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**Excerpts and Summary of the 35th Hunger and Nutrition Forum
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MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

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The following is a summary of the reports made at the forum compiled by Edie Jessup, Phoua Moua and Carey Berend.

**FOCUS: The Rural Report---What's Happening In Fresno County's
Rural Communities And How It Affects Access To Enough Food.
A Panel Discussion**

Edie Jessup: Good afternoon. Welcome to the 35th Fresno Metro Ministry's Hunger and Nutrition Forum. I'm glad that you are all here.

In your packet you will find that there is issues on the back of that. This particular forum was really inspired by Juan Esparza's column in the Fresno Bee on August 4, where he laid out some of the possible outcomes of retiring land from the West Side (of Fresno County), We know that there are big water issues. We know that this is very complicated. His column was particularly focused on taking housing out of the west side along with decreasing farm production. We have a panel today of folks from different perspectives. We are looking for them to tell us their experience and what they are seeing now. We can look a little bit toward what some of the outcomes and some of the impacts might be. We are particularly interested, of course, in people's access to healthy food that is affordable for them for their good health. We're looking at the impact of taking land out of production on low-income people, and farm workers particularly. Enclosed is Juan Esparza's column and a letter from the Farm Bureau laying out farmers' considerations around water decisions and how these decisions might influence the future food supply. Next in the packet you will find a summary of last month's forum looking at overweight and unfit children in California legislative districts. After that you will find a pink folder with 'Hunger News'. Fresno Metro Ministry is committed to this Hunger and Nutrition project and looking at ways that we can repair our food system so that people do have access to good food that we produce here in Fresno County. Fresno Metro Ministry has been awarded a Community Food Project Grant from the USDA. We are in the process of accumulating our in-kind match which we need for this grant. It will allow us to do a full-county Community Food Assessment. It will allow us to work with farmers, farmers' markets, local neighborhood stores to increase access to fresh produce that is grown locally, and it will allow us to promote the federal nutrition programs.

(Participants Self Introductions)

Edie Jessup: I think that our interest is in hearing from the panel's different perspectives on what is happening in the **rural areas of our County, with a particular look at the issues of retiring land and taking land out of production.** Right now we know that some of the (Westside) land is not usable any more, and that has an impact on the communities and the people who have worked on those farms. We have an eclectic group here, and we will hear from both West Side and East Side residents of Fresno County. I have asked the panel to present their perspective in about five minutes, and then we will open the discussion to your questions. Please write your questions on the index cards at your tables.

Margarita Rocha, Centro La Familia: First of all, I will not propose to know the ins and outs of the general plan. I think that Edie invited me because we do work with the low-income families, and particularly in the rural communities. **We have some programs that we are running in those communities and some of the issues that we encounter, of course, are food issues, are housing issues, but with all these issues is an underlying poverty.** One of the big problems that I have in directing my staff to work with families who come with housing issues in rural communities, is that there is a law about habitability. Housing is supposed to have this and that, but if you get to the point of wanting to enforce those laws or regulations, where are you placing the family? Where is that family going to go when in those communities –you have not one family but three or four families living in homes that clearly are uninhabitable, but that's the only choice they have? It's the only choice they have since that's where they live and work. (If jobs then housing are eliminated on the West Side) **I can assure you that we will see more families who will become homeless and will now also stress the emergency shelters that do exist. I can tell you now that those shelters are way over capacity and that there are waiting lists and that we do see families who are being broken up simply just trying to find a place to live.** So one of the things that will result, and I know it will happen, is we will see families that are going to come in to Fresno, and their children will be sent off somewhere else because no one can take a full family if they have three, four, five, six kids, and the dad will go somewhere, the mom will go somewhere, and the kids, they'll keep the little ones and the other ones will have to go elsewhere. **And that's what happens in some of the shelters that we currently have because they're not capable of taking an entire family.** And if you have family support, even the family has to say, you know, I can take you and the little one and the other ones have to go elsewhere. So, those are the things that we can see that will have an impact: displacing families-- if this (taking land out of production) goes through. Let me qualify that I do not know the entire the general plan. I'm just giving you a scenario of working day to day with a family who shows up at Centro La Familia for services. **You see the faces and that's where you see the trauma and that's where you see the crying and that's where you see people begging to find a place to live.**

Vickie Hoyle, Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission: Hi. I'm coming from an EOC Rural Collaborative meeting, and that's what I want to speak to you about. Here is a brochure along with an article about a Reality Bus Tour that the Rural Collaborative and the Workforce Investment Board sponsored recently. The Rural Collaborative actually is an offshoot of a coalition that came together as a result of the freeze in December of 1998, and when the recovery period of the freeze was finally complete the coalition that had gotten together had said that they didn't want to disband. Instead they wanted to reorganize themselves, and they became known as the Rural Communities Collaborative of Fresno County, which Margarita also is a member of and ditched my meeting too. We actually had a great meeting. On the brochure you'll see our website. Our general membership has grown so much that there are over 60 entities that are represented. Particularly, **we work with rural communities on capacity building and technical assistance,** a variety of services from information sharing – we have a great communications infrastructure. **We have a telecommunications project in which the Office of Rural Assistance has connected 19 rural communities, the 13 incorporated cities plus 6 unincorporated cities. We have**

partnered with USDA to provide a variety of services such as free grant writing workshops, strategic planning team building. We also work with the USDA to do a 504 loan packaging, which are grants for seniors and low-cost loans for low-income folks to do rehab on their houses. You can see that we provide a variety of social services in the rural areas. Economic development is one of our focuses. We chartered a bus and went out to the rural West Side. Sarge Green was our tour guide and he is definitely an expert on the West Side-- If you want to know about the West Side and the land retirement you need to talk to Sarge. I'll go ahead and let Sarge talk more about the West Side. Thank you.

