

December 10, 2007

**Message From the Chair Emeritus—Richard Johanson**

Our Bulletin this week centers on a scholarly perspective of the San Joaquin Valley. It was written by **Professor Emeritus Gerald Haslam** of Sonoma State University. In a brief summary he captures the geographical, historical, economic and cultural realities of this entire valley. His treatise, "Another California—A Real One", is an important addition to our knowledge base as we look forward to continuing to work with our partners in the coming year.

**Another California. . . A Real One**

"The Golden State has traditionally been defined from a coastal perspective, so its interior has ironically been dismissed as no more than a margin. But photos from satellites reveal that California is actually composed of mountains and beaches and deserts surrounding a vast valley, which is the state's actual core.

The Great Central Valley, over 400 long miles and 30-to-60 miles wide...about the size of England, is generally divided into three subregions north-to-south: the Sacramento Valley, the Delta, and the San Joaquin Valley. The latter includes the USA's three most productive farming counties: Fresno, Tulare, and Kern. It is the richest agricultural region in the history of the world, as well as the setting of several of the state's fastest-growing cities: Stockton, Modesto, Fresno and Bakersfield.

Physically, the great valley is an enclosed prairie, with remnants of desert and wetland, and even a small range of mountains, plus millions of acres under cultivation. As a result, it is both one of the state's economic engines and the international hub of agribusiness, producing approximately one-quarter of all food eaten in the United States and consuming nearly one-third of all pesticides sold in the USA. Perhaps as a result, its air quality is often poor.

The busy, multi-layered history of the San Joaquin Valley reveals that people have been coming here in the hope of climbing an economic ladder since the Gold Rush; little wonder that a large Native American population was soon displaced. This was and remains a seeker's realm, but here harsh reality imposes itself: the first step on the way up is usually toil.

As a result, the Valley is also the home to a diverse population that speaks over 100 languages. Visits to a Sikh Temple in Fresno or a Portuguese bullring at Tulare or an entire African-American community in Allensworth reveal society's richness here. When natives move away, they often realize for the first time that communities veined by dirt-banked canals, communities that have engulfed tankhouses and barns, communities edged by double files of palms or eucalyptus standing like forlorn sentries, are reminders of history's continuum.

Unfortunately, endemic poverty also festers in many of those communities, creating a two-tiered society. The nation's single most productive farming county, Fresno, a cultural as well as economic nexus, is paradoxically the setting for the five communities in the state with lowest per-capita income. That may be because it is estimated that between 50 and 90 percent of farm laborers here are illegal immigrants, and illegals have slight economic leverage.

Then there are illusions: A few years ago, Time magazine published a special issue entitled "California: The Endangered Dream" that referred to Fresno as "un-Californian." If Fresno is "un-Californian," then what is "Californian"? Berkeley? Beverly Hills? In fact, Fresno is the real Golden State and the gold here is called "opportunity."

What's more, residents here can still relish the sight of a dust devil dancing across the horizon or of a flock of birds so vast it blocks the horizon. And on a winter day after a rain, when the Sierra Nevada looms white to the east and to the west the foothills of the coast ranges lie like supine lions, when the tang of ozone replaces the clog of smog and the sun rises like a fading orange, this place may seem as wonderful as anything Hollywood imagines."