

NEWS RELEASE



Farmington

Groundwater Recharge Program

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 30, 2003

EAST COUNTY GROWERS CONSIDER NEW CROP ROTATION

Farmington Groundwater Recharge Program Promises to Restore Overdrafted Basin

Eastern San Joaquin County growers are now considering water as a crop following an open house that unveiled the Farmington Groundwater Recharge Project for Eastern San Joaquin County. Hosted by the San Joaquin County Farm Bureau Federation, the Wednesday evening event drew more than 30 attendees from throughout the east county.

The Farmington Groundwater Recharge Project Open House was sponsored by Stockton East Water District (SEWD) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). The event included information booths staffed by subject-matter experts, a brief project presentation and a panel discussion featuring Kauffman, San Joaquin County Farm Bureau Federation President Ken Watkins and project manager Bill Swanson.

“The East San Joaquin County Groundwater Basin is in decline and saline intrusion from the Delta continues to move east,” SEWD General Manager Kevin Kauffman said during the panel discussion. “Without the Farmington Groundwater Recharge Project the groundwater basin will become saline contaminated, leading to the closure of more municipal wells in Stockton and leaving growers to farm salt-tolerant, low-value crops.”

The program is a regional effort to recharge the underground aquifer through periodic spreading of up to 35,000 acre-feet of surplus water per year using the flooded-field method. The program will initially

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seek to lease approximately 25 parcels totaling 1,200 acres. Municipal and agricultural pumping from the Basin currently exceeds natural recharge by approximately 130,000 acre-feet/year.

Stockton East Water District and the Corps will monitor parcels enrolled in the program for percolation efficiency, water quality and level changes, and other issues related to identifying the most cost-effective and cost-efficient recharge method. Stockton East Water District will ask landowners of top performing sites to enroll the parcel on a rotating cycle, where recharge and prior land use activities rotate on a five-to 10-year schedule. These owners may have the option to sell their parcel as a permanent groundwater recharge facility. Groundwater recharge is planned to begin in early 2004, Kauffman said.

Since program participants would be compensated, Watkins was asked if water could be considered a “crop” to be added to growers’ existing crop rotation efforts for soil health and integrated pest management purposes.

“Tomato contracts aren’t what they used to be, so yes it could be a ‘crop’ as long as payments are competitive with what could be earned by farming,” Watkins said.

Swanson responded that compensation to growers would be based on several factors – each taken on a site-by-site basis – but largely based on market rates for land used for row crops. Other factors that could contribute to a higher per-acre value to participants could include the percolation capacity of the land and the participant’s ability to construct, operate and maintain the facility. In order to maintain project legitimacy, no participant will receive preferential treatment, Kauffman added.

The \$33.5 million Farmington Groundwater Recharge Project is supported by \$25 million in Federal dollars, with the remaining share paid by SEWD and other local sponsors, Corps Project Manager Pat Dwyer said.

Funding from Propositions 13 and 50 and local agency’s water assessments will assist with the local cost share, Kauffman said.

The initial 35,000 acre-feet/year is based on the Farmington Groundwater Recharge and Seasonal Habitat Study, completed in 2001. Stockton East Water District was the lead-local sponsor of the feasibility study with the Corps. Other study participants included Central San Joaquin Water Conservation District, North San Joaquin Water Conservation District, City of Stockton, San Joaquin County and California Water Service Company.