

Visalia's Maria Herrera wins first Rachel's Network Catalyst Award

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WASHINGTON, DC — [Rachel's Network](#) announced recently that it has awarded Visalia resident and safe drinking water advocate Maria Herrera with its inaugural Catalyst Award. The award recognizes women of color making an environmental impact in communities across the country. Winners are awarded a \$10,000 prize along with networking opportunities.

Herrera has devoted her career to addressing drinking water challenges in disadvantaged and rural farmworker communities. As the manager of community engagement and planning at Self-Help Enterprises, she and her team pioneered the [Rural Communities Water Managers Leadership Institute](#), a program that helps communities in the San Joaquin Valley engage with and influence regional water planning and sustainability programs.

Herrera has secured millions of dollars from state, federal, and private sources to mitigate impacts of the drought, deliver interim sources of safe drinking water, and ensure communities plan for and implement sustainable water solutions.

Prior to Self-Help Enterprises, Herrera led a grassroots campaign to pass historic legislation: The Human Right to Water Act of California in 2012, the first of its kind in the nation. The legislation ensures universal access to clean, safe, accessible, and affordable drinking water.

Herrera was appointed to the California Water Commission by Governor Brown in 2015 and Governor Newsom in 2019. In 2014, she provided consultation to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Water and Sanitation on the participation of marginalized groups.

Herrera's experience growing up in a farmworker family living with polluted and scarce drinking water led to her career in community organizing, leadership, capacity development, and advocacy work.

"It's unacceptable that the people who grow our food often [don't have access to clean drinking water](#), and Maria has devoted herself to addressing this injustice," said Rachel's Network President Fern Shepard. "Her work is improving Californians' health and quality of life and empowering others to effectively advocate for their communities. We're glad to help shine a spotlight on her work through this award."

"Maria's work has given voice to the voiceless, particularly members of rural, largely Spanish-speaking farmworker communities in California," said former Community Water Center Attorney Rose Francis. "It is a testament to her tireless efforts over the last decade that policymakers in California now expect to hear from (and frequently even make space for the voices of) representatives from these communities."

Herrera will be honored at an awards ceremony along with five other winners at Rachel's Network annual meeting in Washington, DC in March 2020.

Rachel's Network, named after noted environmentalist Rachel Carson, is a community of women at the intersection of environmental advocacy, philanthropy, and leadership. Their mission is to promote women as impassioned leaders and agents of change dedicated to the stewardship of the earth. The Rachel's Network Catalyst Award was established to address the underrepresentation of women of color in leadership positions in the environmental community.