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Excerpts and Summary of the 61th Community Hunger and Nutrition Forum
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California Dept. of Health, Cancer & Nutrition Section, California Nutrition Network

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Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission Refugee Rural Initiative

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

Focus: Access to Healthy Drinking Water

Implications for hunger, nutrition, schools and communities in
Fresno County

Hunger and Nutrition Forum Wednesday, December 14, 2005

From the movie “Thirst.” Is anyone familiar with that documentary? This was a movie that producers based in the San Francisco Bay Area put together on **anti-privatization fights across the globe, communities struggling against global corporations trying to come in and take control of their water resources.** The documentary features communities from around the globe, from **Bolivia, from India, and the part that we’re going to show you today is from Stockton, California,** just north, and so that can kind of show you what the scope of the problem is in California. So without further ado...

Edie Jessup: I want to welcome you all to this forum, and I would like to start the forum off by reading from the **California Constitution, which says, “Water must be put to reasonable and beneficial use in the interest of the people and for the public welfare.”** The public value is codified in the **California Water Code, which states, “All water within the state is the property of the people of the state. By law no individual, corporation, or other private entity can own water.”** So, California State holds public water resources in trust for all Californians.

Raisin City, Huron, Parlier, Firebaugh, Mendota, Riverdale, Coalinga, Alpaugh. We have problems with water in Fresno County. We’re going to hear some about this from people. I will do one other little excerpt from the book Thirsty for Justice. “Privatization refers to the transfer of all or parts of a public water system to private control. While state and local governments have historically failed to respond to the needs of California’s low-income communities and communities of color, international examples suggest that corporations will be more difficult to hold accountable. Low-income communities and communities of color have several areas of concerns specific to the impacts of privatization and corporate control of local water districts. There are increased water prices that have occurred, irreversible loss of public capacity to provide water to citizens, and there are huge health impacts that are involved with discontinuance of service and limited accountability once water is privatized.”

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We have serious issues with our children in schools if the water becomes undrinkable, and their access to water without having to buy it is a tremendous issue for health and well being. Today we're going to hear from some people on these topics.

Jeremy Hofer, Fresno Metro Ministry Hunger & Nutrition Project reviewed the Packet.

Eddie Jessup: Thank you. I want to thank our panel for being here today. I will have people introduce themselves. You can see in your agenda that we have Amy Vanderwarker from the Environmental Justice Coalition, Lloyd Carter, who is an attorney here in Fresno, and Lydia Flores, who is an organizer and works with the Unitarian Universalist congregation and League of Women Voters on organizing around water. Tim Casagrande, thank you very much for coming from the County of Fresno. We will get started with our panel, and if we have time at the end, we'll show the excerpts from "Thirst." Water is a critical issue and something that we aren't hearing enough about. I hope that this can be the start of a great conversation. .

Amy Vanderwarker, Environmental Justice Coalition for Water: I work with the Environmental Justice Coalition for Water. We are a statewide coalition of organizations ranging from community-based groups to larger nonprofits. We advocate for community water concerns and California water policy and we also support local communities working on specific water issues. Our coalition has been in existence for six years, and our work is really driven by **our realization over the past six years that throughout California, low-income communities and communities of color lack access to safe, clean, affordable water for all uses.** Eddie opened up this forum with a quote from the California Constitution talking about beneficial uses. For the communities that we work with, **beneficial uses really include everything from drinking to subsistence fishing to cultural and religious uses to recreational uses, but what we have seen, and we work with communities who face this on a daily basis, many communities do not have the ability to access these rights that are guaranteed in the California Constitution.**

Just to bring it home a little bit for you folks, **have you been following what's going on in Parlier?** Has anyone heard about that? For those of you who are not familiar, in **Parlier, a predominantly farm-working community in Fresno County, last week, the public was issued orders to boil their water and not to drink it because they had such high levels of coliform. Coliform is from human waste.** So their water was highly contaminated and they were ordered by the city who runs their water system to boil water and do not drink it. That is the kind of situation that **many communities face on a daily basis,** and many people do not realize that here in California there are still communities that have this problem. Eddie also started with a list of communities, and I could name a whole series of other ones who face this problem. Like I said, these issues range from fishing to cultural and religious uses for Native Americans, but **here in the Central Valley, like in Parlier and here in Fresno, it really revolves around drinking water and a lot of small, farm-working, predominantly Latino communities that do not have safe, clean drinking water. This, really, for our coalition is an issue of access. It's not just that communities have an issue with contamination due to agricultural usage. It's that they do not have access to information in their language about their water issues.** In Parlier the problem was not only contamination but it was the fact that **community members were not notified until several days later of the acute contaminate and warnings were not even issued in Spanish in a predominantly Spanish-speaking town, so it's an issue of access to information and also to funding sources.** There is very little money that gets

