

# VALLEY LAND ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

*Our mission is to educate and build alliances to protect our uniquely productive California Central Valley Farmland*

## Letter from the President In Gratitude

**Change is in the air.** With shorter days and cooler weather I look at the land around me, amazed at how much food we recently harvested. Of the more than 100 crops grown in Merced County two crops by my farm seem to stand out: almonds and sweet potatoes. With the holidays right around the corner we thought we would share a recipe using sweet potatoes, a must for holiday dinner for many people. Low in calories and high in Vitamins A and C, and potassium, sweet potatoes are considered by many to be one of the nation's most nutritionally complete foods.

With our good coarse sand and available water 80% of the 8.1 million hundredweight sweet potatoes grown in California are grown in Merced County. (Capital Press Apr, 2020)

It's all about the water and soil. Water has broken up the granite from the mountains and deposited this coarse sand downstream, with the Merced River creating alluvial fans reaching nearly to the San Joaquin River. A good source for more information is Soil Survey of the Merced Area California, by E. B. Watson.

Another report, San Joaquin Land and Water Strategy, published by American Farmland Trust (AFT) in July 2018, addresses questions we all should be asking ourselves now with Sustainable Groundwater Management concerns. These resources are very important in prioritizing and preserving our best farmland and in helping

protect its water supply.

Some questions addressed in this report are:

- How is the quality of agricultural land distributed in the valley?
- Where are irrigation water resources more or less abundant and reliable?
- How and where does the combination of land quality and water reliability appear to make agriculture more or less resilient?
- How and where will future urban growth, new proposed water regulations and climate change affect agricultural land and water resources?

In this time of limited mobility, may we take a deep breath and be grateful for all we have. (Check out the conclusion to these questions on the following page) Jean Okuye



Almond harvest photo by Jean Okuye

**FALL 2020**

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**Where to find us**

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(CONCLUSION...)

## “THE MORE RESILIENT FARMLAND IS THE MOST LIKELY TO BE PERMANENTLY LOST TO DEVELOPMENT”



Sweet potato harvest photo by Scott Magnuson

## VLA in Action! We are watching

Not only are we watching the proposed Del Puerto Canyon dam, but we have had our attorney, Marsha Burch, write a comment letter addressing the Final Environmental Impact Report...

### “FALLS SHORT OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT”

... was one conclusion. We will have more opportunities to challenge this.

Check out our updated website for more information and resources: [valleylandalliance.org](http://valleylandalliance.org)

Webinars and youtube articles are being followed on the developments with the ground water.

These short videos by Vickey Espinosa, we recommend you watch and share with others:

- <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3zWtX-zGVCazPNbfiEnnvWnyok0tbjSmM>
- Spanish playlist: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3zWtXzGVCaxXfdeDNzyVkbKfgVxELPTS>

Jean Okuye

\* you can reach us at [valleylandalliance209@gmail.com](mailto:valleylandalliance209@gmail.com)

## Welcoming Jake Magnuson

My name is Jake Magnuson, and I've been working at my family's farm my entire life. I studied philosophy at CSU Stanislaus, and want to work towards a sustainable future for agriculture in the valley. I'm excited to help the VLA increase community involvement and recruitment.

### ITS VITAL THAT WE ARE ALL INVOLVED IN MAKING A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THE VALLEY'S LAND AND CREATE A SHARED VISION.

If anyone wants to submit photos or articles for our newsletters know that we welcome all submissions; the more involvement we have the more often we would be happy to release newsletters! We are always happy to have more voices at our monthly meetings, and if you feel interested in becoming more active in preserving and protecting ag land or the environment please contact us.\*

We want to hear your voice now more than ever, and we want to let your voice be heard.

Jake Magnuson



Jake at his family home in Cressey

# Farmer Bob's Sweet Potato Chowder

**COOK:** ½ lb thick sliced bacon cut in 1 inch pieces, cooked crisp, remove fat

**ADD:** 1 red pepper diced  
1 green pepper diced  
2 onions diced

When tender...

**ADD:** 3 sweet potatoes peeled and cut into 1 inch cubes (orange type)  
3 cans (14.5 ounce cans) chicken broth  
1 canned chipotle chile (more if want hotter)  
Simmer 15 min. until potatoes are tender

**ADD:** 2 (14 ounce) cans corn  
1 cup lowfat milk  
½ tsp salt

**SERVE HOT WITH CILANTRO FOR GARNISH**



## Puzzle Sudoku

6				7		3	4	
3							6	8
8			9		3			
9				5			1	4
			1		8			
5	7			2				3
			2		4			6
4	3							1
	2	5		8				9

## Nakashima Farm's Sweet Potato Salad



### HONEY VINAIGRETTE DRESSING

**COOK:** 3 ½ lb sweet potatoes just until tender in salted water with jackets.

Peel and cut in half then into into ¼ inch slices.

