

# THE MODESTO BEE

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## California will pay farmers to reduce groundwater use near drought-stressed residential wells

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The state has launched a pilot program to compensate farmers who reduce groundwater pumping near “vulnerable” residential wells stressed by drought.

The LandFlex program will involve a tiny slice of California’s water supply, but it could be a start toward larger efforts of this type. The partners include Modesto-based groups supporting the dairy and almond industries.

The California Department of Water Resources has \$25 million for the program. Farmers can receive up to \$2.5 million each to pause or end their pumping.

LandFlex has three parts:

- \$450 per acre-foot of water not pumped during a single dry year. Farmers typically use three to four acre-feet to grow a crop. This portion will mostly involve annual crops rather than orchards or vineyards.
- \$750 per acre-foot of water removed permanently from farm use.

- \$250 to \$2,500 per acre for land retired from farming. The payment depends on proximity to residential wells and a crop's water consumption.

LandFlex is aimed at small- and medium-size farms. They must have an average annual gross income of \$2.5 million or less over three years.

DWR partnered on the program with the Almond Alliance of California, the Western United Dairies Foundation, Self-Help Enterprises and the Community Alliance with Family Farmers. It will be carried out through local agencies established as part of a 2014 law mandating sustainable pumping by about 2040.

"Farmers, underrepresented communities and Groundwater Sustainability Agencies share a common interest in the immediate ending of groundwater overdraft on lands near vulnerable drinking water wells," said Anja Raudabaugh, CEO of the dairy group, in a news release.

Self-Help Enterprises is based in Visalia and works on water, housing and other issues affecting low-income people. The Community Alliance with Family Farmers operates out of Davis on sustainable food production.

Almond Alliance CEO Aubrey Bettencourt said LandFlex will "leave water in the ground to stabilize aquifers and allow our farmers to stay in operation and have operating capital on a voluntary and annual basis while supporting our communities and ensuring a secure food supply for next year."

More details are at [www.landflex.org](http://www.landflex.org).