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to small communities to upgrade their drinking water systems. Perhaps most overwhelmingly it's an issue of access to decision making, and this is where a lot of the issues around privatization come in, which, as Edie said, is when private companies come in and take control of supplying and maintaining and managing water in a particular area. What we have found often is that this removes the decision-making abilities of communities one step further. Privatization has been a much larger issue internationally around water than it has been here in California for a lot of reasons, and I think we have a lot to learn from international activists who have fought against global corporations, but I think here in California it's important for us to remember that a lot of these issues of privatization often take a different form. Hopefully we'll have time to see the excerpts of **Stockton where there was a global corporation coming in and taking over a publicly owned water system.** As Lloyd Carter will definitely tell you, **in a lot of ways, water in California has always been privatized and it really has often been controlled by corporations, by urban uses, by agricultural uses.** The large water districts and water agencies that make decisions about California water policy are not making decisions that benefit communities like Parlier, like Alpaugh where Sandra Meraz is from, like Raisin City, so in that sense these communities do not have access to decision-making power at all over what is a public resource and is their human right. I think this is really another **lesson to be learned from the privatization battles internationally and in Stockton, that as the California Constitution says, water is a human right, and the issue of privatization really brings this issue to a forefront because something that everybody needs to survive is often being treated as a commodity,** as something that goes to the highest bidder. Our coalition and the communities that we work with want to say, no, that water is something that should be guaranteed because it is fundamental to everybody's survival, and privatization really threatens the ability of these communities to access what is a fundamental human right. Our coalition did put out the book that Edie was reading from. It is a report that my coalition put together with over 60 organizations and it really gives a broad overview of all of the environmental justice issues with regard to California water. It's in the back. There is also a community summaries piece that you're welcome to help yourself to, and there is an example of a community that we worked with on the central coast that faced privatization directly. They are a small farm-working community and they saw their water rates go up by about 500 percent, really. They were paying hundreds of dollars a month after a large corporation raised their water rates without the community's input or knowledge. It's examples like that that we are trying to stop. With that I'll turn it over.

Lloyd Carter, Attorney and Save our Streams: Thank you, Amy. I've been writing about local valley and state water issues for 30 years now and I reluctantly have reached the conclusion that the **broad general public, sad to say, really doesn't care about water issues as long as it's coming out of the tap and it's not brown.** Apparently water, as I see it, has to poison them or drown them, as Katrina taught us, before they do anything. I'll give you a specific example. A week ago I spoke to a couple of classes at City College. There were about 100 students. Some actually attended and didn't have to be there, which was kind of shocking. There's actually not even an environmental club at City College, which tells you the state of the campus nowadays. I do these little polls before I give a talk and I asked how many of the students were concerned about the air quality and the water quality in Fresno, and not surprisingly, every hand went up. And then I said, "Now, how many of you are actively doing something about the problem?" and there were two hands. So that's the

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problem. It's how to energize the public. **The question is when does California get its Katrina. We know all the warnings are there for the delta, which is the drinking water source for 22 million people. I have to tell you, sad to say, it is the unwritten policy of this state, at least in the delta where, as I said, 22 million people rely on it for drinking water, we mix our drinking water with our agricultural waste water, with our industrial waste water, and with our "treated" city sewage waste water.** If you've been up 99 when you go through Modesto, their waste water treatment plant is right there at 99 and the Stanislaus River, and when we have big flood events they overflow. Southern California has become unspeakable. They pump all their sewage three miles out. The beaches are closed all the time now in Southern California. When you go swimming you're going to get rashes or fevers or worse. California's water protectors are a joke, and if you go to the Little Hoover Commission, which just came out with a report last month on Cal-Fed, which is the consortium of state and federal water agencies that are supposed to be solving the problems of quantity and quality in the Bay-Delta Region, the Little Hoover Commission issued a scathing report. It's kind of like the 9/11 Commission that came out and gave the Bush Administration all Fs. **As far as protecting the public's water quality in California, both democratic and republican administrations deserve an F for the status of the delta today and the protection of California's drinking water supplies in general.** I saw a story in the L.A. Times last week about the City of Sacramento's infrastructure. **Basically, all the big cities in California – and most of the population in California lives in the cities – get their water through pipes and carry their waste water away through pipes. A lot of those systems are now well over 100 years old and they're completely deteriorating. In many cases, water lines and sewer lines run parallel to each other underground. We have earthquakes; we have deterioration of the pipes themselves. The repair costs for Sacramento City's infrastructure of pipes underground alone is four billion dollars. The tab to restore the delta levy system, which was built in the gold rush era and is deteriorating, is in the tens of billions of dollars.** It's not a pretty picture of what California is going to have to do to protect its water supply system. **I suspect it's going to be a band-aid approach until we have our own Katrina-like event, which will either be a massive levy collapse or you'll have a Parlier type situation where people won't just get sick, you'll kill a bunch of people,** and that's what usually triggers some kind of reform is when you kill a bunch of people. So we're going to have lip service to repairing the Bay-Delta. Every city in California is now wrestling with what they are going to do to repair their deteriorating, aging water delivery infrastructures. I think they did a survey of America. Of course, this is not just true in California, it's true all over America. Some cities are two or three hundred years old in America and it's \$20 billion a year for the next 20 years, so we've got a \$400 billion tab to make our water delivery systems.

