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*Comment Received From: Espi Sandoval*  
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## **Rural Communities Rising**

As a board member of Rural Communities Rising Organization and a resident of Western Fresno County since 1972, I have witnessed firsthand the stagnation and lack of progress in our communities. Despite the hard work of many residents, the majority of whom are agricultural workers, they continue to face low-paying jobs and limited opportunities for advancement. The agrarian system, dominated by large corporate agribusinesses, has long exploited the labor of these workers, leaving our communities in a state of persistent poverty.

Today, Western Fresno County remains home to some of the poorest communities in California. I am deeply disappointed by the lack of connection between the Darden Solar Project and the very communities it affects. In many ways, the situation feels reminiscent of past exploitation by agricultural corporations, with no tangible benefits being directed to the people who have long struggled here.

It is imperative that any development in our region, including the Darden Solar Project, directly benefits the residents of our communities. We need meaningful investments in the people who live here, not just in the nonprofits that were chosen without directly consulting the community to understand their needs. I would like to see the people connected to the Darden Project revisit how they plan to distribute these community benefits by consulting with residents directly, rather than relying on outside agencies that are not connected to our communities.