



NEWS RELEASE

September 20, 2016

Contact: Cristel Tufenkjian (559) 237-5567, ext. 118; (559) 906-2952
Kings River Water Quality Coalition Outreach Coordinator

Two Million Dollar Grant Awarded to Innovative Water Quality Program

A group of Water Quality Coalitions was awarded a \$2,000,000 grant to implement an innovative program to quantifying and minimizing current nitrate leaching from farming operations in the Southern San Joaquin Valley. The grant award was made through USDA's Conservation Innovation Grant program, which fosters innovation in conservation to improve things like on-farm energy and fertilizer use as well as market-based strategies to improve water quality or mitigate climate change.

The awarded program will be implemented in over 1.8 million acres of irrigated agriculture in the Tulare Lake Basin across seven agricultural Water Quality Coalitions. The goal of the grant program is to increase the implementation of conservation practices to protect water quality. The Project has five main objectives: 1) to identify protective practices for Central Valley agriculture; 2) to adapt the USDA's Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) for Central Valley agriculture; 3) to increase adoption of protective practice through intensive producer/advisor outreach; 4) to assess adoption of protective practices; and 5) to quantify the reductions in nitrate leaching at the landscape-level using SWAT. The project is producer led and encompasses a broad range of technical partnerships and collaborators. Strategic partners include University of California Cooperative Extension, California State University, California Department of Food and Agriculture and support for the project was garnered from the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board and numerous agricultural organizations.

"This project provides support to growers in their efforts to continue to improve their operational efficiency while addressing groundwater quality objectives recently established for irrigated agriculture," stated Casey Creamer, Coordinator of the Kings River Water Quality Coalition which is administering the grant program in partnership with the six other water quality coalitions. "Over the years, great strides have been made by growers to increase fertilizer use efficiency through extensive research and producer exchange. This project will tap into that existing knowledge structure in order to expand implementation of protective practices that are adapted to individual site conditions and demonstrate the protection of groundwater quality. Protection of groundwater resources is now a necessary component of all irrigated operations and this grant will greatly assist producers with identifying and implementing good stewardship of those resources."

The Coalitions partnering in the grant include the Buena Vista Coalition, Cawelo Water District Coalition, Kaweah Basin Water Quality Association, Kern River Watershed Coalition Authority, Kings River Water Quality Coalition, Tule Basin Water Quality Coalition, and Westside Water Quality Coalition.

#

The Conservation Innovation Grant program is a highly competitive conservation grant program that helps put the very best conservation tools to work on privately held farms and forests, for maximum environmental impact.