**ADD:** 1 pepper cut in strips, 1 red onion cut in rings. Pour Honey vinaigrette dressing over mixture.

**ADD:** ½ cup kalamata olives and 4 oz. Feta cheese.

1 cup rice vinegar  
½ cup vegetable oil  
1 tablespoon honey  
2 cloves garlic  
2 bay leaves  
½ teaspoon salt  
¼ teaspoon pepper  
¼ teaspoon each oregano and thyme, crumbled

Combine all ingredients in jar with tight fitting lid. Shake vigorously until well mixed. After marinating, remove garlic cloves and bay leaves

# Dam Articles!

## Proposed Del Puerto Canyon Dam Pros & Cons

A group of 4 water agencies known as the SJR Exchange Contractors, buy and sell water in central and southern California. The Exchange Contractors along with Del Puerto Water District, are working to build a dam to hold water in Del Puerto Canyon, near the town of Patterson, California. The Exchange Contractors and Del Puerto Water district will own the water in the reservoir and control the pricing of this water.

**Pro:** “Locally owned, locally controlled off-stream water storage. Supports farming and the local agricultural economy.”

**Cons:** The dam would create more storage on the dryer westside side of the valley, at the expense of natural rivers on the eastside, from Fresno to Shasta. This is robbing Peter to pay Paul, with known detrimental long-term consequences: think Owens Valley– water removal, resulting desertification and dust bowl air pollution. Reducing east side water flow, water to the Delta, and naturally occurring groundwater recharge on the eastside will degrade these ecosystems. A steady supply of fresh water flowing to the Delta is necessary to hold salt water in the bay from leaching further into the groundwater of the San Joaquin Valley, threatening even more agricultural lands.

Irrigation of the dry Westland causes salts to build up over time, poisoning the soil. Long term, the dry Westland are best for dry farming. This proposal supports the Exchange Contractors, who then to supply water to farmers and agriculture (highest bidder), versus supports local farmers and agriculture.

**Pro:** “Eliminates flooding on Del Puerto Creek”

**Cons:** Del Puerto Creek drains a relatively small watershed in the coastal mountains and is located in an area that averages only 12 inches of precipitation a year.

This is not the same as rivers that drain the vast watersheds of the Sierras and Shasta, where massive snowmelts and storms can, and do, cause huge, irregular flooding. If/when the dam fails a large flood will occur, putting the residents of Patterson at risk.

**Pro:** Provides groundwater recharge for City of Patterson water supplies.

**Cons:** There are less risky, less expensive and eco-friendly ways to recharge ground water using the existing creek by slowing the flow of water out of the canyon while preserving the native cultural sites and the current recreation and wildlife the canyon provides.

**Pro:** Recreation opportunity in partnership with Stanislaus County and City of Patterson.

**Cons: Not so:** The Environmental Impact Report states: “2.3.4 Potential Future Uses The reservoir is currently proposed to be used only for water storage; no additional uses of the reservoir for recreational purposes are included in the Project Partners’ plans for the reservoir



Active landslide photo by Garry Hayes

site. There has been local interest in the possibility of recreation at the reservoir, and the Project. Partners are open to Stanislaus County developing recreation near the reservoir in the future. The reservoir site could provide upland recreation such as camping, hiking and picnicking, *but the reservoir is not expected to be suitable for water-based recreation and fish stocking would not be allowed.*”

Camping, hiking and picnicking are already possible.

**Pro:** Seismic study will be done.

**Cons:** This dam location is a seismically active area! There is no such thing as an earthquake proof dam, rendering this site unsafe for a dam. Movement in the earth’s crust is inevitable along and near faults, so it is not a matter of “if”, but when. In addition, the canyon is lined with landslide soils, a past slide is visible in the canyon. A landslide can cause a dam to collapse. The town of Patterson (approx. 25,000 people) is directly beneath the dam, putting townsfolk at risk. How will the dam impact the local insurance rates?

Thirty-four miles south of Patterson is the B. F. Sisk Dam (aka San Luis dam) that holds the San Luis Reservoir in Pacheco Pass. The dam has been seismically damaged.

**IT WILL COST MORE THAN 1.1 BILLION DOLLARS TO REPAIR** albeit that price includes a ten-foot increase in height. Taxpayers will pay for the fix.

