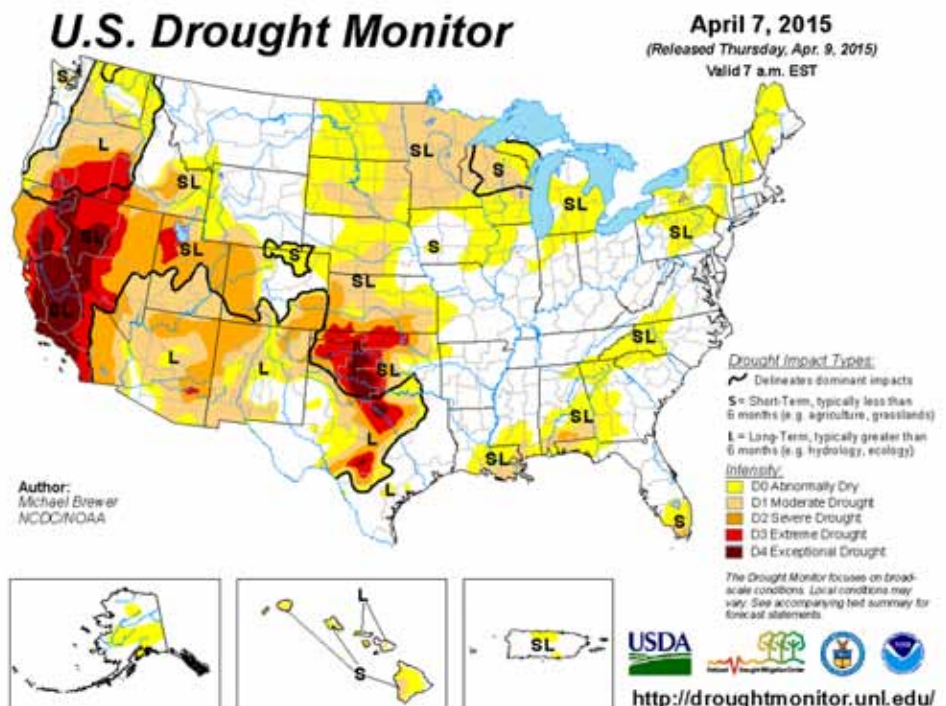
The dire impact of this water crisis for the entire U.S. agriculture base is manifest and understandable, once the physical dimensions are reviewed, as we summarize below. What is less evident, but crucial to understand, in order to take emergency actions, is that the drought is a call to action to restore a Federal agriculture policy to provide for the national and international food supply, and not for feeding the destructive practices of Wall Street. Decades of allowing the Wall Street/City of London factor in the physical economy are what have created the man-made vulnerability to drought to begin with.

No Water, No Farming

Make no mistake. When Gov. Jerry Brown announced that agriculture in California was “exempt” from the 25% mandatory cut in water usage he decreed April 1 for 38 million state residents, this *did not mean that California farms currently have sufficient water*. The governor’s executive order was just back-handed recognition that the state’s agriculture sector is already reeling from lack of water.

Beginning last year, for the first time ever, allocations to California farm operations for the 2014 water season were set at zero, from the two major water management systems serving much of the state’s agricul-

FIGURE 1



ture—the California State Water Project and the Federal Bureau of Reclamation’s San Joaquin system. This comes on top of the low annual water allocations—20% of recent levels—made by these agencies in the past few years of this drought episode. The California Water Project, for example, has in the past provided water for 750,000 acres, and for 20 million people. Now, the water isn’t there. The reservoir levels in these water-management systems, and other impoundments, are way below danger levels.

In recent decades, about 30% of the water used by people in the state has depended on snowpack melt, filling the reservoirs in late Spring and Summer. But as of April 2014, the snowpack level was only 16% of recent average; and this month, it is down to 6%. State-wide, the current snowpack holds only 1.4 inches of water content, instead of the historical (over the last century) 28.3 inches. There is next-to-nothing to melt and run off into reservoirs.