Sarge Green, Tranquility Water District: I'm from the community of Tranquility, one of the small West Side communities that's unincorporated, but it is a member of the I-5 Business Development Corridor, and that is an organization that was started in 1994, made up of several of the West Side communities. The City of Firebaugh started it, and it really was to take a look at some of the problems that we already started to see. **One of the things that happened in the late 80s and early 90s was a drought, so we had already had some terrific impacts on the ability to produce food on the West Side as a result of the loss of water to a natural event, the drought.** And the city manager started to look around and see what assistance he could get and found that he couldn't get very much because he didn't have a very loud voice, and he got frustrated and said, you know, **I think we need to talk about this regionally,** and he got a bunch of us together and that's how the I-5 Corridor Group got started. **It's now made up of the cities of Firebaugh, Mendota, Kerman, Coalinga, Huron, and the unincorporated community of Tranquility. Biola is in the area. The City of San Joaquin used to be a member but because of their dire economic straights they couldn't afford the dues so they're no longer an active member but we cover their area. Coalinga and Huron just recently joined, and then any of the other small, unincorporated communities that are out there in between Mount Whitney to the southeast and then up to Biola and all of those communities now are suffering even more as a result of the proposed land retirement.**

I'm going to talk about the impacts, whereas Phil will probably set the stage a little bit better and give you a little more background on what's happening with Westlands and why and how they're dealing with it. Once the drought hit us and we had those water problems, **the federal government passed a new law in 1992 that permanently cut water supplies on the West Side** and ever since then we've been feeling even more and more of an impact in the West Side communities. The agricultural community has suffered greatly. We've lost a lot of people from the West Side, a lot of important families that started a lot of the communities. Some of them had already moved on, moved into Fresno or the East Side, but a lot of the second and third generation people/farmers are trying to continue on out there. **One thing you have to understand is Westlands really only got going in 1963. That's when their first big contract that they got for water from the federal government really came to fruition. So the ones that have remained have struggled with a couple of problems, and one of them is the *lack of drainage out there. The soil has an impermeable layer underneath it and when you apply the water it builds up underneath and finally either rots the plants or kills them with a high concentration of salts* that were native to the area, plus salt is important in the water. What's happened with the communities is not only did we have the drought, the loss of water supplied, lack of drainage, but none of the programs that have been proposed for dealing with the problems out there have included anything about the communities.**

It's the federal government that changed the contracts and took away the water, it's the federal government that failed to provide a contractual commitment to drainage, but there is no coordinated or focused effort by the federal government to deal with the impacts of those decisions. *It's been left up to the local governments.* Oh, by the way, I forgot to mention Fresno County is a strong member of the I-5 Corridor. They cover the balance of the area. It's a pretty good size, **almost the size of the state of Rhode Island is the area that is encompassed by our nonprofit public benefit**

corporation out there. Some of the things that we're starting to see if you go out there (to the West Side), and as we talked to people on the Reality Tour, is *if you drive from Mendota south there are thousands of acres that are vacant now. There is no activity on there at all.* **In terms of the food production those areas weren't necessarily real high on the priority list for producing vegetables or anything like that. They were more staples like alfalfa and mostly cotton, but there were some melon-growing areas out there and that has shifted to other better soils. One thing that happened is that now melons are field packed and all the packing houses in the communities like Mendota have been shut down.** So it altered the job opportunities in that community. **The real big impact, with the overall drop-off in economic activity has been in housing.** We have a representative from Mendota that perhaps could add something to this, but **the sales tax is down, the cities are all strapped, they have no longer any fat if they ever had any. These never have been really successful communities, but now they're even worse off.** The School Districts there have bonded indebtedness. *There's a brand new high school in Mendota and their ADA has dropped off dramatically. People are leaving.* The interesting thing about it is **while we're losing some people the communities keep growing in population. They haven't decreased in size. There's just been some kind of a readjustment going on and we all try to figure out what that is, but it seems like it's still the poverty level is increasing.** The people that are leaving are the ones that were the business --people who can no longer survive out there because there's not the economic base to support them. So business has dropped off. So we have a real dilemma, and the I-5 Business Development Corridor has got a strategic plan. We've been trying to come up with methods of mitigating this by using the assets that we do have. One, of course, is **we do have a good work force. On the liability side, it's not a very well trained work force, so one of the things that we support very strongly is a vocational activity.** Fresno County has got a proposal to **build some vocational centers** here in Fresno County, one on the East Side to help Victor's (Victor Lopez, mayor of Orange Cove) area and one on the West Side, so we think that's one important element of our strategic plan that we want to get implemented. Another is to **build Highway 180 all the way to Interstate 5** because if that goes all the way through we think it will generate some economic activity and diversity on the West Side. **We think that we still have a strong place in the world of agriculture,** and Phil (Erro) will talk more about that.

But that distribution and warehousing and transmitting of products and processing them are very important, too. A lot of Fresno County produce is processed elsewhere. We have challenges. We have air problems to deal with, so it's not going to be easy.