San Luis Reservoir is also an off- stream water storage unit, like Del Puerto will be. Clean, eastside water is pumped up to the reservoir, where it hosts a toxic algae bloom, making it seasonally unsafe for humans, pets and wildlife. Buyers of this contaminated water must process it, using more products that threaten the environment, but the water was clean to start off with.

It seems to me that the real motivation appears by following the money.

Exchange Contractors & Del Puerto Water District contracts (purchases) would supply water to be held in this reservoir.

(Continued on following page...)

(continued...)

The Exchange Contractors and DPWD will then own the water, which they can sell to the highest bidder. So, who are the exchange contractors? From their website “The Exchange Contractors mission is to... and to defend the Exchange Contractors water rights.” They are folks who gained water rights under archaic, gold rush style laws of long ago, and see the value in retaining them- in other words- privatizing and commoditizing water. A cost benefit analysis is not available to the public. How much does it cost, including maintenance, and supporting expenses versus how long it will last? So far, it appears the tax payers have paid \$1.5 million for this “study” as part of a massive water infrastructure bill passed in the house of Representatives. Who will be responsible for the cost of removal, cleanup and restoration when the dam has lived its life?

If any of this seems incorrect to you, please contact me at the website: [valleylandalliance.org](http://valleylandalliance.org)

Ursula Stock

**“THOSE WHO DON’T KNOW HISTORY ARE DESTINED TO REPEAT IT.”**

Edmund Burke (1729-1797)

# Dam Geology!

## Geology & Environmental Impact

These are the thoughts of local geologists and legal activists regarding the proposed Del Puerto Canyon Dam. They offer telling insights...

“There is also deep concern in the community regarding the private control of water storage resulting in benefits to some, while the citizens of Patterson bear the safety risks, and the increased cost of insurance and reduced land values that will result. **Patterson is home to over twenty thousand people.** The reservoir will be near a fault, and the DEIR acknowledges that the Project will be subject to seismic activity and soil instability in the future. **There is no evacuation plan.** There is no evidence in the record that the risk of dam failure will somehow be reduced to zero, so it is troubling to say the least that the DEIR does not even address the injury and death that could (and would) occur if the dam fails.

The Project is also inconsistent with County General Plan policies regarding placing structures within areas that are subject to flooding, landslide, faulting or any natural disaster to minimize loss of life and property... because **it fails to include mitigation measures that would reduce the impacts.** Reducing, but not eliminating, the possibility of dam failure does not relieve the District from mitigating for the impacts that will occur in the event that the dam does fail.”

Marsha A. Burch, Attorney at Law



Canada goose by Scott Magnuson



Deer in live stream by Garry Hayes

**“DEL PUERTO IS ONE OF THE MOST UNIQUE LANDSCAPES OF CALIFORNIA’S COAST RANGES...”**

“There are large landslides in the lower canyon that would almost surely be reactivated (or accelerated; they show evidence of recent motion) if the base is inundated by lake water. **There are definite seismic concerns,** as a probable active fault lies just east of the dam site. But my biggest concern is the effect the dam will have on the natural environment of the canyon.

Del Puerto is one of the most unique landscapes of California’s Coast Ranges, and as I noted, a geological and natural treasure.... California has some really strange landscapes. A state that has beaches, mountains, volcanoes, forests, and deserts is going to offer many perspectives of the complex geological influences on the state. But for alien and otherworldly, few places in the state can compare to the journey you take when you follow Del Puerto Canyon from its mouth in the Great Valley to the headwaters in the Diablo Range. It’s a journey into the middle of the world.”

Garry Hayes, Modesto Junior College Geology Prof.

You can find Garry and his geological news and insights at <http://geotripper.blogspot.com>

# Thank you to our Donors

We wish to thank all of you who have supported us with memberships and contributions. Your contributions allow us to educate people and policy-makers in our community. VLA is grateful for the support from the John & Nancy Cassidy Family Foundation, an advised fund of Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

We want all of you reading this to know that we want to hear from you! These newsletters are a result of community involvement. The Valley Land Alliance is supported by you. Starting with our next newsletter we want to give thanks to everyone who donates and continues to make our mission possible.

Our next newsletter would like to feature your names to give credit to you, who keep making it possible.

## THANK YOU!

*If you have a photo or write-up you'd like to share, please send it to our email at: [valleylandalliance209@gmail.com](mailto:valleylandalliance209@gmail.com)*



John Mitchell's buddy pictured in Nathan Meninger's sweet potato field. This picture was taken during a harvest of 6,000 pounds of sweet potatoes that were donated to Food Bank. Thanks to Nathan and the volunteers.

*If you'd also like to be a donor fill out the form below. No gift is too large or too small.*

Valley Land Alliance  
PO Box 102  
Cressey, CA 95312

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Here

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