

Productive Leaders, Leadership Matters

Mary@ProductiveLeaders.com, 02/08/23



I was talking with my friend who owns two great restaurants. I asked him if he was going to use the start of the new year to revisit his strategic plan. “*What strategic plan?*” he laughed. “*I’ve been really successful by just figuring it out along the way. My plan is to keep doing what I’m doing.*”

He’s right. He has been successful in doing what he’s doing. But he could be even more successful, and with probably less work on his part, if he had a strategic plan to guide his team to fulfill his vision.

Every business, no matter its size or industry, can benefit from having a strategic plan.

A strategic plan is a working document that outlines an organization's direction and makes decisions on allocating its resources to head in that direction. It helps businesses to set goals, analyze the competitive environment, and assess internal and external factors that may affect their performance.

Here are just a few reasons why every business needs a strategic plan:

1. A strategic plan helps businesses to define their vision and mission. It helps to establish the overall direction and purpose of the organization, and provides a clear roadmap for achieving its goals.

2. A strategic plan helps businesses to stay focused. It provides a clear set of priorities and helps to ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently to achieve the organization's goals.

3. A strategic plan helps businesses to adapt to change. It allows organizations to anticipate and respond to changes in the market or industry, and helps to ensure that the business remains relevant and competitive.

4. A strategic plan helps businesses to align their efforts. It ensures that all departments and employees are working towards the same goals and objectives, and helps to improve communication and collaboration within the organization.

5. A strategic plan helps businesses to measure progress. It provides a benchmark against which to measure the organization's performance and helps to identify areas for improvement. In summary, a strategic plan is essential for the success and effectiveness of any business. It helps to establish a clear vision and direction, stay focused, adapt to change, align efforts, and measure progress. Without a strategic plan, businesses may struggle to make informed decisions, allocate resources effectively, and achieve their desired outcomes.

However, it is generally acknowledged that having a strategic plan is important for the success and effectiveness of organizations and individuals.

A strategic plan is a document that outlines an organization's direction and makes decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this direction. It helps organizations to set goals, analyze the competitive environment, and assess internal and external factors that may affect their performance.

Without a strategic plan, organizations may struggle to make informed decisions, allocate resources effectively, and achieve their desired outcomes.

There are many resources available to help organizations develop a strategic plan. These may include consulting firms, business advisors, or online tools and templates. It is important for organizations to regularly review and update their strategic plans to ensure that they are still relevant and aligned with their goals and objectives.

Ground zero: Rain brings little relief to California's depleted groundwater

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The powerful storms that clobbered California for weeks in December and January dropped trillions of gallons of water, flooding many communities and farms. But throughout the state, the rains have done little to nourish the underground supplies that are critical sources of California's drinking water.

Thousands of people in the San Joaquin Valley have seen their wells go dry after years of prolonged drought and overpumping of aquifers. And a two-week deluge — or even a wet winter — will not bring them relief.

Even in January, as California's rivers flooded thousands of acres, state officials received reports of more than 30 well outages, adding to more than 5,000 dry residential wells reported statewide in the past decade.

“Just one wet year is nowhere near large enough to refill the amount of groundwater storage that we've lost, say, over the last 10 years or more,” said Jeanine Jones, a drought manager with the state Department of Water Resources.

Water from heavy rains can reach shallow groundwater basins in a matter of days, but in places where wells must pump from deep underground aquifers — like those in the San Joaquin Valley — this can take months. And even a season's worth of storms is not usually enough to restore wells left high and dry by years of overdraft.

Restoring California's groundwater is not as simple as waiting for rain and letting it seep into the ground. It requires detailed planning and scientific analysis of project sites, and uses tens of millions of dollars in state funds. Land has to be purchased or growers must be compensated for flooding their fields. And it also means that growers — and to a lesser extent, communities — must reduce the water they pump.

Graham Fogg, a UC Davis professor of hydrogeology, said the recent rainfall could substantially help minimally impacted areas, like much of the Sacramento basin, where groundwater tables are only 25 to 30 feet down. But it's a far different story in the San Joaquin Valley, where the water table is 100 to 300 feet down, even 700 feet in some places.

“That's where most of the dried-up wells have occurred,” Fogg said, “and that's where it will take years, maybe decades, of not only managed aquifer recharge, but also reduced pumping from wells, to raise groundwater levels back to more appropriate elevations.”

According to state officials and other groundwater experts, most wells in the San Joaquin Valley have virtually no chance of recovering unless groundwater pumping is drastically curbed.