Another big area that we're talking about is the notion of **expanding all nodes on Interstate 5** itself because we're right in between San Francisco and Los Angeles; and if you think about it, every last one of those highway intersections out there would be a potential economic center, whether it's for trucking or tourism or whatever it is, we have that opportunity. I want to talk a little bit about the general plan. One of the things that's going on is the Board of Supervisors is taking a good look at the general plan to see how it needs to be adjusted to accommodate the kinds of diversity that we think that we need out there on the West Side to help mitigate some of these impacts. I think I'm going to stop there because I could go on forever on this stuff. Like I said, I've been steeped in it since 1994, and it's really imbued in my brain now, but I'll answer questions later. But the critical thing is that we are self-starters out there, and we're trying to help ourselves. **We will have a critical need for certain kinds of services, and food is clearly going to be one of them for people who don't have access normally to these things.** One of the things that people need to understand is that many of the **people on the West Side are relationship oriented. They're not system oriented. They talk to somebody and that's how they**

find out about services rather than dialing up and calling and trying to implement our system of doing things, and so I think that's an important message to pass on.

Phillip Erro, Farmer: Thank you, Sarge. My name is Phillip Erro, and my family has farmed land in the Westlands Water district, and I wanted to address **the figure of 200,000 acres of land retirement. That is not a magic number. That is a number that's been proposed by the Westlands Water District Board and staff primarily because if 200,000 acres in the east side of the district are retired, that will yield a lot of water that can then be applied to the remaining 400,000 acres in the district.** That is the driver of that number, the 200,000. There's nothing magic about it. **The concern is not that there is 200,000 acres of land that is completely contaminated and unsuitable for farming.**

I've seen the figure 230,000 acres, of land that is to some degree or another water logged and contaminated with salts and boron and selenium and residues of fertilizers and residues of pesticides. But that can be addressed. You could take all those toxins, remove them by putting perforated pipes under the ground, and then take that water from those 150,000 acres, let's say, and apply it to a remaining 50,000 acres. So if we had the political will to do it we could retire only 50,000 acres and keep more in production, so the driving force is that the district wants to keep the water it has now and not have to deal with the expense of drainage systems and farm the land that is naturally on a higher slope, on the higher end of the grade, and to farm that land that is not so impacted now with drainage problems. There are some things coming up on the horizon now that changed this drive to...I should have said if I didn't already, **on those 200,000 that are proposed to be retired they have entitlement to 400,000 acre-feet of water.**

The proposal is to take those 400,000 acre-feet and apply them to the remaining land, which is 400,000 acres. So that means that a person who has land on the remaining 400,000 acres of Westlands Water District, which is presently 600,000 acres, it means that they will get another foot of water. **Now, what that means is: a lot of us here in this room have grown tomatoes. Tomatoes require 25 to 30 inches of water. My water entitlement right now is 17 inches. I can't grow very many crops on that. I can only grow some winter crops with that allocation or fallow some land and grow on part of the land and then have fallow land. So the drive there is to get the water.** Just a couple weeks ago in Napa, as some of you have read in the news media, the federal and state water officials concluded that they had storage and pumping that they could use on a shared basis beneficially. If that comes to pass – it probably will – there could be as much as 200,000 acre-feet of water that are freed up to come south of the delta to the Westlands Water District. That 200,000 acre-feet would relieve a lot of pressure on retiring so much land. Another development that may come to pass – it's only in the embryonic stages now – is the proposed dam at Temperance-Flat on the San Joaquin River. If that does become a reality that would triple the amount of water that is stored on the lower San Joaquin. Just that new dam would store twice what Friant Dam is storing now. If that yielded 200,000 to 250,000 acre-feet for the Westlands Water District that would reduce the pressure on retiring so much land. So I just want to get those points across that **the driver of retiring so much land is water availability and not drainage per se. If the federal government did provide drainage all 600,000 acres could be utilized.** The land that is now contaminated could have means of removing all the brackish water under it and new water could be put on to flush out the salts and other contaminants. *But if we just put in the drainage that was supposed to be put in that would not increase the supply of water, and so that's why you don't hear on the news media or read in the papers about retaining the 600,000 acres.* **The problem would be, okay, we have 600,000 acres that are usable but we don't have the water to apply to it, so that's why that is not on the agenda.**

I would like to say that a possible scenario with these new supplies of water is that there will be more water, there could be less than 200,000 acres retired, maybe something on the order of 100,000 to 150,000 acres. There may be rotating fallow land, land that is laid

out idle only one year at a time. It could be done on a systematic basis. So that's a possibility as far as land retirement.

Regardless of the scale of the land retirement there's going to be short-term unemployment and I believe depopulation of the area in the near term, although Sarge is saying that we get new people coming in for other reasons, so I don't know. **But I think there will be some shrinkage in population. Long term there will be more vegetable production on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley and more almonds and pistachios. Those will provide employment, but there will be a long period between now and when that comes to full fruition. So we're in for some very difficult times, and I'm glad that we have all these other organizations that are addressing those problems.**

One final thing I'd like to just throw out to the audience is that **I think if we had a Community-Supported Agriculture group that was focused on feeding the poor in Fresno County, this could initially be funded by grants and then hopefully USDA funds that are already going for school lunch programs and food stamp, and maybe some new money, that would be the best situation, could sustain the program, and then property taxes could fund...in other words, the whole county property tax base could fund a Fresno County-funded, Community-Supported Agriculture group wherein farmers would be paid by this quasi-public entity funded through the county by the county and they would be providing food for x number of families, and so I think that's a possibility.** Thank you.

