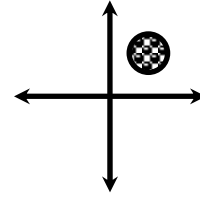


## NEW EDEN

Upper right quadrant combination:

Horizontal—*Positive External Influences*

Vertical—*Improving Social Conditions*



*“New Eden” says it all. Who would have believed back in 2003 that in the span of two decades the San Joaquin Valley could mature into a region with clean air, a diverse economy, a strong agricultural industry, and a highly educated workforce? All the components of an enviable quality of life are here.*

It’s June 22, 2025 and the conclusion of a special mayoral election brings us to the courtyard outside Fresno City Hall in downtown Fresno. Fresno County Supervisor Peter Pappas is concluding his opening introduction for the newly elected mayor of Fresno, now California’s 3rd largest city. Given this impressive political base, observers are already speculating on the new Mayor’s gubernatorial prospects.

“. . . and without more ado, it is my distinct honor and privilege to introduce my good friend and the new Mayor of the Best Little City in U.S.A., Graciela Rodriguez!”

“Thank you. Muchas gracias . . . gracias . . . thank you . . . For your applause and for your support. I am humbled and recognized I would not be on this podium today if it were not for you . . . and the history we share not just as a city, but as a Valley.”

“Today, as I stand here, it is clearer than ever to me today that this should be a day of celebration for your achievements. As we stand here in the bright sunshine of the present, it’s so easy to forget the past, and the hard work that’s led up to today. So let me take a moment to remind us.

## IT WASN’T EASY

“How many of you remember how hard life was back at the turn of the century? How many of you remember how quiet our voices were? So few of our parents had jobs outside of agriculture or low-paying services. But there were some. There were some who overcame prejudice, who bucked the stereotype of the poor, uneducated Mexican immigrant. There were some who stayed in school and got their education and started businesses. It wasn’t easy.

“It certainly wasn’t easy during the long three years of drought which decimated crippled crop production to levels unseen in more than two generations”.

“It wasn’t easy when unemployment shot up to depression levels.”

“You remember Congress voted billions in relief, but with a twist. Do you remember how they said that half the money had to be channeled into diversifying the Valley economy?

“With all due credit to the President, he said he didn’t want to throw good money after bad and watch taxpayers money get blown away in the next drought.

## MEETING THE CHALLENGE

“Yes, we had help, but we rose to the challenge. Many of you and many of your parents found your voices. You marched on Sacramento and you demanded improvements in education, from pre-school programs to better primary schools and middle schools and high schools, to new branches of the University of California system.

“Fresno’s, the Valley’s -- California’s entire system of public education needed a major makeover and, with your insistence, it happened.

“We changed the way teachers were recruited and trained so we could meet students ‘where they were.’ We got rid of tenure so that incompetent teachers couldn’t keep their jobs forever. We even brought in specialists from Monterrey Tech to show us a student-centered, service-oriented curriculum that spoke to Mexican-Americans.

“It took time to educate a new generation of sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters of Mexico on American soil . . . but when it came time to build a diversified economy in the San Joaquin Valley, a new generation of highly educated workers was ready to meet the challenge, Mexican-Americans, African-Americans, Central Americans, South Americans, and Anglos as well, some who stayed put, and others who chose to come here because of the growing opportunities this region has to offer.

“As you know, we didn’t stop doing agriculture . . . but we did it differently, with more biotechnology and less water. We didn’t stop using water; but we found it in new places, from ice-bergs, from careful use and conservation, from de-salination, and from fog. We didn’t stop using energy, but we learned how to depend less on oil and gas and more on hydrogen and wind and solar.

“We got smart and efficient and very profitable. Our jobs were no longer low-tech, low-pay, and low-value-added. Instead we learned how to farm in ways that are now setting a new standard for the rest of the world.

“But high-tech farming was just the half of it. With the benefit of an increasingly skilled workforce, and the support of a booming California economy that needed a place to grow, the non-agricultural half of the San Joaquin Valley became a newer, better blend of Southern California and Silicon Valley. Seeded with venture capital looking for new places to go, and fertilized by a work force that was well educated and ready to go, the Central Valley took off.

“Growth was a challenge. It had to be managed. We didn’t want the traffic congestion that had become so bad in Los Angeles and the Bay Area. We didn’t want the air pollution. So we invested in public transportation: high-speed rail, light rail, and regional airports.

