

AGNET WEST

LandFlex Program to Help Farmers Transition Away from Groundwater

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The new LandFlex program from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) seeks to reduce groundwater demand through incentives. Administered in partnership with local Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs), the program is being supported by \$25 million from DWR. Chief Executive Officer of Western United Dairies, Anja Raudabaugh said there are three main components of the program.

“You have the immediate drought relief piece which is paid per acre-foot of saved water through evapotranspiration technology,” said Raudabaugh. “The second piece is to incentivize the farmer – we’re calling it a transition payment – to transition from a fairly water-intensive crop to a lesser water-intensive crop.”

Transition payments can range from \$250 to \$2,800 per acre depending on current land uses. Farmers can receive \$450 per acre-foot of water saved by fallowing land for one year to provide immediate drought relief. Raudabaugh explained that the final component “is the sustainability and the sustainable yield piece which is essentially being paid to the farmer \$750 per acre-foot of transitional overdraft that he or she wants to sell to DWR.”

DWR is also working with the Almond Alliance, Western United Dairies Foundation, Self-Help Enterprises, and California Alliance with Family Farmers as part of the program. The groups will provide technical assistance to GSAs in providing support and outreach to the agricultural community.

The overall goal of LandFlex is to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. Easing pressure on groundwater will help prevent vulnerable communities from running into problems with available well water.

“We’re trying to protect drinking water wells through preventative fallowing and the permanent retiring of groundwater overdraft on enrolled acres,” said Raudabaugh. “Farmers that are willing to engage the program will be placed on a priority system depending on how close they are in proximity to domestic drinking water supplies.”

Public comments on the LandFlex program will be accepted through December 29. DWR will also be hosting an Applicant Workshop on January 19, 2023, for those interested in applying for the program.