Edie Jessup: Thanks. And Victor and Bill, the balancing impact, then, on what's happening on the East Side of Fresno County and how this dilemma that is occurring on the West Side might impact you.

Victor Lopez, Mayor of Orange Cove: Thank you. It is an honor for me to be here as the Mayor of the City of Orange Cove. I'm really honored to be here with you this afternoon. I want to talk a little bit about Orange Cove, and not only Orange Cove but, as you well know, **there are five of the poorest cities (in the State) in the food basket of the world, Fresno County.** It's really sad to say that, and Orange Cove is probably number one. The **unemployment ranges anywhere from 20% all the way to about 42%** in those particular cities. We understand now that we're agriculturally based, but we also understand that we're not going to survive unless we diversify. We need to diversify and we need to partner together, that being a model of working together with the poorest cities in partnering. Two years ago we received a **Federal Enterprise Community designation the only one in the whole state of California, with Parlier, the Tule Indian Tribe, Huron, Orange Cove.** Well, Orange Cove was able to bring in over \$40 million in the two-year period, and the monies are going to be used for the purpose of infrastructure. **The cities in Fresno County need the infrastructure, which is your water and wastewater.** Without that nobody is going to be looking at your communities. Orange Cove is blessed. Right now with the help of Mr. Bill Little, we are putting a state-of-the-art, one of the most modern systems, in the City of Orange Cove. Water and wastewater. As you well know, **Orange Cove did not have any water.** I spoke to 40 directors in the Central Valley Project and I was able to find the Lower Tule Water District to work with me. I was fortunate to buy 2000 additional acre-feet for the period of 50 years, so the citizens of Orange Cove will never have to worry for the next 50 years. I don't plan to be here for 50 years, so I'm not going to worry about that. We only had 1400 acre-feet, period. We ran out of water. I was scared. We had a lot of development on board already, but I never gave up. I kept working and working until we found the Central Valley Project, the Lower Tule, to cooperate with me and sell me under an entitlement the additional 2000 acre-feet of water. **What is it we need? We need tools.** The people of our community need the tools. What are they? **Transportation, childcare, training. We have one of the best training centers for poverty in the state, the Victor P. Lopez Rural Economic Development Job Training Center. We have a full-blown technology center with state-of-the-art computers, with teachers that are teaching farm workers to be able to access the computers at no cost to the community. Thousands**

of people have gone through that center and we opened up even on Saturdays so that those folks that want to come in on a Saturday and do whatever, business plans or learn how to operate the computers, we have that. We have GED classes. Last year 50 graduated. This year 100 are getting the GED class certificates in Orange Cove. We just graduated last week 50 individuals from Orange Cove. Former farm workers are now in the field of medical billing. They got their certificates last week. I'm really proud of that. In the field of child development we're a **model in child development.** I was able to take 35 farm workers, put them in a classroom, bring in Fresno State University, Reedley Community College, and today they're certified teachers in the field of child development. **They have benefits with salaries and they have a future.** Those were farm workers. Now those folks can go anyplace and work as teachers in the field of child development. **We're leaders in housing. I have three gated communities for farm workers with clubhouses, swimming pools, a lot of open space, playground equipment, security, maintenance, and we're proud. We're doing another project of 74 units today.** The first project under Fannie May is going to be a model if not in the state, the nation. It's going to be first class. Every apartment will have a computer paid by the company and maintained by the company with Internet, with printers and everything free and no cost to farm workers. **I'm building 160 farm worker single-family homes. Home ownership.** Each home is going to have a brand new computer, printer, one year of Internet – **a gift from the City of Orange Cove to the local citizens** – and a \$30,000 buy-down grant on behalf of the City of Orange Cove through the Joe Serna Farm Worker Grant Program so that those farm workers can own a piece of the rock, can own their own home and have a lot of pride in their community. So there are many, many things I could speak about our community, but we're on our way. Real soon you're going to hear that Orange Cove is going to have a groundbreaking ceremony for the Paul Rodriguez Plaza, a brand new multimillion-dollar shopping center in Orange Cove, and we're working with **Jigante**, one of the biggest markets in Mexico. They want to come to Orange Cove – 100,000 square foot facility. Over 300 employees will be hired. Now, we are a **Federal Renewable Community.** We've already hired brand new employees in Orange Cove, 450 new employees in Orange Cove under the Federal Renewable Community Program that Orange Cove was selected with Parlier, and now the Chinese are coming to Orange Cove to invest in Orange Cove. **They're going to create jobs in Orange Cove, and the University of Beijing selected Orange Cove to have over 200 greenhouses in Orange Cove, Chinese flowers, Chinese products. The owners will be Orange Cove people operating those greenhouses.** So I will be inviting you folks to come to Orange Cove. The University of Beijing picked Orange Cove. We're going to prosper, we're going to create jobs and a solid foundation for the citizens of our community. So Mr. Bill Little, our city manager, will elaborate on some of the other issues.