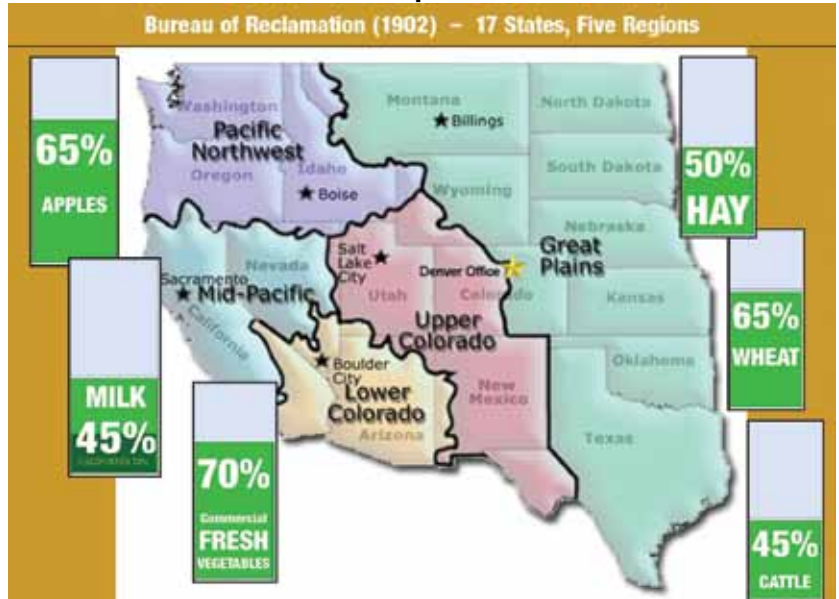
Last year, because of the water shortage, a huge area—1.7 million acres—was not planted in California’s Central Valley. NASA’s remote sensing system verified this, estimating that, as of July 27, 2014, there were 1,706,038 acres idled—which is about 20% of the total irrigated area of 9 million acres throughout the state. Irrigated farmland in the Central Valley and the Imperial Valley—also hit by water shortage from the Colorado River run-off contraction—is among the highest-yield in the world.

As of the 2015 crop year, prospects are even worse, and farmers have few remaining contingencies. Central Valley growers, for example, have dug or deepened wells, sought to buy water at exorbitant prices, triaged parts of orchards and groves, etc. Farmers have put in subsurface and drip irrigation systems, and other technologies for efficiency and conservation. There are no “last resorts” left.

No Farming, No Food

This adds up to an unprecedented food crisis, not only because of the extreme physical challenges as such, but even more, because of the continued toleration of the drought “responses” declared by the Obama

FIGURE 2
Percent of National Food Output



Administration and Wall Street as “solutions,” namely: cutbacks, water market-pricing and greenie depopulation.

Figure 2 illustrates that large parts of U.S. food production—wheat, dairy and beef, fresh fruits and vegetables—come from Western states, many of which are now in severe drought. The map shows the 17 states originally in the five Bureau of Reclamation districts, where certain water infrastructure development projects (dams, irrigation channels, etc.) were built—but only up to a point. The 1950s and ’60s plans for continued development through the proposed NAWAPA (North American Water and Power Alliance), nuclear desalination, and even the full build-out of the Missouri River management system, were thwarted.

In the Great Plains, a high percentage of the nation’s hay, wheat, and cattle are produced. The current High Plains drought region (Figure 1) in northern Texas and western Oklahoma and Kansas, is the heart of the U.S. Wheat Belt, where 65% of the national wheat output is produced. The U.S. is one of the top wheat exporting nations in the world.

Texas, long the leading cattle state, has seen its beef cattle inventory drop from 5.35 million head in 2005, down to 3.91 million in 2014, under drought conditions. Nationally, the U.S. cattle herd (all types) has fallen to the same level as 1951.

California is a world-class farming disaster across the board. The state alone accounts for 20% of U.S. milk output, and the baseline water requirement for dairy husbandry cannot be cut. Cow herds and numbers are being triaged.

