

Ag water initiatives underway in California

By Western United Dairymen May 20, 2015 | 7:28 pm EDT



Water-related initiatives are underway in California to address agricultural water use and quality.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) is accepting applications for the State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program (SWEET), authorized by emergency drought legislation (Assembly Bill 91). An estimated \$10 million will be available for competitive grant funding to provide financial assistance to implement irrigation systems that reduce greenhouse gases and save water on California agricultural operations.

The funding is made available through the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, the proceeds of California's greenhouse gas cap-and-trade program. Agricultural operations can apply for funding up to \$150,000 per project. The funding can be

supported by a broad range and/or combination of irrigation and water distribution-related practices providing quantifiable water savings and greenhouse gas reductions.

Prospective applicants must access the "Application Guidelines" at www.cdfa.ca.gov/go/SWEET (<http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/go/SWEET>) for detailed information on eligibility and program requirements. Application workshops will be held May 28-June 9.

Application deadline is June 29, followed by a technical review process. Grants recipients will be announced in September 2015.

Western United Dairymen has partnered with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Sustainable Conservation to secure an additional \$3.5 million for Merced and Stanislaus County dairy producers for water quality/conservation projects.

The process to apply for the available funding is the same as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and will be submitted with NRCS. EQIP has changed from one deadline and funding cycle per year to five. Applications will now be batched and ranked on specific dates, providing a more timely funding response.

The remaining fiscal year 2015 batching schedule is as follows:

- Batching Period 4 – June 19
- Batching Period 5 – July 17

A Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) must be completed as part of the process. A Technical Service Provider (TSP) is necessary to complete the CNMP process, with producer costs reimbursed by NRCS.

Type of projects funded through this program are: irrigation pipelines; pumps; structures for water control; waste storage facility (concrete pads); solid liquid separators; irrigation land leveling; and Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP).

Contact a local NRCS office for more information.

Finally, according to numerous published reports, farmers in the Sacramento–San Joaquin River Delta holding some of California's oldest water rights are proposing to voluntarily cut their use by 25% to avoid the possibility of even harsher state restrictions later this summer as the record drought continues. Under the deal expected to be presented to state officials Wednesday, farmers would either take less river water for irrigation, or leave a quarter of their crops unplanted.