

For Immediate Release  
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**Out of Sight, California's Groundwater Disaster is Also Out of Mind**  
***Food & Water Watch Report Finds Regulators Turn Blind Eye to Central Valley***  
***Pollution from Large-Scale Dairies, Fail to Keep Groundwater, Communities Safe***

San Francisco – Today the consumer advocacy organization Food & Water Watch released a report showing serious contamination of groundwater around large-scale dairies in California's Central Valley. The report details how the agency charged with protecting groundwater in the Central Valley has been negligent despite knowing there are serious problems and calls on the Governor to nominate strong appointees to the Water Board.

The Report, [\*What's in the Water? Industrial Dairies, Groundwater Pollution and Regulatory Failure in California's Central Valley\*](#), was jointly written by Food & Water Watch and the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance. Using new data that had not been previously analyzed, it demonstrates that public and environmental health may be at serious risk due to groundwater contamination near dairies in the Central Valley, and finds evidence that the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (CVRWQCB) has not effectively enforced regulations.

“Half of the Central Valley's drinking water comes from groundwater sources, but Governor Brown has been more focused on high-tech tunnels to siphon the Delta's water to Southern California than groundwater that means life or death to Central Valley residents,” said Elanor Starmer, lead author of the report and Western Region director of Food & Water Watch. “Under the watch of the Water Board, we've seen harmful levels of nitrates in the groundwater around most dairies and virtually no effective steps to fix the problem. We're calling on the governor and state legislators to step up and protect people's health.”

Despite years of pollution, the CVRWQCB failed to implement existing groundwater regulations for dairies until 2007, by which point the total number of dairy cows in the Central Valley had reached more than 1.5 million, generating a volume of waste equivalent to that of a human population nearly 5 times the size of Los Angeles.

“After years of ignoring groundwater pollution from dairies, the Regional Water Board belatedly adopted inadequate regulations that it now, under intense industry pressure, refuses to enforce,” said California Sportfishing Protection Alliance Executive Director Bill Jennings. “Failure to protect groundwater not only threatens the health and safety of many thousands of Central Valley residents, it places additional stress on limited surface water supplies to the detriment of already degraded aquatic ecosystems.”

The report finds that regulations governing dairy waste pollution in the Valley are insufficient to stop existing or prevent future pollution and that they have not been effectively enforced. In the file of one dairy – White River Dairy in the San Joaquin Valley

town of Ducor – researchers found nine inspections and six Notices of Violation that the dairy was illegally discharging waste into a river that fed a groundwater aquifer. Yet according to the file, the problem is still unresolved. Twenty-seven years after the first complaint was brought against White River Dairy by a neighbor and 17 years after the first Board inspection identified a violation of state and federal water quality laws, no fines have ever been issued.

Additional highlights of the report include:

- 60 percent of the nearly 1,500 dairies in the Valley have groundwater on their property that is contaminated with nitrates above the drinking water standard.
- 40 percent of these dairies (550 facilities) have nitrate levels at least twice the drinking water standard.
- 85 percent of dairies in the Valley are located within 300 feet of an off-site domestic well (someone else's drinking water source), raising concerns that other Valley residents' water is contaminated.
- Under California law, facilities that contribute to a violation of a water quality standard are subject to cleanup and abatement orders and can be fined. There have been no dairies fined for contributing to high nitrate levels in groundwater in the Valley and no cleanup and abatement orders issued.
- 71 dairies failed to turn in part or all of the documentation required by the new regulations in the first year after they were implemented, but none of these dairies was fined.

These findings are particularly troubling for communities that live near the large-scale dairies.

“Many residents no longer have access to safe drinking water because their wells have become contaminated with nitrates. Dairies are one significant source of nitrate pollution, and the health of local families depends on adequate protection measures that should be enforced by the Regional Water Board,” said Laurel Firestone, Co-Executive Director of the Community Water Center, a non-profit that works with many valley communities impacted by drinking water contamination. Greater attention to the serious water problems that plague the Valley, including dairy pollution, is expected next Tuesday when an independent expert from the United Nations visits the Valley and meets with affected communities.

Among several specific recommendations, the report released today calls on Governor Brown and the California State Legislature to prioritize groundwater protection by appointing Board members who will strongly uphold California's water laws and regulations, and by finding ways to increase resources for inspection and enforcement.

The report also recognizes that although the CVRWQCB is responsible for implementing and enforcing state water laws and regulations, federal agricultural policies have driven dairies to get larger over time, concentrating production and waste in the Central Valley.

Federal policy change will be necessary in order to support a more sustainable dairy industry.

The full report can be downloaded here: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/whats-in-the-water/>

[Food & Water Watch](#) works to ensure the food, water and fish we consume is safe, accessible and sustainable. So we can all enjoy and trust in what we eat and drink, we help people take charge of where their food comes from, keep clean, affordable, public tap water flowing freely to our homes, protect the environmental quality of oceans, force government to do its job protecting citizens, and educate about the importance of keeping shared resources under public control.

The [California Sportfishing Protection Alliance](#) (CSPA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit public benefit conservation and research organization established in 1983 for the purpose of conserving, restoring, and enhancing the state's water quality, wildlife and fishery resources and their aquatic ecosystems and associated riparian habitats. To further these goals, CSPA actively seeks federal, state, and local agency implementation of environmental regulations and statutes and routinely participates in administrative, legislative and judicial proceedings. Where necessary, CSPA directly initiates enforcement actions on behalf of itself and its members to protect public trust resources.

[Community Water Center](#) (CWC) is an environmental justice nonprofit organization whose mission is to create community-driven water solutions through organizing, education and advocacy in California's San Joaquin Valley. CWC works directly with a number of low-income, primarily Latino communities to address problems that range from chronic drinking water contamination to barriers to participation in local water governance. CWC strives to ensure that all communities have access to safe, clean and affordable water. CWC's report on nitrate contamination of drinking water and the health of San Joaquin Valley residents can be found [here](#).

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