“I’ve seen about 2,000 wells go dry, and we don’t see wells recover on their own,” said Tami McVay, director of emergency services for Self-Help Enterprises, a San Joaquin Valley nonprofit that provides funding to residents who need new wells. “They sometimes recover for a couple of days, but then they go dry again.”

Groundwater is among California’s most precious natural resources, providing about 40% of the water consumed in most years. It is an inexpensive, local source in a state where many cities rely on imported water and rural towns have no other sources. And its importance is magnified in dry years, when reservoirs fed by rivers are depleted.

The San Joaquin Valley’s groundwater reserves have been relentlessly pumped by farmers for decades. Tens of millions of acre-feet have been pumped from the ground, causing the water table to steadily drop and thousands of wells to go dry.

A handful of communities, largely home to low-income Latino residents, have run out of water, forcing people to use bottled water. The true scope of the problem may be underestimated, since many dewatered wells are unreported.

East Porterville, Tooleville, Fairmead, Lanare and Riverdale are just a few of the San Joaquin Valley communities that have been hit hard with dry wells.

“There’s so much political pressure to maintain the status quo, and to continue pumping, because it’s tied up with economic profits. And the end result is community members who can’t rely on their wells for safe water,” said Tien Tran, a policy advocate with the Community Water Center, which advocates for water equity.

In 2014, California passed a law to protect groundwater from overpumping. The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act requires local groundwater agencies to halt long-term depletion and achieve sustainability. But the deadlines are almost 20 years away, and basins are still being overdrafted.

The San Joaquin Valley’s major groundwater basins are designated critically overdrafted by the state Department of Water Resources. A year ago, the agency rejected the region’s groundwater sustainability plans on the grounds, saying they inadequately considered the needs of residential wells.

Gov. Gavin Newsom’s water strategy released last August called for increasing groundwater recharge by an average of half a million acre-feet each year. On Jan. 13, state water agencies announced a program to expedite approval of recharge projects.

“We’ve got a heck of a lot of snow in the Central Sierra,” said Karla Nemeth, director of the state Department of Water Resources. “That snow is going to melt, and we want the local water districts to be positioned to capture some of that excess snowmelt and get it underground.”

Compelled in part by state law, and often supported by millions in state funds, some farmers have dug large basins to capture stormwater and allow it to sink. Cities design similar projects, and in recent months alone, they've put tens of thousands of acre-feet of water into underground storage.

While not enough on their own to reverse overdraft, the programs could serve as models for scaling up recharge efforts statewide.

In the Tulare Irrigation District, stormwater is diverted into 1,300 acres of ponds used to recharge groundwater. And in a new program launched last year, farmers who sink water into their fields during storms can get it back during dry periods. General Manager Aaron Fukuda said dozens of landowners have taken part this winter, and on Feb. 3, the district was depositing nearly 1,500 acre-feet daily into the ground.

"The actions our district took last year are paying dividends this year," Fukuda said.

About 40 miles north, the Fresno Irrigation District has captured at least 9,000 acre-feet of water since December in 900 acres of basins, according to Kassy Chauhan, executive director of the North Kings Groundwater Sustainability Agency, which manages the district's groundwater.

The district spent millions buying former farmland and forming the basins, which are basically bulldozed depressions ringed by earthen berms.

"We were able to capture that water in those basins," Chauhan said. "It was clear progress."

But these types of efforts will only have a limited impact. Managed recharge using local water could potentially recover just 3% to 8% of the San Joaquin Valley's groundwater overdraft, according to 2020 research.

UC Davis Professor of civil and environmental engineering Jay Lund said, while he endorses groundwater recharge projects, there is a better way to lessen the Central Valley's water woes.

"We have to reduce demand," he said.

The problem is that farmers are still pumping water out of the ground faster than it's going back in.

Experts have predicted that the state groundwater law could eventually force as many as 750,000 acres of farmland out of production, permanently easing demands on the state's water supply.

Paul Gosselin, the Department of Water Resources' deputy director of sustainable groundwater management, said 42 recharge projects underway with \$68 million in state

support could add 117,000 acre-feet of water storage to the state's aquifers — a big step toward meeting the governor's half-million-acre-foot goal. He said the department has \$250 million available to support more recharge work.

Active recharge programs generated about 6.5 million acre-feet in the San Joaquin Valley alone in 2017, according to a report by the Public Policy Institute of California.

"We have lots of active recharge already," said Ellen Hanak, vice president and director of the institute's Water Policy Center. "The question is, with (the groundwater law), can we up our game?"