Bill Little, City Manager Orange Cove: I'm glad to be here today. It's funny, because I look back. I was the first city administrator of Orange Cove between 1977 and 1979. Victor was a hard act to follow then. He's a harder act to follow today, but nevertheless, I'll try. After I left Orange Cove I moved to Arizona and for the last 20-some years I've been building water and sewer facilities over there. I've done several major water system improvement projects in smaller communities and one sewer project. Three months ago I was talking with him and he said I've got some work for you over here. So I moved back three months ago and he definitely has some work for me, and I look forward to doing that and working with you all and getting to know my way around the San Joaquin valley again. Thank you, and I look forward to it. If I can answer some questions I'll do that.

Eddie Jessup: Thank you all very much. We have a very interesting dilemma that has been laid out here before us in Fresno County, and I would invite you to raise your hand if you have a question, and Gail, can you pick those up? If there are general questions we'll allow all the panel to respond. It's very interesting, Victor, what you've been able to do in terms of getting federal and special money to address the issues in Orange Cove. What we know is here in Fresno County

that we have many cities that have that same configuration of issues. And then, in addition the whole water issue is very important.

Questions for the panel participants:

Question: Would alternative irrigation techniques help save water? If so, are they currently used?

Phil Erro: That's a real estate question. Location, location, location. Here on the east side of the county, no, it wouldn't do us any good to try and save water here, to try and move it out to the West Side because what happens with the waste here is that by over-applying it recharges our ground water. Right here around the City of Fresno, for example, we depend heavily on the failure of farmers in the Fresno Irrigation District to deliver more water than their crops need. If they didn't do that we'd all be in deep trouble here in Fresno. **So alternative irrigation methods may work in certain circumstances. Clearly, drip tape, drip systems, low-volume sprinklers are being tried where they can be economically done, and that is very capital intensive, and I think one of the biggest limiting factors has been the money available to do that. Farming has been so under the weather, so to speak, financially in difficult times, that they haven't been able to make that investment.**

Victor Lopez: You know, the farmers in Orange Cove, we work very closely with them. Of course we have the drip systems, and we're trying to put in the most sophisticated systems to save water. But one thing that Orange Cove has done, Orange Cove has a **tertiary waste water system versus a secondary, and what we do is we purify our sewer water to Title XXII drinking standards and we use that water to irrigate, and enormous water is saved and then we turn around and give it to the farmers at no cost to them** because I have to dispose of that water. Its got to be Title XXII drinking standards in the State of California and I meet that standard and we're irrigating with that water, so that's a good method of saving water.

Bill Little: We're planning on maybe taking that a step further with our latest sewer treatment plant improvements and that's to use that same irrigation water for the city irrigation for the parks. We have a high school that's not too far from the main trunk line that goes from our plant to Orange Cove irrigation district, so I think there are some major **gains to be made by supplanting or using treated waste water in place of good potable water.**

Phillip Erro: With regard to the availability and use of efficient irrigation systems there is a direct relationship between the income that comes off a crop and the amount of money you invest in the irrigation system. One thing you'll notice when you drive on the West Side of Fresno County when you cross the Fresno Slough, which is the lowest point in the valley, just west of the Fresno Slough as you go south toward Five Points and Huron you'll see that the ground is fill irrigated. Now there are a couple of reasons for that. One is the land is fairly flat there and they do have close well water. In other words, the **well water isn't very far below the ground.** But the other thing that you notice is that the **crops that are grown there are the old commodity crops. You have cereals like wheat, you have sugar beets, you have cotton.** Don't see too many tomatoes there. And so what you have are **very low-paying crops and so there's not a lot of revenue generated to put in a drip system. Some of these newer more sophisticated drip and fan jet systems are \$1200 per acre. When you're growing a crop that will net you \$100 an acre you can't save up enough money to put in the more efficient system.** So what we see is that when you get out up near the West Hills where the soils are a little better drained because of the grading I mentioned earlier you'll see the lettuce growers. You'll see them ten to twenty miles west of Five Points, you'll see them around Huron. **And where you're growing lettuce your production budget for just a 90-day period is \$3,200. They don't think anything of spending another**

\$1200 to get an efficient irrigation system. They're growing winter lettuce with seven inches of water. These are phenomenal figures they're obtaining and attaining. But I emphasized that this is **only done where the crops are generating the most revenues, so your vegetable crops, fresh vegetables and the almonds and pistachios are the most efficiently irrigated.** As you go down the pay scale you go from those crops and then you go to the contracted onions and garlic and tomatoes, all of which go to processors, then you see less sophisticated irrigation systems, and then when you get down to the cereals it's 1920s technology. **So revenues drive the investment in efficient irrigation systems.**

Edie Jessup: Thank you. We're going to do a few more water questions because folks want to understand this better, and then I've got some really heavy employment questions and what is happening to folks.

Question: What guarantees do we have that the water allocations from the retired farmlands will remain in the West Lands and what authority does the County of Fresno have to control the available water allocations?

Sarge Green: Fresno County has no control over water allocations. It's usually a contractual relationship with the state or federal government or it's a right that's held by water users who obtained them a long time ago by putting the water to beneficial use. So there are really only two kinds of water supplies – those that you buy from somebody else or a wholesaler or you have the right to use them. We all have the ability to sink wells for groundwater, but it's uneconomical on a household. It's got to be usually a ranch of some size to do that, so there is no capability really for Fresno County to get into the business unless they want to contract for some of the water, and in fact they do. They contract on the Cross Valley Canal to serve water in the foothills. **A lot of the foothill communities lost their water because it ran downhill and they didn't get a chance to capture it.** We used it down here first, and it's first in time, first in right. So they don't have the water that they need, and in some instances those cracks in the mountains up there don't hold enough, so we had to buy water for them and then we leave a little behind up in some of the mountain lakes and deliver it to them.

