

2019 BizFed Leadership Roundtable Series: Joaquin Esquivel



BizFed Central Valley members recently enjoyed a full day of touring water facilities and engaging in in-depth discussions about the future of California’s water with newly appointed Water Resources Board Chair Joaquin Esquivel.

Esquivel wanted to see how water works in Kern County so the day began at 7 a.m. with a bus tour arranged by BizFed CV member, Water Association of Kern County. Esquivel learned how water is moved between several systems including the Central Valley Project, State Water Project and Kern River at what’s known as the “spaghetti bowl” in Bakersfield along Coffee Road, where all three systems come together.

Water managers from different districts explained how water can be moved into or out of Kern through the Cross Valley Canal, giving locals enormous flexibility in how water supplies are handled.

The tour then moved to the Kern River, the massive Kern Water Bank and finally to the California Aqueduct.

At the luncheon, which was hosted by GEI Consultants, BizFed CV members shared a number of concerns with Esquivel.

Q: What are the state’s plans if locals can’t get their Groundwater Sustainability Plans done by the deadline of Jan. 31, 2020?

A: Though that’s more of a Dept. of Water Resources issue, Esquivel said he expects it will be handled on a case-by-case basis. “While you don’t want to allow too much delay – we could have another drought – I am hearing that people are concerned about the timeline.” He added that he’s been having conversations with Karla Nemeth, DWR chief, about this issue.

Q: What about data overload? Water managers are uploading and reporting often the same data to multiple agencies that never seem to speak to one another.

A: That IS a problem, Esquivel acknowledged, noting that the state is asking for much more information such as how much water is being used by each rights holder. He said there are 68 data systems at the state and none communicates with the other. “There’s nothing more



frustrating for users than having to deal with one side of the system for water reporting and another for finance and having to give each system the exact same information.”

Q: Thoughts on using recycled oilfield water for irrigation?

A: The state and communities use recycled water in many different areas, Esquivel said. And the state has strict safety protections for that water. “There’s a perception that we don’t know what’s in the water. Yes. We do,” he insisted. “It’s important not to let dogma rule the day on this issue.”



Q: Could the Friant-Kern Canal be used as a drinking water source for communities along its path, many of which have undrinkable water?

A: That would take a change by the feds, which own that system, Esquivel said. Though he is not personally involved in those discussions, he noted communities would view the canal as a valuable asset that they would fight to protect if it could also deliver clean drinking water.

Finally, Esquivel heard from a local 4th generation farmer who explained that the future for family farmers in California is grim because of state regulation.

The reporting, labor and water burdens are becoming unworkable for a one- or two-person shop.

“If this keeps up, we won’t be here in another 10 years,” the BizFed member said of his farm.

The state needs to look at the cost of compliance for the small farmer every time they add a new regulation.

Esquivel agreed.

