

# CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

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## DWR Awards \$25 Million in LandFlex Grants to Protect Drinking Water Wells

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SACRAMENTO, Calif. – The Department of Water Resources (DWR), in coordination with the California Department of Food and Agriculture, today awarded \$25 million in financial assistance to three groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) through the LandFlex Program. The funding will help preserve critical groundwater supplies in Central Valley communities.

LandFlex is a tool for GSAs to help provide immediate protection of drinking water wells in underrepresented communities impacted by prolonged drought and overpumping of groundwater supplies. The program also helps GSAs accelerate efforts to better manage and protect groundwater supplies for long-term sustainability as required by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) of 2014.

DWR has awarded grants to the following three GSAs:

- Madera County Groundwater Sustainability Agency - \$9.3 million
- Greater Kaweah Groundwater Sustainability Agency - \$7.0 million
- Eastern Tule Groundwater Sustainability Agency - \$7.0 million

With these grant funds, GSAs will work directly with interested growers to temporarily idle agricultural lands to provide immediate benefits for vulnerable domestic wells. This one-year drought relief measure is expected to keep 1,500 to 5,000 acre-feet of groundwater in the ground to avoid impacts on vulnerable drinking water wells. The program will also help permanently eliminate the use of groundwater overdraft on each enrolled acre. This longer-term benefit of the LandFlex program is designed to prevent the extraction of an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 acre-feet of groundwater, accelerating each GSA's efforts towards sustainable groundwater management.

The program incentivizes participation by small- and medium-size farm operations where a reduction in agricultural pumping would help keep household and small community water system wells from going dry.

"LandFlex will help incentivize responsible groundwater and land use sustainability practices by encouraging growers to mitigate the impacts of groundwater overdraft in vulnerable areas. This program not only has the potential to be an effective tool for GSAs and their growers to push towards sustainability but to provide a much needed helping hand to our vulnerable communities in the San Joaquin Valley whose drinking water is being severely impacted by overdraft and the state's prolonged drought," said DWR partner Eddie Ocampo with Self-Help Enterprises.

Although a series of storms in January helped recover some reservoir levels, groundwater supplies are slower to recover and drinking water wells throughout California are still at risk of going dry because groundwater is being pumped faster than it can be replenished.

"Many California communities, especially those located in the Central Valley, rely on groundwater and drinking water wells for their water supply needs, particularly during extreme drought. LandFlex is an example of the State taking proactive steps to protect drinking water supplies for California's most vulnerable communities," said DWR Director Karla Nemeth. "We are proud of the partnerships we've formed to make this program a reality."

In order to reach vulnerable communities in need and provide small or disadvantaged farmers access to the program, DWR is partnering with Community Alliance with Family Farmers, Self-Help Enterprises, Western United Dairies Foundation, and the Almond Alliance to assist GSAs with providing outreach and engagement to growers.

"This program demonstrates how collaboration and leadership are essential to meeting the challenges of climate change and bringing our aquifers into balance," said Karen Ross, Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. "I am encouraged by the initial interest of farmers in this approach and appreciate the innovation and commitment they bring to healthy food production and the wellbeing of their communities every day."

More information about the LandFlex program. Learn more about SGMA, which addresses issues of over-pumping and provides a framework for local agencies to better manage and protect groundwater supplies for long-term sustainability.