

# Calif. bond would set \$100 million for water-use efficiency

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An irrigation canal sends water to farms near Red Bluff, Calif. The \$7.5 billion water bond on the November ballot in California includes \$100 million for agricultural and urban water efficiency projects.

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**California's \$7.5 billion water bond proposal would provide \$100 million for water use efficiency projects on farms and in cities.**

Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — The \$7.5 billion water bond that will appear on the November ballot in California includes \$100 million for water-use efficiency projects on farms and in urban areas.

The Community Alliance with Family Farmers and other groups that assist small operations are applauding the bond's provision of significant funds for such farming practices as irrigation scheduling and soil moisture monitoring.

Past bonds have failed to include money to help agriculture get the most out of limited water supplies, said Jeanne Merrill, policy director of

the California Climate and Agriculture Network.

"The language in the bond is relatively broad, but it's available for ... both urban and agricultural water conservation projects," Merrill told the Capital Press. "So we're particularly keen on giving technical assistance and financial incentives to growers who are interested in on-farm efficiency projects, which could range ... from irrigation efficiencies to other production management practices that help to conserve water."

Merrill was involved in negotiations with Gov. Jerry Brown and legislators over details of the bond, which was passed overwhelmingly by lawmakers and quickly signed by the governor earlier this month.

The bond, which will appear on the ballot as Proposition 1, will include \$2.7 billion for storage, \$900 million to address groundwater problems, \$810 million for drought preparedness and money for a host of other uses.

Merrill and others pushed for water-efficiency funds to be available as competitive grants to individuals rather than being distributed more broadly to water districts for their regional water management plans, she said.

While the bond language doesn't spell out how the water-efficiency money would be divided between ag and urban uses, it's almost certain to provide more funds for on-farm water savings than previous bonds, Merrill said.

A recent CAFF analysis found that few dollars have gone to supporting farmers in improving water efficiency on their land. For example, of the \$37 million from Proposition 50 that funded agriculture water efficiency since 2005, nearly three-quarters of the money has gone to infrastructure improvements such as pipelines, canals and pumps, the study found.

Only 8 percent of the money has gone to help farmers implement inexpensive conservation practices such as irrigation scheduling, soil moisture monitoring or designing the landscape in a way that maximizes water use, CAFF noted in a news release.

As California's drought has worsened, agencies have placed an increased emphasis on water-use efficiency. Earlier this year, the federal Bay Delta Conservation Initiative offered \$18 million in grants to farmers to conserve water and improve wildlife habitat, and two state agencies offered another \$10 million in grants this summer for similar projects.

The University of California Cooperative Extension has made irrigation efficiency a key focus of their training for farmers in recent years. Earlier this year, the Fruit and Nut Center at UC-Davis launched a website to help growers interpret readings from pressure bombs to determine how much water their trees need.



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