

How a Los Angeles couple came to control a water empire

Lynda and Stewart Resnick use more water than anyone else in California—including the city of LA

By [Elijah Chiland](#) Aug 10, 2016

Whether you're familiar with their massive agricultural holdings in the Central Valley, you may have heard the names of Stewart and Lynda Resnick. Known for their many charitable efforts, they're the Resnicks who gave their name to LACMA's Resnick Pavillion and UCLA's Resnick Neuropsychiatric Hospital. They also use more water than absolutely anyone else in California—and that includes businesses, farms, and even the city of Los Angeles.

How is this possible? An excellent profile in *Mother Jones* has the full story, but here's the gist of it. Back in 1978, the Resnicks entered the agricultural business with the purchase of some orange groves in Kern County (their initial fortune came not from agriculture but from the Teleflora flower delivery service). They later expanded their assets, buying farms on the cheap during the drought years of the late 1980s. Their company—then known as Paramount Farms, but now called the Wonderful Company—soon became the largest producer of pistachios and almonds in the world. Their many brands include Wonderful Pistachios, Halo Clementines, Fiji Water, and Pom Wonderful.

Now, all that farming requires a ton of water. Fortunately for them, the Resnicks own a majority share of what's known as the Kern Water Bank. The state spent \$75 million developing this massive underground storage facility before mysteriously handing it off to Kern County officials, who then gave much of it to Westside Mutual Water Company, a private water supplier owned by the Resnicks.

In 2014, a superior court judge decided this shady series of transactions was just that—shady. He ruled that California's Department of Water Resources hadn't fully examined the environmental impacts of the water bank, and later ordered the Environmental Impact Review to be resubmitted.

In the meantime, the Resnicks have been going hog wild with all that water. Based on current estimates, their Central Valley crops receive more yearly water than the amount used by every single home in Los Angeles *combined*. Their citrus crops alone use up more water than the city of San Francisco.

Not only that, but, having also set up a huge network of deep groundwater wells, the Resnicks are water rich enough that they've actually been selling the increasingly precious commodity back to the state. So far, they've made about \$30 million in the process.

Plenty of legal questions are still swirling around the ownership of the Kern Water Bank, and it's possible that the Resnicks might soon have to cut back like all the rest of us. But amid the uncertainty, they're still hoping to expand. Turns out, Chinese consumers can't get enough of those California pistachios.