

# Coastal Grower

FALL | 2016

An American flag is draped over the top of a wooden sign. The sign is made of vertical wooden planks and has the words "THANK YOU" painted in white, block letters across the top. Below the text are two red hearts, one on the left and one on the right. The sign is set against a red brick wall.

THANK YOU



FIRE



FIGHTERS



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### COVER PHOTO

"Thank You Firefighters" By Whitney Pridey  
One of many signs created by the San Benancio 4-H to thank the brave men and women fighting the Soberanes and other fires along the Central Coast. © 2016 All rights reserved.



## Why Water Needs to Remain the Focus in California

BY BRIAN MILNE

*"And it never failed that during the dry years the people forgot about the rich years, and during the wet years they lost all memory of the dry years. It was always that way."*

– John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*

It's been more than 60 years since Steinbeck penned those words, but here in California we still tend to suffer from amnesia when it comes to water use following a wet year.

Since the "Monster" El Niño brought better than average rainfall to California (at least to the northern part of the state) during the 2015-16 rain season, it seems talk of the drought has started to dry up.

Gov. Jerry Brown has lifted water conservation mandates for California residents. Media coverage of the drought has taken a back seat to the general election and a rash of hot-button issues such as gun control and marijuana legalization.

Despite our attention to drought deficit disorder, water is still a critical issue for all of us in California, particularly in our Central region where we don't see the benefit of runoff from the Sierra Nevada snowpack.

As it stands currently, a majority of the Salinas Valley groundwater basin is still being classified as a high risk basin by the Department of Water Resources. That means the pressure remains on local officials, agriculture and the general public to balance groundwater basins to meet state mandates and assure long-term water resources.

For that to happen, water conservation needs to become a way of life for all of us.

At the time I sat down to write this piece, the state had eased up considerably on residential water conservation restrictions. That said, California residents still reduced water consumption by 21.5 percent in June 2016, the first month since restrictions were relaxed, versus the baseline in June 2013.

Good news, right?

But if you're a glass-half-empty type, you'll point out that number went down from the 25 percent reduction mandated earlier in the year, which shows a slippage in residential water savings since Gov. Jerry Brown dropped all statewide mandatory water conservation targets this past summer.

Without the mandates, or the media coverage, California residents run the risk of relapsing when it comes to pouring it on during the dry months.

The 2015-16 El Niño rain season has given Californians false hope that the drought is coming to an end. But the reality is, Central and Southern California are in the same boat we were in a year ago, only with a weaker La Niña season expected this winter.

Despite the ongoing water concerns, water was only a small part of the conversation at this summer's Forbes AgTech Summit in downtown Salinas, CA. On the panel "Life After Water," panelists discussed the state of water management in California, noting the focus has definitely shifted from the drought to how to better manage our water systems and groundwater sources.

"There was a small part of me that wanted the drought to continue, because that's where innovation, and policy is set, when it starts to hurt," said summit panelist Eric Averett, General Manager for the Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District in Bakersfield.

And it still hurts, particularly for farmers, who feel the realities of California's drought firsthand every day.

While the mandates have been dropped for residents, many growers have seen their allocations slashed, and are being forced to grow more with less water, or more expensive water.

"We're getting squeezed pretty hard," admitted Stuart Woolf, President and CEO for Woolf Farming & Processing.

And it's only going to get harder for California growers.

Despite some relief from El Niño, Gov. Brown recently signed Senate Bill (SB) 88,



Sections 15-18, which will require many large-scale growers in California to install flow meter monitoring systems and submit water-use reports in 2017.

The reporting requirements apply to all water rights holders, diverting more than 10 acre-feet of water per year.

"It's definitely on everyone's minds, knowing regulations are coming down the line," said Hortau Salinas region representative Cord Nunez, who was on hand for the AgTech event. "For growers who have a good-sized operation and have multiple ranches, they know they have to get ahead of the regulations and do their part.

"Water conservation is not being lost on our farmers. Most of them are growing more with fewer inputs today, and have already adopted precision irrigation practices. Now it's about showing the work they've put in, and that they are in fact managing their irrigation programs efficiently."

Therein lies the huge challenge.

While installing irrigation management and monitoring systems has already helped agriculture optimize water use, crop health and production, there are more questions than answers about California's overall water use. Meters still aren't used on all urban sources, and roughly half of the state's water is set aside for environmental use.

**Without the mandates, or the media coverage, California residents run the risk of relapsing when it comes to pouring it on during the dry months.**

All of which creates a complicated web of water issues and conservation challenges. That's how it's always been in California, just ask Steinbeck.

"Bringing everything into balance is really the challenge the state faces, and it's really not something that happens in one year," noted summit panelist Daniel Mountjoy, Director of Resource Stewardship for the nonprofit organization Sustainable Conservation. "It can't get fixed in one year, but it can start in one year. The question is, can we keep the interest alive when there's not a drought?"

Unfortunately, droughts have become more frequent since Steinbeck's day, and the water issues will only get worse unless we leverage the water-saving technologies and conservation practices that are at our disposal today.

So let's not forget about the "dry years", rather let's focus on making every year a "rich year" when it comes to conservation and our long-term water resources.

Learn more about Hortau Irrigation Management Systems and Flow Meter Monitoring solutions at [hortau.com/flowmeter](http://hortau.com/flowmeter). **ce**

