



Yolo County Resource Conservation District

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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Yolo County RCD and NRCS receive \$3.75 million to assist local producers in water quality and conservation efforts on rangeland

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced last Friday the release of over \$21 million to fund the new 2010 Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) established by the 2008 Farm Bill. Overall, 9 projects in California were approved over a five-year period for \$6.27 million for water quality and quantity projects. This spring, the Yolo County Resource Conservation District (RCD) submitted a proposal on behalf of landowners in an eight county area known as the Sacramento Valley Cluster, and has received notification that \$3.75 million in AWEP cost-share funding will be available for water quality and conservation projects on rangeland over the next 5 years.

AWEP is part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which is the USDA's largest conservation program on working lands. The new AWEP program was developed with the support of the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition (CRCC), the Audubon Landowner Stewardship Program and the RCD's throughout the project area. The program is focused on rangeland and will provide financial and technical support for ranchers to carry out practices that conserve ground and surface water, and improve water quality.

The Sacramento Valley Cluster includes Shasta, Tehama, Butte, Glenn, Colusa, Yuba, Sutter, and Yolo Counties which all lie within the AWEP national priority area of the Sacramento River Basin watershed. Issues that face the Sacramento River Basin are also exhibited throughout the Sacramento Valley Cluster and have been identified to occur in rangeland situations. The recent drought has highlighted the demands made on surface water as well as rangeland capacity to retain water for groundwater recharge. Water quality is a major concern with winter runoff delivering large amounts of sediments, organic and inorganic particulates of concern into surface water bodies. The USDA has delegated administration of the program to the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Yolo County sheep and cattle ranchers who want to address these issues on their land can apply for cost-share funding through the local NRCS field office in Woodland. NRCS also administers EQIP and provides agricultural producers with technical assistance for conserving natural resources.

The AWEP program is designed to address water quality, groundwater recharge, water availability for ranching operations, and conservation issues at a regional level by leveraging federal funds with the efforts and specific concerns of local partners. The specific goals identified by the Yolo RCD and Woodland NRCS are to: reduce accelerated rates of streambank, upland, and road erosion; reduce winter storm runoff from rangelands; address inadequate livestock distribution; reduce animal waste and other organic rangeland sources of water pollution; improve rangeland hydrologic function; and improve water supply for livestock.

To maximize resources and gain the multiple benefits of conservation practices, the AWEP program will use CRCC's designations of important and critical conservation areas. The CRCC has designated approximately 1.15 million acres of rangeland in the Sacramento River Basin as critical for conservation activities. Based on these designations, watershed studies were done to further prioritize AWEP-funded practices.

Jeanette Wrynski, Interim Executive Director for the Yolo RCD, noted that the program arrives at a good time for the County, "Rangelands in Yolo County are typically located upstream in the watershed where conservation practices can really affect water quality downstream. Many rangeland conservation practices are beneficial to both livestock operations and wildlife, making it a win-win for the landowner and conservation" She also noted that practices such as restoring native plants along creeks and improving livestock distribution are conservation methods that can improve water quality, and will be covered under AWEP.

"The program will provide funding to landowners from the USDA, but the RCD can aid landowners with technical expertise in planning and implementing conservation practices," Wrynski added.

Applications from individual agricultural producers must meet EQIP requirements, but do not need to have existing EQIP contracts. Producers whose applications are selected enter into individual contracts with NRCS. Application deadline for this year's cost-share funding is July 28, 2010. For more information about the program, contact the Nick Gallagher at the NRCS Woodland Field Office located at 221 W. Court Street, Woodland, CA 95696 at 530-662-2037, extension 114.

The Yolo County Resource Conservation District's mission is to protect, improve, and sustain the natural resources of Yolo County. Our projects reflect a cooperative effort with our partner agency, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service.

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The Yolo County Resource Conservation District (RCD) is a special district recognized under state law. The Mission of the Yolo RCD is to protect, improve, and sustain the natural resources of Yolo County. Our Board of Directors and staff are dedicated to developing resource stewardship solutions for local landowners based on the best available science and local needs. Our projects reflect a cooperative effort with our partner agency, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), landowners, agencies, and agricultural and conservation groups.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Heather Nichols-Crowell at 530-662-2037 x112 or email nichols-crowell@yolorcd.org.

Photo caption: The Yolo County Resource Conservation District has been awarded \$3.75 million in funding over the next 5 years to assist landowners in the improvement of water quality and water conservation on rangelands.