

Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District



65 S. Main St. Ste. 107 Templeton, CA 93465 | 805.434.0396 x 5 | www.us-ltrcd.org

To: James Caruso

From: Laura Edwards

Re: Interim Crop Conversion Program

Date: December 13, 2013

Background

Based on the severity of the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin, an urgency ordinance has been enacted to place a hold on increased water use in the Basin. The county is in the process of establishing a formal water offset program but is currently processing crop conversion permits. Producers are seeking to redevelop their crop operations based on consumptive water use. Under this scenario, a producer may wish to stop cultivating X acreage of alfalfa in exchange for Y acreage of a higher or lower water using crop. Water credits will need to be evaluated using known water use data for the differing crops to determine the appropriate acreage exchange in addition to any water unit surpluses gleaned under this scenario.

Concept Proposal for Interim Technical Assistance in Determining Crop Conversions

This interim program is designed to assist county staff in determining appropriate agricultural crop conversions – and their associated water use(s) – until a more formal offset program is completed in the spring of 2014. This interim program would treat projects on a case by case basis, examining existing and proposed farming practices and evaluating appropriate water offsets for those changes. These evaluations would be conducted by experts in the field of agriculture and natural resources management from the Upper Salinas – Las Tablas Resource Conservation District.

Proposed Program Process:

The US-LT RCD proposes to duplicate a successful process adopted by the Napa County RCD with Napa County for erosion control planning which involves these simple steps:

1. Landowner has water use conversion need and prepares a conversion plan or hires a technical advisor to assist them with creating an offset “Plan”.
2. The “Plan” is brought to the RCD technical team who reviews it for technical accuracy and site specific appropriateness.
3. The RCD technical team reviews the proposed “Plan” and schedules an on-site walk through with the landowner (and his/her technicians, if applicable). “Plan” specifications will be modified to include recommendations and adaptations from RCD technical expert.

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4. Once the landowner receives the RCD approved “Plan”, they will take it back to the County for processing.
5. Site visits will follow (typically 1-3) to ensure “plan” specifications are being carried out as designed.

Costs

The US-LT RCD proposes a streamlined way of processing these projects. The county will establish an account with the RCD by procuring a bulk number of site visits/plan approvals in advance (\$35,000). The county will seek reimbursement from the landowner by folding all processing charges into one bundled payment with their permit. Since project complexity varies, the RCD will seek to average the cost of each “Plan” for processing simplicity for all parties.

Note: The RCD will also use these case studies in the development of an agricultural water offset program, if applicable.