We created “regional cities” that avoided the traditional inequities of rich suburbs and poor downtowns. We linked the centers and the peripheries and improved living standards for all.

*The relentless development at the edge around the car is unsustainable, and most of us know it. A new regional order is emerging.*

*To succeed, this new regional order must reintegrate Edge Cities with old cities and first-ring suburbs. . . . These three areas are each on the cusp of change: regionalism is a reality about to be born, the suburbs are rapidly maturing, and many inner-city neighborhoods are primed for rebirth. The three are connected by a common design ethic: that communities at the regional or neighborhood scale should have active centers, should respect their history and ecology, and should husband diversity. The challenge is to clarify the connections and shape both neighborhood and region into healthy, sustainable forms—into Regional Cities.*

*The missing link for many communities has been the loss of some simple and basic urban-design principles. These principles are (as they always have been) to create places that are walkable and human scaled, that are diverse in population and varied in uses, and that are shaped around public spaces that are meaningful and memorable.*

—Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton, *The Regional City*, pp. 5, 8

“We learned from the mistakes made by our neighbors on the coast. We didn’t remake our Valley in their image. We built our Valley in our own image, one that borrows from the best of our Mexican heritage and grafts it to the best of California. Our hybrid culture and economy is vibrant and strong.

“We now have the leading fuel-cell car manufacturing facility in the world, a major reason why we’ve been able to clean up our air. Kicking the hydrocarbon habit started at home, by getting the gas guzzlers off our own roads. From Tulare to Taft, our universities boast the most advanced programs for research into agricultural biotechnology.

“Who would have believed that the number of new movies coming out of the Universal Español studio in Visalia is fast approaching the number coming out of Burbank. Our trade with Mexico and the rest of Latin America is robust and well balanced.

“And still we have not abandoned the strong agricultural heritage that brought so many of our parents here in the first place. Still we have the best combination of soil, seasons and sunshine anywhere in the world, but now we have learned how to steward this valuable resource by practicing sustainable agriculture.

“Isn’t it amazing what a little education will do? But it was more than just little education, wasn’t it? We rebuilt the schools, and then the schools rebuilt us, and then we rebuilt the Valley. It’s a pretty good story we can tell our children today. And now they have the opportunity to build lives to hand on to their children.

“In closing, over my term, I will be guided by the sense of purpose, principles and judgment you have demonstrated day after day to improve both Fresno and the Valley. This office is an honor. And I will give it my all. Thank you so very much.”

## **WHAT DOES NEW EDEN MEAN?**

- Young professionals spur innovation.
- Individual rights may be challenged by growth management choices.
- The challenge of state politics—how to make sure the Valley has a voice in the Capitol?
- Rising costs to business due to increasing regulations.
- Challenge of increasing rate of political participation.
- Economic viability of smaller family farms critical to the nature of local agriculture.
- Different cultures, values and interests demand an approach designed to arrive at a shared vision.
- Where does leadership come from?

## **SOME POSSIBLE EARLY INDICATORS OF NEW EDEN TO LOOK OUT FOR:**

- Rolling out of plans for improving air quality.
- Declining unemployment and welfare.
- Tighter checks on air quality along coastal areas.
- Movement towards real education reform.
- Federal government pouring money into services for Valley population (e.g. Title V).
- Better management of traffic congestion.
- More collaboration between environmentalists and agricultural interests
- Increasing ‘infill’ development within city centers
- Improving graduation rates
- Increasing per capita income
- Increasing home ownership
- Decreasing crime
- Improving water quality and flourishing wildlife
- More cooperative regional coalitions
- Better air quality
- Closer parity with coastal cities
- Decrease in childhood asthma
- Expansion of educational opportunities (more options, flexibility, etc.)

## **STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR NEW EDEN**

- Develop a regional water plan
- Create a regional economic development strategy that builds on existing assets
- Plan for transportation that addresses air quality issues
- Create a regional plan to diversify the economy (e.g., move beyond intra-regional competition)

- Plan for sustainable land use planning that preserves agriculture and allows for growth
- Develop a coalition for campaign finance reform
- Increase spending on research for alternative and renewable energy
- Develop strategies that are big-picture and take an integrated, systemic view of change
- Develop a plan to change self-image and external image of Valley
- Create financial incentives for better individual behavior towards the environment
- Remember individual choices have community impacts
- Value the Valley