

East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition

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www.esjcoalition.org

For Immediate Release

Madera County Farmers Asked to Join Water Quality Coalition

May 7, 2004, Modesto, CA -- More than 1500 Madera County farmers received letters this week describing their options under new farm runoff regulations and asking them to join a coalition of other farmers throughout the eastern San Joaquin Valley.

The letters were sent as part of a membership building effort by the East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition (Coalition), a group formed in 2003 to represent owners and operators of irrigated crop land in Merced, Stanislaus, Tuolumne and Mariposa Counties under the "Irrigated Lands Conditional Waiver." The new regulation was passed on July 11, 2003 by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board. Madera County farm organizations recently joined the Coalition, opening the door for farmers in the county to sign on to the group.

"This Coalition is the only opportunity local growers have to avoid filing individual farm runoff reports with the Water Board," says Parry Klassen, Board Chairman of the ESJWQC. Klassen is a co-founder of the group along with Wayne Zipser, Director of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau. "Our efforts are directed solely toward fulfilling the requirements in the conditional waiver," says Klassen, who is also Executive Director of the Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship (CURES). "Those requirements are significant over time and will take the support and involvement of a broad cross section of agriculture in this Valley. We cannot afford to fail."

Since August 2003, a core group of farm representatives has been meeting to set up the organization needed to comply with the new regulations, which give farmers the option of joining a coalition group or filing individual discharger reports with the Regional Water Board. The Coalition recently filed a monitoring plan for local rivers and drains and a watershed use report, key requirements for a coalition to be in compliance with the new regulations.

Local agricultural groups supporting the Coalition include Madera County Farm Bureau. “Our Board of Directors have studied these new farm runoff regulations and decided that the coalition option makes the most sense,” says Jason Baldwin, Director of the Madera County Farm Bureau. “In our opinion it is overregulation but our best chance of changing it is through participation in the Coalition,” says Baldwin. Other local cooperating entities include the Madera County Agricultural Commissioner, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Madera, and the Chowchilla Irrigation District.

Klassen and Baldwin are asking Madera County farmers and other local agricultural groups to join the Coalition. To date the Coalition’s cooperating entities include Ducks Unlimited; East Merced Resource Conservation District; East Stanislaus Resource Conservation District; Merced County Agricultural Commissioner; Merced County Farm Bureau; Natural Resources Conservation Service; Stanislaus County Agricultural Commissioner; Stanislaus County Department of Environmental Resources; Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship; and the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau. Calaveras County Agricultural Commissioner, Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship, Ducks Unlimited, East Merced Resource Conservation District, East Stanislaus Resource Conservation District, Mariposa County Agricultural Commissioner, Mariposa County Farm Bureau, Merced County Agricultural Commissioner, Merced County Farm Bureau, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Merced, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Stanislaus, Stanislaus County Agricultural Commissioner, Stanislaus County Department of Environmental Resources, Stanislaus County Farm Bureau, Tuolumne County Agricultural Commissioner, Tuolumne County Farm Bureau. More than 1200 individual farmers have signed on to the Coalition as well.

For more information go to www.esjcoalition.org or contact Parry Klassen, Coalition for Urban/Rural Environmental Stewardship, 559-325-9855; parryk@comcast.net or Jason Baldwin, Madera County Farm Bureau; 559-674-8871; jasonbaldwin@sbcglobal.net.

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