This is the most chemically intensive farmed place on earth. We use more pesticides here than anywhere else on earth. Tens of thousands of rural residents in this valley live and get their water from domestic wells that never get tested. They have no idea what's in their water supply. Farmers themselves, ironically, may be poisoning their own families. I saw another piece in the L.A. Times two weeks ago about Parkinson's. **The link between Parkinson's disease and pesticides is becoming clearer and clearer.** A lot of the scientists in the field have no doubt that there's a linkage. The irony is that it's not a particular pesticide that's involved; it's the **synergistic effects of combinations of pesticides.** **In fact, they've seen situations where you may get exposed to a certain type of pesticide as a child, and you carry, of course, some residue. We've all got DDT in us as I speak. Then a couple of decades later you get**

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exposed to another pesticide and within your body those two pesticides interact. I recommend that you all go to the L.A. Times website and look up that article on Parkinson's because it's really scary. So there is a lot to do and our **politicians are the ones that we need to hold accountable.** Thank you.

Sandra Meraz, Committee for a Better Alpaugh, and the Center for Race and Poverty: Good afternoon. My name is Sandra Meraz and I am representing the Center for Race and Poverty, which is an advisory board table that I belong to and Mrs. Martinez here, and I am representing Alpaugh and an endangered species, rural families in danger. We have had a struggle on the water issue, as everybody knows, I think. I was looking at the notes that I made, and actually everything runs together. We lost a well. That's where we started. **We lost a well in Alpaugh back in 2002. We found out that the domestic system that was owned by another entity had a high energy bill that they couldn't overcome. It was overwhelming and they went bankrupt,** so we started with a well failure. **Then we were on another well and that failed, and that was started with arsenic problems.** It has been a difficult time for seven years trying to get a well and infrastructure, but actually three-and-a-half years of cost, poverty, and the cost of water for us has been very, very high, and we're still there. There is so much to say about our seven-year struggle, but actually, organizations have started helping us and the community. We finally successfully got \$4,100,000 between both federal and state agencies. **The Department of Water Resources gave us money for the infrastructure. The USDA is putting in a well and other items and then getting grants for meters so the people wouldn't have too much of a cost.** It has been, like I said, overwhelming, but it's been a struggle to get local government to really help us. I know that the local government has deficits and everything else, but we've had to go out and seek these grants. Every time I go to a conference or I tell our story I don't know where to start and where to stop. We have an organization, **Committee for a Better Alpaugh. By January 1st the DHS will have to send a letter that we have to send to our customers, our families, and it will be suggested or recommended they can't drink the water after what we've all gone through because of the new standards, ten parts per billion arsenic. Our new well will be 16 parts per billion. We're not going to make it in compliance.** We are going to have to seek more grants to have an arsenic system plant that removes arsenic. Again, here we are beginning again another struggle and another trial. I don't know what it is that I can say and how to tell other communities where you start. It used to be that we were very successful and we had a resource, but now looking into the future, what resources are there, really? We got water and they say that it's drinkable. I'm not whining or complaining. I'm just concerned for all the...**the school really is my concern. This is what we were drinking. This is microsand. When the well failed this is what we ended with in 2002. In May of 2004, they put in a well that the entity had at the time, and this is what supposedly we're drinking now. This is supposed to be good water, and it is. I'm not saying it's not, but it took us a long time to get here. It was said that we could not drink this until January 8, 2005, and this was 2002. But with the help of Assemblywoman Nicole Para, she put a 5,000-gallon tank of water in our community. We did have our assemblywoman helping us. CSET gave us a grant for water when the community was trying to pay for their water because of the high rate. Our rates went from \$20 to \$72.60 and then dropped to \$68.59.** It never passed, and now when they had a law suit from the community they said \$45 a month, so they had the choice, take the water or they would pay one month's bill for them. I don't know if I'm making any sense to you, but it's a struggle and **it's a sad thing that we live in the land of milk and honey, which is**

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pollution and contamination at this point. That's what we came here for. A lot of the families came for that. **But our water is going down everywhere, not just us. There's Ducor, Plainville, Tonyville, Hanford, and Corcoran. Corcoran says, "Why Alpaugh? Alpaugh has gotten so much notoriety." But Alpaugh has had blood, sweat, and tears. It has suffered, and those communities are suffering too when you can't have water.** I saw in a newspaper where another lady in Ducor raised her Coca Cola bottle or some kind of bottle that was as dark as this. But this is the past, supposedly, and this is the future.