The second question was **'What guarantee does West Lands have?'** There is no guarantee. Since it is a contract with the United States the United States can dictate the terms and conditions in that contract, and we have *outside parties who are saying perhaps we shouldn't leave that water in West Lands. Perhaps it should go to other uses,* which would devastate the West Side even further. There have even been news articles in the Fresno Bee that said perhaps the water should go to the environment, and that would be the death knell for the entire West Side.

Question: Is there common ownership of the 200,000 acres and the 400,000 acres? Do the same people own both of those amounts of land talked about?

Phil Erro: No, not necessarily. **A given individual or a given family may have land in two or three locations and may have some land that's going to be retired and other land that's going to be getting more water from the retired land, but there's no cross ownership on a systematic basis** that I know of. That's not generally done. Usually most families just have a nucleus of land and that's where they farm, and they'll lease land around that. You generally don't want to have your equipment running very far from the shop.

Question: What will become of retired land? Industry, housing? Is there any speculation?

Vicky Hoyle: One of the things that the **Rural Collaborative** is working on are just those questions, and that was the impetus for the **Reality Bus Tour** that we took. **The Workforce**

Investment Board who sponsored that trip, created a video that will be done hopefully mid September and all of those folks who participated in the bus trip will be invited back to view the video. Then we will set about the work of trying to figure out how we use the information to tackle these questions. **Nobody argues that we don't need to have some diversification of our agricultural-based economy. The question is how do we do that.** The Rural Collaborative met this morning, and a very interesting speaker, Dr. Fujimoto from UC Davis spoke about a community development rural studies program. He said that you have to find your strengths and build on those, and that's not easy.

Sarge Green: Specifically about the retired land, what's going to happen to it, there's a map floating around, it's just a draft, and it's got some ideas. **One is to return a lot of the land to wildlife habitat. The environmental agencies would like to see some more upland game endangered species habitat.** There is a need, even, for mitigating other projects in other areas and creating that kind of opportunity, so some will be potentially used for that. Some may be used for **storage of fresh water. There is a problem in the delivery system on the West Side and that is we don't have enough storage, and every year our old water becomes new water if we don't use it fast enough.** Kind of a funny deal. One day it's this year's water, the next day it's next year's water because **we are so efficient in many instances we don't use it fast enough, we conserve it, and then they take it away from us.** So one of the things we're proposing to do is to build a storage reservoir somewhere where we can spill this year's water and then they continue to pump and add to next year's water by refilling San Luis Reservoir. Another notion is to **use some of the land for industrial development, especially along the Highway 180 Corridor area.** The other possibility is what Phil talked about, and that is to **use some of the remaining land for disposal of drainage water from drainage impacted areas.** And those are the basic core opportunities.

Susan Arpet, Westside Housing and Economic Network (WHEN): The question also asked about housing, and one of the things that's happening is really tragic. **The land that's being retired is transferred to the Interior Department. The Interior Department puts easements on the land and then it's transferred to West Lands Water District. West Lands Water District is requiring that the landowner evict all tenants in housing on their lands before they are transferred. That means that all the housing on retired lands will disappear.** We looked at some on Adams Avenue, five houses that were in good shape. We had a house mover up to look at whether they could be moved, and they could be moved. **Unfortunately, Fresno County says that these houses could not be moved into the unincorporated area of the county and that all housing must be moved into existing cities and towns, and so all of the housing, those five houses, have now been trashed. They're not recoverable.** Within 45 days there are **17 more houses built by Taylor-Wheeler on a ranch on the West Side. Tenants in those houses have already been given eviction notices and by the time those houses are turned over, if you know what happens to vacant houses in the countryside, they'll be trashed within a week.** There is another farm that has **25 houses in excellent condition, and they can no longer afford to maintain them. The County says that they may not sell the houses to individuals, and so the landowners have no other option except to bulldoze the houses.**

Question: How many people are likely to lose their jobs if the 200,000 acres are taken out of production?

Sarge Green: West Lands has on their website, www.westlands.org, *their economic study on what they think the impacts are going to be on jobs.* Unfortunately, we think they used an inappropriate model. The Farm Bureau commented on that letter and their letter is available also because they also thought that they missed the boat. ***They estimated 1700 jobs would be lost. We think it's closer to 10,000 to 12,000 that will be lost because they didn't use all the***

multipliers and things. Not only are the direct farm workers going to be severely impacted but then the foremen, the truck drivers that used to haul the crops, the tractor dealers, the accountants here in town and the attorney's here in town that used to serve these people. There are a lot more that are going to be impacted. The impact of 200,000 acres, one-third of West Lands... *West Lands output on an annual basis is \$1 billion, which is one-third of Fresno County agricultural economy of \$3 billion.* So if one-third of Westlands goes down that's about \$250 to \$333 million. The usual multiplier for that is three times. That's one billion, then, of economic activity, \$750 million to \$1 billion of economic activity that will be lost to this county if the whole 200,000 acres goes out of business and nothing replaces it.

Question: Margarita, what plans does Centro La Familia Advocacy have for emergency housing and food in the rural Mendota, Three Rocks, Firebaugh area, and what are you doing now to provide services, food, shelter, parent education and so forth in these areas.

