



Media Release

LOCAL FARMERS, STATE AGENCIES COLLABORATE ON DRINKING WATER REPLACEMENT PROGRAM FOR SALINAS VALLEY COMMUNITIES

STATE ENCOURAGES FARMERS TO JOIN TEMPORARY PROGRAM TO ADDRESS CONTAMINATED WATER

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SACRAMENTO – In a collaborative effort, a coalition of farmers has joined with state and local regulators to produce a replacement drinking water plan for Salinas Valley residents whose groundwater supplies are contaminated with unsafe levels of nitrate.

Working in cooperation with the State Water Resources Control Board and the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Salinas Basin Agricultural Stewardship Group, LLC has agreed to supply drinking water to communities in the Salinas Valley whose drinking water is above the standard for nitrates.

The temporary program will be organized and funded by the members of the stewardship group, a coalition of local agricultural owners and operators. It will run for up to two years while the parties work toward permanent solutions to respond to the challenges of nitrate accumulation in Salinas basin groundwater.

“Ensuring that communities have safe, affordable drinking water is a high priority of the State Water Board,” said Jonathan Bishop, chief deputy director at the State Water Board. “We welcome the leadership of the stewardship group in stepping up to this important challenge. And we look forward to working with them and others across the community toward long-term solutions.”

The temporary program covers small water systems and some domestic wells used by about 850 residents in the rural area. The Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship (CURES), which is coordinating the program, is contacting residents whose water sources have levels of nitrate above the drinking water standard. Delivery of the replacement water will begin this month.



Nitrate contamination of groundwater is one of the most serious water quality challenges facing rural communities in California. Over the last decade, the Central Coast Water Board has been at the forefront of identifying communities at-risk for nitrate contamination and working to ensure clean drinking water options are available.

“Protecting the health of those dependent on groundwater for their drinking water goes to the core of our Board’s mission,” said Central Coast Water Board Chairman Dr. Jean-Pierre Wolff. “This collaborative agreement offers the opportunity to provide interim safe drinking water to some of those in need -- and represents a big step in the right direction.”

The State Water Board’s Office of Enforcement and the Central Coast Water Board are suspending their current replacement water enforcement programs against parties that join the stewardship group for as long as two years while this new program is instituted. Landowners who wish to become a member of the stewardship group still have time to join.

“We’re going to allow about a month for folks to join the group and take advantage of the enforcement standstill before we start looking at further enforcement against non-cooperative parties,” said Cris Carrigan, director of the Office of Enforcement for the State Water Board.

The state and regional water boards credited the stewardship group’s leadership as one of the keys to creating the temporary drinking water program.

“The stewardship group members are pleased to partner in this important pilot program to answer the immediate needs of households whose drinking water from domestic wells contains nitrate exceeding the maximum contaminant level,” said Joe Pezzini, stewardship group member and President/CEO of Ocean Mist Farms.

“Safe drinking water is certainly a basic need and we must now work together on an effective, lasting solution involving our entire community,” Pezzini said. “As a group, we are focused on a long-term solution that balances community concerns, including the safety of our water sources, the health of our people, and the productivity of our local economy that supports us all. We look forward to working with governmental agencies, including the State Water Board, and other local interests to build a cooperative organization with the resources needed to resolve this community challenge.”

The State Water Board, Central Coast Water Board and the stewardship group will host a community meeting in the Salinas area soon to provide additional information and answer questions about the agreement.

View the settlement agreement at the State Water Board’s Office of Enforcement [webpage](#).

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