Lydia Flores, community organizer with Congregations and the League of Women

Voters: I was asked to talk about organizing, and the way I started was I really knew nothing and worked at Fresno Metro Ministry on nutrition issues for Edie for a while and then I saw a notice about abolishing corporate power. I really had no idea what it meant, and so **I entered into the study program for ten weeks. At the end of ten weeks, four of us developed a panel and we went around to anyone who would listen to us at the university, at the churches, whatever, telling them, "You don't realize that corporations are in control of our government and everything we do."** To Peace Fresno we said, "You can be out there yelling all you want about peace or the environment, but the corporations run to the Justice Department and they ask for a variance and then say, 'We don't have to change for another ten years.'" The pollution increases and nothing gets done. You will see little things in the newspaper about what they're going to do. Those are just tactical ploys. **You assume that something is going to be done. Well, nothing is going to be done until you get wise, until you get educated, and until you do something about it. What I did was go around to different groups and when somebody would ask me any questions, they would give me their name and phone number.** This is a very fancy sign-up sheet that I have now. They can put down their phone number or they can put down their e-mail. This one says to check your preference of involvement, because this is for you. Do you want to form a study group? Do you want to be tied into the water list serve, which is the Department of Water Resources, and every day you'll get something about the watersheds, the news for the day? The water closets. You'll know a lot. By the time you get through you realize nothing is really getting done. **There are 500 agencies in California and there's really no direction. Everybody is working on their own.** I also prepared for you a list of water resources I asked Lloyd, "How complete is it and can you add more to it?" So he has added. There are books that you can read about water so that you can understand the terminology. Just don't go down there and complain that we want clean water. **Have your information before you. Know what you're talking about.** There are electronic sites listed here and there are videos. I put an ad in the Community Alliance, the progressive newspaper in Fresno. The Community Alliance comes out once a week. I brought about 100 copies, which are over there. Please take one and look through it. It will have comprehensive articles on what's going on. **I put an ad in here and I said anyone who wants to borrow "Thirst" or "Tales of San Joaquin," let me know.** I got people down from Visalia, their city college. I would meet people in different corners giving them that video because I wanted people to know what's going on about water. Using this sheet, I'll put them on a list serve. For those that want to come to my home and watch a social action DVD, I invite them. That's what I've done before. I've had Walter Shubin at my house, I've had Phil Erro, and there would be about ten of us and there would be a discussion about the video. It is important to get the word out. Do not rely on the media or anything like that. Thank you.

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Tim Casagrande, Fresno County Director of Environmental Health, Community Health Department: First of all, thank you for inviting me. My name is Tim Casagrande. I'm the director of Environmental Health, and it's one of the divisions within the Community Health Department. Maybe I can clarify some things as to what we do at the Community Health Department from a **regulatory standpoint**. **We are, as Lloyd put it, what he believes is a joke. We are one of the jokes, I guess. But let me tell you exactly and put into context maybe some of the things that occurred** and that were mentioned here. One of our responsibilities in the **Water Surveillance Program is to ensure that water systems that have 200 service connections or below, the smaller communities and those water systems out there that have 200 connections, are maintaining the standards that exist as such for larger systems**. The **State Department Health Services Office of Drinking Water manages and regulates those larger systems like the City of Fresno** and many of the systems that were mentioned here today. **I agree with what Lloyd says, and that is that most people don't understand about water quality issues and how land use affects those quantity and quality issues.**

In the Health Department in my division, I have 15 programs that I oversee, and most of them are regulatory. They get into businesses, they get into activities, and some of them may be at private residences for that matter. **Those programs deal with outcomes, and many of those outcomes were created many, many years ago due to bad land use, or at the time what appeared to be good land use decisions, which now appear to be bad land use decisions**. They certainly affect ground water, they affect our air, and they affect our environment. **One of them that's really important is this water issue, and when we talk about what we do as regulators, we oversee the small water systems.**

With respect to **Parlier, the system worked as far as the fact that they have to monitor that system**. Our systems that we oversee have to monitor for certain constituents. **In this particular case, it was a bacteriological constituent called coliform. It's present everywhere. It's found in intestines of all animals, not just humans, but all animals. It's not known how that particular organism showed up in that system, but one day it did. The testing during that week showed it. In the weeks before it wasn't there and then all of a sudden it showed up, so the system of monitoring that is undergone every day throughout every community for chemical constituents and bacteriological constituents, in this particular case in Parlier, worked**. When you find that constituent, it's incumbent upon the agency that oversees that water system, number one, to get the information from the laboratory quickly and to respond quickly to that potential threat to that community. In this case, they got the information from the laboratory. You have to understand, too, that when this monitoring occurs it takes time for the samples to be pulled, for the laboratory to do the analysis, and then for that laboratory to report to someone, usually the operator, who then has to report to the regulatory agency. Is that a perfect system? Absolutely not. It needs to get better and reporting requirements and monitoring of results **needs to happen much sooner in order to protect the public**. I agree with that. **But the fact is that it happened and the state was out there immediately. They immediately notified my office.**

Why are they notifying us? **We (Fresno County Community Health Dept.) don't regulate that water system, but we do regulate many of the businesses, for instance, all the food facilities. We have over 60 retail food facilities that prepare food and use water in the preparation of the food. My staff were out there immediately to notify all those businesses that they had to be put under restrictions on how they could use that water, again, a protection mechanism for the public that goes in there and buys that**

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commodity. So, the systems were in place. Are they perfect? Not necessarily. Do they work here and are they the same in every community? Probably not, but I wanted to clarify that that action did occur in Parlier and the system worked, and to my knowledge we haven't had any illnesses that were reported to our office and to our communicable disease staff.