Edie Jessup: I want to mention that of these families affected and the families affected by unemployment and in Fresno County, **if there were full enrollment in the Food Stamp program, if all those estimated eligible families were enrolled in food stamps, according to the USDA figures it would add \$2 million a month to the economy that would be spent on food at retailers and on local food product. That's \$24 million a year that would come in as federal money to Fresno County alone,** We have Johnnie Belford here from Fresno County Employment and Temporary Assistance and she does outreach for Food Stamps. **The county has had to cut back on outreach because of funding cuts, and I know that they are working with some other areas to expand that, but for the food situation we could really do something about it if we were to fully enroll folks here in Fresno County and it would help our local farmers.**

Margarita Rocha: Well, I certainly appreciate the question as if I've come here with a plan. It's not true. Let me just address some of the issues, though, and I'll start with the food. What we currently do is we provide services to all residents of Fresno County, and our funding comes from at least seven to eight different sources, and of course, as most of you know, whatever the source is it's dedicated to a particular issue. We get money from Fresno County and money from the City of Fresno, and money from United Way to **address housing issues from the legal standpoint.** When someone is being evicted, is the eviction notice proper? is it following all the rules that it's supposed to? If the ultimate result of if the eviction is proper and the person does need to move **we work to find shelter for the families.** And in most cases we have been successful. However, again, I must tell you that **the shelters are nowhere near sufficient to meet the demand we currently have, let alone what might result if folks are evicted from the current housing that we're talking about in terms of the 200,000 acres of land that's not going to be utilized.** And I forget the number of housing, that we're talking about that are no longer going to be available for these families. **I think that in order to respond to how that's going to happen is that we really need to bring a group of people together on how we're going to work with those individuals and identifying those families because no one organization will be enough.** I know Central California Legal Services also works with housing issues. The California Rural Legal Assistance also works with housing issues and particularly migrant families and they're nowhere near (staff) capacity to address those issues. **And certainly Centro La Familia isn't either other than doing the day to day, the intervention, and hopefully being able to extend an eviction and buy time to help the family. Then we'd have a plan. We don't have one, unfortunately.** I think that it warrants bringing people together to strategize and going before your City Council and your government. That's about the most that I could suggest that we could do. **Food-wise we are very involved in the signing up of families into food stamps. We know and the reports have said that there are more families eligible than we are signing up. That's an educational process.** We are in the communities, particularly **Huron, Firebaugh, and Mendota.** We partner with the

County. I have staff in those communities weekly. We are there every Tuesday in one community, every Wednesday in another community, every Thursday in another community. Nancy Daniels has been very helpful with us in allowing us to come and utilize her facility and to do a lot of different things, not just housing, not just food, but we've done ethnic violence, we do parent mentoring. There is just an array of things we do. **So that is how we are trying to attempt to handle the food hunger. We also take food out to families who are enrolled in our programs. Monthly we take food out to those individual families who are participating in our program.**

Obviously, that is just a little Band-Aid as far as I'm concerned because we are helping but we're not solving the problem at this point.

Joe Arpad, WHEN: The farm worker housing is on private land, and when they receive an eviction notice there is no way that anybody can go onto that property and to inform the people of their rights. We've been talking with CRLA about that, and the owner has the right to lock the farm workers on the property and not allow them access to anybody who is going to talk to them about eviction. There is something called the Uniform Relocation Act that provides all kinds of benefits to the people who are being dislocated when the federal government removes, in this case the Interior Department. That is not being applied in this situation because West Lands is a state agency and does not have to abide by the Uniform Relocation Act and they have pushed it on to the individual landowners and the landowners are just ignoring.

Vicky Hoyle I just wanted also to address the issue in terms of what are we doing, and Margarita is right. **We all need to mobilize and again offer the assistance of the Rural Collaborative. As I said, we have a telecommunications program that gets information out to 19 rural communities.** I've talked with Johnnie, especially when she had her decrease in outreach workers, that the word can be spread free of charge. Just e-mail me what kind of messages that you want to get out. Margarita had utilized us for the training of those folks. And then one of our steering committee members is **Kathleen Mancebo** who is the executive director of the Nonprofit Council, and that has an additional 100 members and so she sends it out to all of those folks as well.

As for housing, that really is the tough one, and I'm not sure how many of you are aware, but **there are some landowners, or I should say complex owners, out of L.A. and they've recently been selling many of their units. They sold about five I think. They've got over 970 in the valley and they sold them to the same person also down south, and that person is renovating them but unfortunately they're having about a 40% increase in the rent as well so people are getting displaced, and Gloria is serving on a taskforce that Roger Palomino chairs for the Empowerment Zone, and although it's urban based we're trying to look at models and I'll be excited to hear tomorrow from her taskforce.** We're looking at how do we increase housing and we've got Self Help and the Housing Authority and those folks coming together, and Gloria's group is looking at in the meantime while we're trying to build houses, which is going to take time, **where are those people going and how can we assist them?**

Margarita Rocha: One of the things that we need to think about, especially when we're talking about housing, is the housing issue is not easy, and when we're going to talk about families and trying to relocate it is complicated. Remember that to get into other housing there are **qualifying measures that many of the families we work with do not meet. There are credit issues, there are immigration issues, there's the size of the family issue, and particularly in Latinos – I'll speak to that since that's what I am – is that many times we're a family but we have extended family members. It's not viewed as proper to do, but that's who we are and in many cases there are extended families that live together, and those are all kinds of issues**

that need to be overcome even if we got to the point of relocating. How do you qualify? how do you manage? All those kinds of things are asked by families, and those are some of the things that we see daily with folks coming in to seek our services. So maybe putting something together about **handling what may become a very explosive issue**, we need to look at all those layers that come with it.