California and Arizona account for 70% of total U.S. fresh fruit and vegetable production, threatened for lack of water. By food type, California ranks first in the nation of production of many crops: apricots

(88%); avocados (88%), raspberries (74%), fresh strawberries (91%), grapes (91%), kiwi fruit (87%), lemons (92%), nectarines (95%), olives (96%), peaches (73%), plums (97%).

California also ranks nationally for significant grain production, which is falling drastically in the state. Look at the harvest for 2014: The rice crop was down 25% from the year before, and for the third year running. Most of the U.S. medium-grain rice is grown

FDR: Do What Works!

Figure 3 shows the 436 U.S. counties now officially designated to be drought disasters, as of April 1, by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Under the Obama Administration, that's as far as it goes. The designation means only the possibility that farmers and ranchers may squeak by for a little while, by qualifying for certain loans, grants, and waivers, to try to stay on the land.

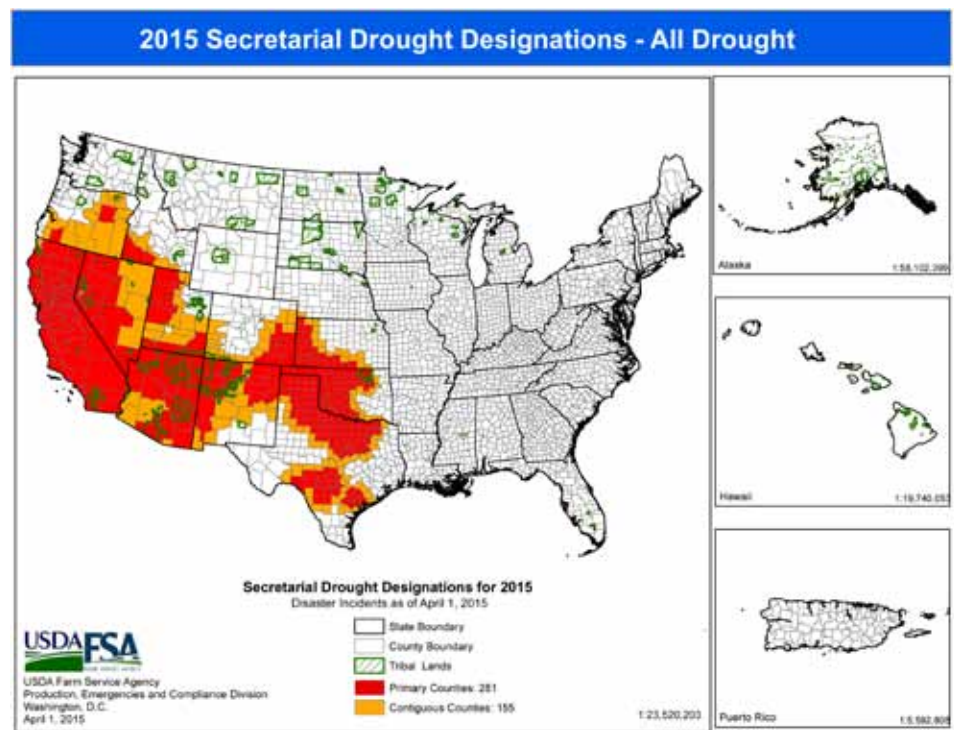
Contrast this to the very active map of Federal action on the drought under the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administrations in the 1930s and war years. The entire productive base of the nation was upgraded. During the Dust Bowl, measures were deployed ranging from building wind-breaks, to initiating contour ploughing. The Civil Conservation Corps (CCC) planted hundreds of thousands of trees, against water and wind erosion on the High Plains. In 1935, the national Soil Conservation District system was launched, enlisting citizens to work together in a local, state, and Fed-

eral partnership to enhance resources. Millions of people were given jobs and hope.