When we get a report of an illness, for instance, where someone may say I ate here or I drank here, we investigate every one of those illnesses, even if it's just one. If there's more than one, we're immediately communicating with other divisions within my department such as our Communicable Disease Division. We're communicating right away. We're finding out if there are any links, and we do that as our normal course of action in disease surveillance and response. So, in this county that's how it works. **Other counties may have different organizational structures and different ways of how they manage disease and/or contamination issues.**

As part of the program in **this county, we permit and we inspect every well that's drilled in this county. If it's drilled in the city, that city is responsible. In the County when individual home owners have a well drilled those wells are inspected by my staff and they are sampled, and they are sampled** for what we know to be constituents for bacteriological quality as well as chemical quality so that that owner that has that new well knows what's in that well from a quality standpoint, and we provide them information. If we do have any constituents of concern in there that might be high, that exceed or meet a state standard, we let them know about it. **The problem with that whole issue is that private domestic wells are not regulated by any standards.** If a homeowner has a problem in a well, let's say they have high nitrates in that well, and that's not uncommon in our valley, we notify them, "You have high nitrates in your well." They say, "That's fine. We'll take the precautions." **But then five years down the road they sell that house. There are no requirements. We don't know that that information, then, is transferred to the new owner, so there's a gap.** In our county anyone can ask to have their well sampled and we will sample their well. If it's involving an illness we do it with no charge. In our county if you ask to have your well sampled there is a nominal charge. We can go get the sample or the sample could be brought to us, but we only charge our laboratory costs for bacteriological quality: \$22. *If you're doing a full chemical screen, it can be in the hundreds of dollars and it can even be into the thousands of dollars when you start talking about significant chemical analysis.* **In our county, we do have a number of chemicals of concern, primarily nitrates. We have DBCP, which is a banned pesticide that's somewhat prevalent in certain areas and certain regions of the valley. We have certain radiologic chemical constituents like radon that's present in certain aquifers. One of the important things to know is that I only have responsibility for our county.** However, the population of the San Joaquin Valley has responsibility for all of the aquifer. When Lloyd talks about the delta, water has no boundaries. **The water in Fresno County doesn't stop at Fresno County. The aquifer is continuous, so when we talk about protection we need to have those federal and state agencies that do cross boundaries ensure that the protections are in place. We need to have the regional board because they have ultimate and jurisdictional responsibility to protect the waters of the state.**

You can ask if they are doing that adequately. My answer is no, and I come from a regulatory world where I see what they're doing and not doing. **We do things that are in a regulatory framework and are intended to protect the public and intended to protect the waters of the state. A good example is our underground storage tank program. We've had probably 7,000 underground storage tanks that stored hazardous materials,**

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primarily gasoline, for instance, that have come out of the ground and new ones put in the ground that have protections that will protect the waters of the state. We've had a number of them that have leaked and they have gone through cleanups and many of them are currently still going through cleanups, but the public doesn't understand that. They just pump the gas and think it's somewhere else I guess, coming from a pipe somewhere. I just want to let you know the breadth of what we deal with, the understanding of the communities, the frustration of the communities, especially small communities that don't have the resources to pay for problems when they do occur, whether it's outdated infrastructure and pipes breaking and sewer systems breaking, those communities have to rely on public support from the federal government and the state government funds to be able to correct those problems and allow the communities to have those proper services.

Edie Jessup: We will take questions from the audience first if that is okay. I really appreciate the breadth of what you've had to say. It is also very frightening to hear that things aren't regulated, the cost to replace water infrastructure is huge, and the health hazards that we are facing because of this and the lack of awareness in our community.

Ray Ensher, Health Care for All: **Tim, does the County have adequate staffing to check these facilities? And also, what are the regulations on when you check the wells? I understand they go on for several years and they're not checked.**

Tim Casagrande: We inspect a whole variety of different activities within the county and all the cities within the county. **We (Fresno County Environmental Health) inspect all retail food facilities, we inspect all recreational facilities, which means all recreational pool facilities, apartments, and we inspect all employee housing. We do all the solid waste, all the hazardous materials, underground storage tanks. We have adequate staff in addition to our Water Surveillance Program. Much of that staff exists because we have fees. We get the mandates from the federal government and the state government to implement these regulations, but they don't provide any funding. They basically tell us to go charge a fee. They give us the authorization to charge a fee to that entity or business, and fortunately, our board has allowed us to charge the fees in order to have the staff to do those activities. We do see every well that goes in. When we talk about water quality or water surveillance, we do see every well that goes into the county. All well drillers know that they have to submit permits to us and notify us, so we do have that capability.**

Edie Jessup: **How many employees do you have testing wells?**

Tim Casagrande: **We don't test the wells. We will take samples of the water of those wells. We have about 300 water systems in Fresno County that we regulate. In the drought years, we have had upwards of 500 to 600 wells being drilled per year and we have about six to seven staff that cover that.**

Rachel Carpenter, Fresno County Child Care Commission: I'm a little disconcerted mainly because I deal with very small children. I was in high school in the 70s and Love Canal was a really big thing, and when I got pregnant with my first child my in-laws and my family thought I was insane because I refused to use tap water. My son is 23 years old now, so 25 years ago people thought I was crazy because I wouldn't use tap water to make anything for my infant child, and now I have a 13-year old daughter and when she was born

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Love Canal went back on the market. What was really phenomenal to me, what really impressed me when I was just a teenager was that **they didn't know that the water was contaminated because the adults were fine. It wasn't until the children were coming up with digestive disorders, and those children lived an entire life with those issues with their health, so it's very disconcerting to me that the county would charge so much money if there's an infant in the family that needs to drink that water. Is there any way that something can be done for people with small children to make sure that it's affordable to have their water tested?**

Tim Casagrande: If you're talking about a water system that you're connected to, you're not connected to your own well, that system is being monitored every day, every week. For those individuals who have wells, it has always been our statement that you always want to know what's in that well, so we suggest you have that well tested. **If all you tested for would be those constituents that are of concern like bacteriological quality, for instance, nitrates, which are a concern for pregnant women and infants because it does cause methemoglobinemia, which is blue baby syndrome, those are the things that we look at, and if people have concern with respect to that they can call our office and we will make an effort to go out and sample their well.** We'll probably look at the well and make an inspection of the well, too, to see if there are any deficiencies in the well and let the homeowner know about that and then also sample the well. There may be costs. **If there's an illness or an issue, a physician can ask that the well be tested and we will do it at no charge if there's a concern.** Generally we'll know in a particular area of the county that there are certain regions that are known for certain chemical constituents and we'll target those chemicals rather than, again, doing a whole span of chemicals that are going to drive the cost up. We'll target for those particular chemicals that are known in that area.