Edie Jessup: Thank you Margarita. I think that that is really crucial as we look at this and the issues that roll down: **its employment, it's housing, it's food, the very basic things that people need to survive.** I'm very concerned that here at this initial look for some of us at **these issues of agriculture and Fresno County that we don't have the people directly impacted by those issues here to talk to us about what some of those complications are.** We don't ever have those people coming together so that they are a visible group, and maybe those are some things we need to look to because **it's very hard to believe what it might be for 17,000 families to be dislocated.** the numbers that we've been talking about.

Question: What does unincorporated mean?

Sarge Green: Well, cities form either by charter or by signing up under a law of the state. **Unincorporated areas are towns that are out in the area that do not have their own city government. They rely on the county for a lot of their services.** They may have a special district out there that does some things, but it does not have all of the powers and the unique capabilities that a city can provide, everything from police and fire to roads and sewer and water. There might be a special district that does water or does even in some cases police protection, but unincorporated just means you're not a city.

Edie Jessup: I'm going to quickly read the other questions but then ask if folks have one last thing about what they see that we might do next

The other questions are:

- **How does a vocational center help if there isn't work to be found?**
- **How will minimum wage jobs at fast food places on Highway 5 be helpful?**
- **I hear from public officials on processing our agriculture here instead of out of the region. Is there any momentum on developing this? Would a casino help?**
- **Why can't we get a directory of organic farmers in our region?**

And so those are the remaining questions that we have, and we will be continuing to work on those. If you'd like to have a summary comment and perhaps some commitment about how you or your organization might be able to contribute towards solving this problem.

Sarge Green: With regard to Interstate 5, the **Fresno County policy has been since 1968 before the freeway was put in to only have two interchanges where there are restaurants,** and that's the Panoche Road and where the Harris Ranch Restaurant is, Highway 198.

So unless the Board of Supervisors changes that, the number of fast food restaurants will probably remain where it is now.

Vickie Hoyle: Yeah, we were talking about opening them up but not necessarily for fast food. We thought that a **better use would be things like warehousing and distribution where there are higher paying jobs because we're located right between L.A. and San Francisco and we can store goods and ship it either way rather than them going up and down both ways**, so, no, we were talking about higher-value, fairly well-paying jobs, and then the people living in the existing communities, not building whole new communities out there. That wouldn't make any sense either. So we can talk more about that some other time.

Victor Lopez: I wanted to announce that I've been working for a year with the administrator for SBA, Hector Berado, and I've applied for a CDC and I have formed a CDC already or incorporated already. The bank is sitting with me. I'm the new president, and we'll be making an announcement this month that we'll be the first rural CDC in America, and we did it and we're excited and the secretary will be coming to Orange Cove to make the announcement. But this is not only Orange Cove, it's for the whole rural area, three counties, that we're going to be doing this. And the purpose of that is **so that they can develop industrial parks, industries to create the jobs in our communities and the monies will be available for the first time in the history.**

Bill Little: I know it's something we haven't discussed at all, it doesn't relate to water or waste water, but one of your news releases has to do with **overweight and unfit children** as being a problem, and **as you all know cancer and heart disease are skyrocketing among young people and that's something that this group ought to at least spend a little bit of time with, and if you've got a taskforce or something I'd be happy to contribute my time to that.**

Edie Jessup: I'll be talking to you soon, Bill. We have that very thing. Thank you very much.

Margarita Rocha: I do have an announcement I'd like to make. I do make a commitment to continue to participate in any fashion that we can and also my staff as well. I'd just like before you leave to let you know that there is a training coming up on Monday that we're cosponsoring which is for agencies to give you some information on what the concept of **Promotora** is. We utilize the Promotora concept with some of our projects, and someone is coming in from San Francisco to offer training to agencies who may have some interests in weaving that into your services. **Promotora is a promoter. We go into, and particularly we've done this in the Westland rural communities where we have identified through several methods a leader, so to speak, within that community, and right now we have about 15 of the Promotoras** that we're utilizing in three communities. That training on Monday the 18th from 10 to 3, I believe. If anyone has an interest if they could call my office, and my number is 237-2961. We'd be happy to have you come. The training is particularly for organizations at this point.

Edie Jessup: Thank you so much, and thank you all for the work that you do.

The Packet provided contained: Agenda, and calendar of meetings on hunger and nutrition this month; in-kind match request for USDA grant "Fresno Fresh Access"; an update on what has survived the State budget that relates to food issues and Federal Child Nutrition Reauthorization which is coming up; two articles bipartisan support for a particular bill that has great advantages for seeing that California farmers are able to provide really good, healthy, local food locally, and an article introducing Dr. Moreno, new Public Health Officer for Fresno County. We are very happy he has named obesity, diabetes, and asthma as the three most serious health issues facing Fresno County, and that will allow us to elevate the need for nutrition access for health solutions; California Food and Justice Coalition will be doing a listening session and hearing September 30 here in Fresno on their policies, legislative recommendations and Weaving the Food Web; task groups sign ups; a petition to the state to continue attempting to find ways to use the new food stamp card EBT/Golden State Advantage) at farmers markets; an evaluation of this forum.