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## My View: Farm, fishing industries can't remain foes in water debate

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The battle for California's water took national stage recently as several senators and political pundits added their comments to a debate that has riveted this state for years. Yet with the new voices came the same old repetition: Someone else is responsible for our water crisis. The current blame game ensures the status quo survives. Progress requires a common ground.

There is no doubt that the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is in crisis. Years of less-than-average rainfall and decades of shortsighted overuse have turned rivers into puddles, streams into dry beds. Water supplies that have supported agriculture for decades have been cut, and the fragile ecosystem is collapsing.

As a result, the livelihoods of both inland farmers and coastal fishermen have been destroyed. Cries of a "dust bowl" are echoing through the Central Valley, and thousands of acres of once-fertile farmland have been left fallow for lack of water.

A few hundred miles away, commercial and sport fishing boats up and down the coast are being sold for scrap after the second consecutive year in which there have been no fish to fish. California has lost more than 20,000 fishing jobs and nearly \$2 billion of annual revenue from the collapse of its fisheries and the industries they support. Now we import more than 80 percent of the seafood we eat from overseas.

As the weakened cornerstone of the nation's food security, California farmers and fishermen are in the same boat, but the two groups are being pitted against each other in rhetoric used by politicians, activists and the media.

Recent federal decisions to ensure there is a bare minimum of water to keep the coastal ecosystem from catastrophe are being blamed by farmers for the decrease in crop production, even though they have yet to fully take effect and restrict only a drop in the bucket compared with what is available.

On the other hand, accusations that corporate agricultural firms are greedily sucking water overlook the majority of family farmers truly suffering through the drought.

This is a crisis harming the entire state, and a solution must be found that ensures the longevity of both industries. The collapse of either livelihood, and the hardships brought on its workers and families, is a victory for no one. If California is to continue supplying the nation with fruit and fish, and if we are to remain at the forefront of environmental progress, traditional divisions must be set aside and a new path of cooperation must be forged.

While attempts at major overhauls of our water system failed in the state Legislature, small steps can be undertaken with large impacts, protecting both farmers and fishermen. Current environmental laws that protect the water from pollution need to be rigorously enforced. Technologies that help conserve water and tap into new sources need to be supported. The popular practice of water speculation, in which subsidized water is purchased from the government and resold for profit on the free market, needs to be outlawed.

Furthermore, U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein's recent request for \$750,000 for yet another scientific review of Delta fisheries needs to be challenged. Instead of wasting tax dollars on repeating the same study carried out under the Bush and Obama administrations, new research could examine exactly how much water can be pumped from the Delta without destroying it, providing farmers with reliable predictions on the water available for future crop irrigation.

This is a crisis with some readily available solutions. Instead of passing blame, all of the industries affected by the water crisis must come together to work with water policymakers on implementing sensible changes over the coming months.

Only through cooperation and dialogue is it possible to restore the bounty of next year's summer growing and fishing seasons. If the political bickering continues to dominate the process, however, farmers and fishermen won't be the only ones with empty dinner plates.

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