

New Wave of Regulations for Irrigated Lands Program.

By Becky Waegell, Sacramento/Amador Water Quality Coalition

Development of the Long Term Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program will put irrigated ag under further pressure to demonstrate that they can improve surface and groundwater quality where water quality monitoring has identified exceedances related to agricultural operations. This will be even more important for growers and ranchers in the Sacramento/Amador subwatershed because of the focus on the Delta ecosystem by federal and state agencies working on the Bay Delta Conservation Plan. The future Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program is focused on nitrate impacts on groundwater quality.

Irrigators in the Sacramento Valley have had to meet the requirements of the Regional Boards conditional waiver of agricultural discharge (Waiver) for the last 7 years. To comply with the Waiver, irrigators could either join a coalition such as the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition or deal with the Regional Board individually. This Waiver is to be in place until the Regional Board can develop the Long Term Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (LTILRP). Regional Board staff are working with a broad based group of stakeholders, including agricultural organizations (e.g. California Farm Bureau Federation) to develop the documents that guide the LTILRP.

The first of these documents; the Nutrient Management Plan requirements, Groundwater Quality Questions to be Addressed in the New Regulation, the Surface and Ground Water Quality Management Plan Requirements and seven questions that our parent organization—the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition (SVWQC)—will need to answer on our behalf in the new program were discussed with stakeholders at an August 10 meeting with Regional Board staff. As a result the SVWQC joined with other agricultural organizations to express their outrage at the new requirements in a joint letter to the Regional Board staff. Some of the concerns raised in the letter included the overall cost of the program, the vague definition of groundwater and the increased requirements for the surface water quality program. Revisions to these documents will be discussed with the Stakeholder group at a September meeting.

Though many of the details still need to be worked out there are a few changes that irrigators should come to expect.

- First is that there will be a groundwater quality component to the LTILRP.
- Second nutrient management plans will be required of all landowners where nutrient contamination of groundwater exists.
- Third the surface water monitoring program will continue. And fourth coalition groups shall continue to be the interface between growers and the Regional Board. One other change that growers can expect will be increased costs to the program. In addition to increased monitoring and reporting requirements for groundwater the State budget has removed \$1.7 million of general fund money from the LTILRP. Currently \$.12 per acre of your fees goes to the State to cover some of their costs to implement this program. That fee has been proposed to increase to either \$.56 or \$.61 per acre.

To date, agricultural interests have been well represented at meetings with the Regional Board and their staff. However, there are many issues that are coming up which will need input from all affected irrigators. We will keep you posted when letters are needed.

If you are an irrigator and are not participating in this program contact me, Becky Waegell at 916-416-7012. I will help you determine if you need to be in the program and how to apply.

For information on the Sacramento Amador Water Quality Alliance
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