Participant comment: I just wanted to respond to your concerns. I unfortunately don't have the good news you're looking for, but I do think your concerns are entirely valid. One of the main problems a lot of people talk about with our primary drinking water standards is that they don't take into account the different levels of vulnerability among children or more vulnerable populations such as people who have autoimmune deficiency disorders or chronic illnesses or are handicapped. **Our drinking water standards are based on 150-pound white males, so that obviously leaves out not only the majority of people in California but also all children, and I think it really is a shame we don't have a policy around providing replacement water for schools, not even just for individual wells, but for schools. We work with communities where the entire school system is drinking contaminated water.** In Southern California they have rocket fuel in their water and they cannot get the regional board to provide replacement water for the schools. That's not the good news, but there are a couple things that are afoot that hopefully will provide some small benefits. **We are trying to push for a low-income water rate, so hopefully that can be helpful to people who do not have the means for more expensive water. I do think your concerns are very justified and I wish there was a better answer for your questions.**

Edie Jessup: I want to comment just briefly on the **cost of water for people here in Fresno.** As we're all aware, **there are no meters and people are charged a flat rate, which puts an undue burden on low-income communities.**

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Lloyd Carter: The per person per day usage of water in Fresno is around 400 gallons. The national per capita average is 185 gallons, so we in Fresno use twice as much water per day as other communities. I want to add to what Tim said.

It was my experience as a newsman that people at the staff level in water quality monitoring are good folks who really care about your health and they're doing what they can. **As you move up the political unit to the top, you find that – and I'm sure Tim would be the first to admit it – he'd like more staff. They don't get to do as much as they want to do and they're always short for money because protection of your water is not at the top of politicians' priority list.** Sad but true. Secondly, the difficulty of testing water to find out what's bad in it. Twenty years ago some older folks in here remember the McFarland Childhood Cancer Clusters which I covered as a reporter. This was at the time as a newsman that I was really starting to get into water issues and the complexity of the problem. **When you take a water sample from a well, you test at a certain depth. Well, it turns out that groundwater is like an underground lake, and when you have a toxin, it has what they call a specific gravity so it actually floats in that underground lake at a certain level in the water, so you can go 30 feet and not find anything and go 60 feet and find something. To further complicate the thing, groundwater level rises and lowers seasonally and depending upon usage.** When those kids down in McFarland got sick – there were a half a dozen of them that all got leukemias and extremely rare cancers – the coincidence odds were astronomical that that would be coincidental. It's possible it was sheer coincidence, but it surely was suspicious. **They farmed right up to the edge of schoolyards. I remember seeing video of a cotton field right next to the McFarland Grammar School.**

The other problem that's inherent in testing for toxins, **we have 70,000 chemicals loose on the earth, manmade things that are potentially problematic. When they test, they will test for individual constituents in the water, pollutants, but they never test for those things in synergistic combination.** As I mentioned, in the Parkinson study now, a little of this or a little of this may not hurt you, but you put them together and they make dynamite, and so all of a sudden you've got something that's toxic. **They can't test for that. In fact, when they loose chemicals into the environment, when they're permitted to introduce a new chemical into America, they don't have to synergistically test it with other potential toxins,** so it's a crap shoot.

The other thing is, **although you were right to mistrust your tap water, there's some expertise up here on bottled water, which is frequently water coming from the tap.** When I was a reporter for the Bee many years ago I did a story on Yosemite Water, so I hope there's no one here from Yosemite Water. I got a call from one of their delivery guys because there was, I believe, a merited fear among the public about the safety of public water. Generally, it's probably just as safe as bottled water, but nevertheless, there are **corporations that prey on that fear, which is why bottled water is a multi-billion dollar business. This guy from Yosemite Water, he was a driver, he called me secretly as a reporter and said that business was booming so much – this was right during Kesterson so everybody was freaking out about their water – that they were simply refilling the jugs.** We investigated and we did a story in the Bee. **To trust the bottled water companies makes me just as nervous,** so I don't know what the answer is. You have to take your chances. **But the bottled water industry to me is symptomatic of a fundamental failure of your government to provide you the basic necessities of life. You should be outraged that your government cannot guarantee that they will provide you clean water.** It's astounding to me that that can happen.

