

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

DWR Assists Underrepresented Communities & Tribes with Local Groundwater Improvements, Expands Support to Small Farmers

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By: CA Department of Water Resources



California faces a full range of climate challenges, from extreme drought to flooding, that place stress on critical water supplies like groundwater that communities, businesses, and ecosystems rely on. Recognizing the lack of resources underrepresented communities have to address these issues, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) provides hands-on technical assistance services at no cost through the [Underrepresented Community, California Tribes, and Small Farmer Technical Assistance Program](#) (URCTA Program).

Beginning in 2024, DWR and its partners expanded existing technical assistance services to include support for small farmers. Expanding technical support to eligible farmers within critical over-drafted groundwater basins will help ensure that they also have the resources and information they need to adapt to a changing climate. New services for small farmers include groundwater level monitoring, soil moisture monitoring, aquifer testing, support and preparation for irrigation services, well monitoring and training.

In recognition of this work and the expansion of the program, DWR received the Public Outreach Merit Award by the American Planning Association this fall.

“The Communications and Outreach award DWR received highlights our continued efforts to reach, collaborate, and provide a voice to California’s most vulnerable communities so that they have the information and tools to secure a more reliable, climate resilience water future,” said Kelley List, URCTA program manager at DWR.

Services through the URCTA program offer risk, needs, and vulnerability assessments that identify areas where poor water quality and water shortages are affecting Californians across the state. The information gathered offers solutions to fund upgrades to existing wells, install new wells, and offers guidance on sustainable groundwater management. These services are community-centered, involving local leadership interaction and partnership.

“The goal is to provide a voice and defer to community representatives on what their preferred desired outcomes of our assistance should be,” List said. “We want communities to feel empowered and have the information they need to advocate for themselves.”

Groundwater Improvements

Since the program’s launch in 2021, DWR has partnered with nonprofits, collectively referred to as the Groundwater Leadership Forum, to outreach to underrepresented communities and provide technical assistance services that support climate resilience and local [Sustainable Groundwater Management Act \(SGMA\)](#) implementation.

As part of the URCTA Program, DWR assessed over 32 sites and helped several communities fix failing water infrastructure, connect to larger water systems, increase groundwater storage capacity, and identify funding opportunities to improve local supplies and water security.

The [Well Mitigation Project](#) in the Central Valley is a prime example of the work being done to meet sustainability goals. DWR partnered with the Water Foundation, Community Water Center, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, Self-Help Enterprises, Audubon Society, and Nature Conservancy to address dry wells, contaminated supplies, and manage groundwater-dependent ecosystems in the region.

Looking ahead, DWR and its partners plan to continue offering technical assistance, along with other activities like groundwater dependent ecosystem studies, well inventory and mapping, drinking water tool enhancements, and K-12 education material expansion.

For more information on the Underrepresented Community Technical Assistance Program and available resources, visit water.ca.gov/urctaprogram.