At the same time, the Roosevelt Administration conducted breakthrough work in atomic research, plant genetics, and other branches of science. There is no conflict between long-term commitment to the most advanced knowledge, and taking short-term emergency measures. Only if we pursue the frontiers of progress, can we succeed in taking the actions for the immediate crisis.

—*Marcia Merry Baker*

FIGURE 3



in California; about half of the crop has been exported in recent years, mostly to Asia.

Wheat production in California was down in 2014 by over half from the year before. The 2014 winter wheat harvest, in the range of 430 thousand tons, is the lowest since 1968; durum wheat, at 78 thousand tons, the lowest since 1977. (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service)

Dry Up Wall Street

There are several areas of emergency action required to shore up U.S. agriculture and the food supply. These go along with the fundamental actions required to shift the nation into a re-commitment to scientific understanding of the broadest processes affecting the biosphere, to enhance and protect necessary economic activity. How can we cause and augment rainfall? How can we forecast and defend against disasters—earthquakes, tsunamis? Consider four interrelated categories:

1. Take action to achieve the necessary national volume of food production and supply. Bring together the right “wheat people,” “citrus people,” “orchard fruits people,” dairymen, and so on, to determine where and how to foster expanded production in non-drought areas of the country, while preserving and compensating growers and producers in California and other drought regions, during the crisis period, until relief can come.

There are precedents for this, especially in the FDR war-time mobilization, when substitute crops, as well as compensating areas of production were brought into play. All necessary financial measures can be activated, including moratoria on debt payments and on foreclosures for farm operations in drought areas, and grants to boost production in non-drought regions.

For example, citrus production in Florida and parts of Texas (depending on water), can be increased. Doing this will require such tasks as defeating the citrus plant “greening” disease in Florida.

2. Take action on urgent financial measures. Enact all necessary farm-commodity price-control measures, to stabilize agriculture. Price ranges must be set, to guarantee covering farm costs of production. The principle of parity pricing worked well in the past and can do so now. Outlaw speculation in farm commodities on the Chicago and other exchanges. And outlaw the practices based on commoditization of

water, whether such violations of the public good be mega-farms selling water rights, or privateer water speculators, bilking farms for access to water.

The lead-in to all this, is to restore the Glass-Steagall Act, to separate commercial banking from speculative, so-called investment banking, and federally back only the former. In turn, this is the lead-in to establishing nation-serving national banking, the issuance of credit, and initiation of the needed infrastructure (water, transportation, and other) upgrades to support vast expansion in agriculture potential. This is spelled out as the “Four Laws” of Lyndon LaRouche.¹

Enlist the United States with the BRICS international development drive, especially joining the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

3. Work with trade partner nations for mutually assured food supplies. The U.S. already—prior to the California and Western drought disaster—is heavily food-import dependent, and selectively, a big farm commodity supplier. While this is almost entirely a legacy of the era of mega-multinationals using “free” (rigged) trade as a weapon, it now must be re-sorted out according to the principle of mutual benefit. The drought has called the question.

Collaboration on food flows is actively underway among the BRICS nations and friends. For example, Argentina is orienting to vastly increase meat shipments to Russia. China, which relies on imports for some 60% of domestic soy consumption, works closely with its supplier nations, to collaborate on infrastructure development for farming, shipping, and handling.

4. Reinstate anti-trust policies in agriculture science and the food chain. At present, Wall Street—in the form of hedge funds, billionaires, investment syndicates—are all over food-processing and mega-farm operations, as well as doing hyper-speculation on farm commodities. The most recent example, is the pending takeover of Kraft Foods Group by Warren Buffett’s H.J. Heinz, a \$45 billion deal. The most sinister of all, is the takeover of plant genetics research by Monsanto and cohorts as of the 1970s, through subversion of U.S. patent law. Bust this up.

Patrick Ruckert contributed to this article.

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1. Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., “The Four New Laws To Save the U.S.A. Now! Not an Option: An Immediate Necessity,” *EIR*, June 13, 2014.