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One last point. I don't want to be all doom and gloom up here because I want to give you a success story right in our county. **In the foothills, the concern is not quality, it's quantity. The wells are going dry.** We cannot have this refugee exodus from L.A. and San Francisco into the Sierras, which is what's happening, because the wells are all going dry. They want to build a new town up in Millerton, thousands of homes, and they want to build at Shaver. Last summer I went up and gave a talk. **Me and Walt Shubin, the Kerman farmer who is actually an environmentalist – that's not an oxymoron to be a farmer and an environmentalist – went out and spoke at the library in Auberry. There were a lot of foothill citizens who were worried because their wells were going dry, and we're talking big money to drill new wells, \$50,000 to \$75,000.** They got organized up there and they started lobbying. Waterston was their first target because he was a county supervisor, and if you saw in the paper a few days ago, they're going to ban new development in Shaver and they're finally starting to address the problems of rampant growth in the foothills with no guarantee that anybody is going to have any water. **The lesson here is to organize.** There's enough energy in this room right here to raise a lot of hell. **You have to educate yourselves first on the subject and then go to board of supervisor meetings.** I've been to a thousand water hearings in the last 30 years and there were times when there would be two or three people representing the public interest. **All the lawyers for the polluters are there; I'll guarantee you that. So, you have to get fired up. If you want to change the world, you start with yourselves.**

Tim Casagrande: I have one quick comment on what you brought up about Love Canal. **Things don't change when they're working.** Things only change when they're broke, and Love Canal and all the other things that occurred after it chemically speaking and hazardous waste impacting and contaminating the environment from major corporations that suddenly go out of business, those things cause the public uproar and the furor and that then causes change in the federal government and the state government to act. All of our regulations that are in place now, today, didn't start until probably 1980. A lot of the air pollution regulations, a lot of the change took place when they stopped allowing people to burn open dumps. Those were some of the first changes in environmental regulations that occurred, and that was in about 1971 or 1972. So when you talk about postwar and all the time that it took through the space program and so forth, all the increasing use of chemicals and industrialization and the fact that nobody was looking at where those byproducts went, **it took about 30 years to create the problem and it took about 20 years for them to figure things out and increase the regulations. And they still haven't figured out some of the stuff.** Technology had to catch up. **What Lloyd mentioned about testing for chemicals, if you look back at history through the 70s and the 80s we didn't have the ability in our laboratories to even test for some of the byproducts of some of the chemical reactions that took place. There wasn't even the ability to test for it.** Then as we began to test for it we began to see, okay, let's test one in ten thousand, one in one hundred thousand, one in a million, one in a billion. Now we can test one in a trillion and even beyond, so **technology had to catch up to the problem, and that is why a lot of the regulations that we have in place were created. Before that, we didn't know what the problem was.**

Alegria DelaCruz, California Rural Legal Assistance: I work for an organization called California Rural Legal Assistance. My questions are directed towards Tim in regards to the Parlier incident but also on a broader level. **First of all, there are people in Parlier who are still sick including children, so I wanted to know about the requirements or the process by which illnesses on a community level that are caused by community**

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problems like water are reported to your agency so you are getting the right information about those and then how you as an agency deal with those community health issues. Second, my question is in regards to the kinds of education and outreach that you do for communities after events like the Parlier event and in what languages you communicate notices to communities so that they understand in their own languages what's happening to them and their children and the people around them.

Tim Casagrande: All I can tell you is what we experienced. **We didn't have any illnesses reported to us, so they may be anecdotal. You may know of them, and they certainly can contact our office. We hope that the public will notify us. We hope that the public will call our office or call the Health Department or the State Health Department. If we don't know about it, we can't respond with respect to those illnesses. With respect to communication in Parlier, the notices should be in English and in Spanish. We were communicating directly with the businesses and we had English-speaking and Spanish-speaking staff that were out there doing that. With respect to the notices to boil water, those come from the operator of the system, so in this case it would come from the City of Parlier, and they were told to put that in English and Spanish. I'm assuming that they did that because they know the majority of their population speaks Spanish.**

Alegria DeLaCruz: I just wondered if when the Parlier outbreak happened you posted fliers on telephone poles and bulletin boards in the community so that people without phones who don't read a newspaper knew that, one, there was a problem, and two, if they got sick where to call, because I don't think people even know to call you.

Tim Casagrande: During the notification it has to be at each connection, so they had to hand deliver these to each connection, so each resident, or in our case we went to each food facility, anyone served by that.

Alegria DeLaCruz: I have one follow-up question in regards to **people who are still sick and their families. The majority of these people, as we've all talked about today, are low income and may not have health insurance and may not have access to healthcare. To what extent does the Community Health Department find out how to provide those sick people health services that come from a community sickness? Does the Community Health Department find ways to get those sick people access to healthcare when they may not have it otherwise?**

Tim Casagrande: Yes, through our system. **If they're on public assistance, they will have access to the clinics or to the emergent care. You have to also understand, too, we're at a time right now where there are illnesses occurring just on a regular basis. The indicator organism in this particular case was not fecal coliform, and coliform in and of itself is an indicator organism. It doesn't necessarily cause illness, so whether those illnesses are related to the fact that people were drinking the water might be difficult to determine, but in most cases simply coliform in and of itself isn't going to cause an illness. Fecal coliform certainly will.**

Participant Comment: I just want to follow up with one quick comment about this issue. I understand you're kind of put on the spot here as a representative of the county. First of all, there are the **factual issues that in fact the laws regarding public notification of a coliform violation, whether total or fecal, were not met because it was not within a 24- or 48-hour period that community residents were notified. And in fact, this advisory**

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just says, "The information contained here is very important for your drinking water. Translate it or talk to somebody else who understands it." That was given out to monolingual-speaking residents. But beyond all that, I think, as you've heard today, this gentleman is saying the system worked, but as Alegria can testify to and as I can testify to up in Oakland, I've already talked to people who for community members in Parlier it did not work. And no matter what a county says, no matter what regulations, no matter what justifications you have, there is a whole community of people who feel like the system did not work for them, and that is what we really need to start talking about.

There are communities throughout the Central Valley who feel like the system is not working for them. There are a million reasons why that may be, but we really need to start tackling these issues and not just coming with excuses for why that may be but really start to take into account and fully appreciate those experiences of contamination and of failed public agencies.

Rita Rios: Mr. Casagrande, my question is for you. This is new knowledge for me, and I'm finding this to be very informative. **In regards to the private domestic wells that you mentioned that are not regulated, once you go out there to inspect or issue a permit, are you in a position to give the owners literature in Spanish or Hmong or whatever language they require?**

Tim Casagrande: As far as the information from the water sampling, yes, we can.

Rita Rios: Okay. And you've said that they have to take responsibility for their own wells. For example, if there are high nitrates, what type of information or precautions can they take?

Tim Casagrande: We give them that information as far as the impacts of nitrates. They can employ filtration systems. If they have a pregnant woman or infant children and if they don't have a filtration system on then they shouldn't drink that water. They should drink bottled water, for instance. In that particular case with the nitrates, it's specific for pregnant women and infant children, so you target that population with the information and you refrain from the drinking of it rather than putting a full filtration system on. That's a simple way to reduce the risk.

Rita Rios: Do you go out there and inspect on a regular basis?

Tim Casagrande: No, we do that one time when the well is drilled.

Rita Rios: And if that owner moves, sells the home, and another family moves in, is it their responsibility to call you or to know to call you?

Tim Casagrande: It's the responsibility of that property owner, and maybe Lloyd should answer this, but the owner of that well that transfers the property depending upon how that sale is done must disclose if there is a problem with that well. Am I right? There is a gap there as far as if that needs to occur.

Participant question: I just wanted to ask Lloyd Carter what the expectation in Parlier is now. Is this an ongoing problem? Should the wells be treated? Should the water supply be treated? Is this something that people who drink the water out there have to think about for months or perpetually?

Lloyd Carter: I can't speak to the Parlier problems specifically except that it's typical of problems that pop up all over this valley. The people in Mendota on the other side of the county have had their water truck in because agriculture polluted their groundwater supply. Let me tell you, and Tim may agree with me on this, at least on the east side of the valley the number one threat to drinking water from the groundwater source in this valley is nitrates. The principle cause of nitrates in groundwater, which is what causes this blue baby syndrome, which means that the oxygen-carrying capacity of infants is impaired and they literally look blue, they have a bluish cast to them and it can be fatal. So, nitrates and nitrites, those kinds of things are scary and there are places all over the valley where they now exceed. The primary causes are nitrogen-based fertilizers and cows, dairies, and a secondary source would be the septic tank on the farm itself which leaks and gets into the groundwater supply and naturally occurring nitrates, too, for that matter. Years ago when I did a story on nitrates on the east side I went to the fertilizer companies. I said, "You're getting blamed for contributing to the nitrate problem." They said, "It's not our fault. The farmers over-irrigate and they wash a lot of nitrogen-based fertilizer down into the groundwater. But the thing that's scary to me was a **story in the Bee a week ago about 2.6 million cows in this valley. It is astounding. Each cow produces the waste product of 20 humans. That means we have like 50 million human beings living in this valley. Where is that waste going? It's going into these dairy lagoons. I did a story when I was still a reporter 15 years ago, they had hundreds of dairies in the valley, and they had one dairy inspector in the valley. He came around about every five years to the dairies. They have seven now. How many dairies are there in the valley? Several hundred dairies in the valley and there are a bunch more that want to come into Fresno County. **Where are they coming from? If you know your dairy industry history, they come from the Chino Valley in Southern California, which is where they used to operate. They destroyed the aquifer in the Chino Valley, it's ruined, and they came up here.** They got these dumb hick cow counties to buy into it, Tulare County, Kern County, Kings County, and now Fresno County. **It's going to be the destruction of our groundwater. Fifty years from now, you won't be able to use the groundwater in this valley. It will be all ruined. Everything will have to come from surface water.****

Edie Jessup: Thank you very much. We are at 1:30 and a lot of people have had to leave. I know, Tim, that you have to go to a homeland security meeting following this. I hope that you will talk about the issue of water and access to water. Poor people having to buy bottled water is a big issue, and if we have to sell water on our school campuses, that is another big issue. Finding ways to provide adequate water to people is really important. I know that this is just the tip of the iceberg. I want to thank you all very much for your time and expertise. Please feel free to talk to these people. They know how to organize. We have a lot of congregations here. I'm impressed with that. There are materials on the table on the water issue, and I would suggest that you talk to Lydia about forming a water group in your congregation and begin to help educate and organize for the work that we have to do ahead of us. Thank you.