



Fact Sheet

Frequently Asked Questions:

Why does the Central Coast Region need a new Agricultural Order now?

- The previous Order has expired, and needs to be updated. Staff proposes a draft Order with more accountability for water quality and public health protection, and more effective monitoring and reporting.
- Water quality in many of the region's agricultural areas is severe and impaired to a level where it impacts human and aquatic health, especially drinking water sources. The Water Board must address these issues.
- State law requires the water quality standards to be met in a timely way. State law provides full authority for Water Board enforcement of those standards.

Who is regulated by the draft Order?

- Similar to the previous Order, the draft Order regulates discharges of waste from irrigated lands where water is applied for producing commercial crops.
- This includes, for example, land planted to row, vineyard, field and tree crops, commercial nurseries, nursery stock production, and some greenhouse operations.

Have stakeholders collaborated on this proposal?

- Yes. Growers and environmental groups submitted their own proposals for this draft Order and made numerous presentations before the Board. Components of those alternatives were considered by staff; appropriate components are now part of the draft Order.

Have the public and stakeholders been given the opportunity to comment and make suggestions on the draft Order?

- Opportunities for the public and stakeholders to review and comment on the Order have been numerous and comprehensive, including five public written comment periods, seven public workshops and hearings, and more than 60 outreach events.
- The Water Board has received about 2,000 comment letters and heard testimony from hundreds of organizations and individuals, and these comments have resulted in many edits to the draft Order.

Does the proposed draft Order increase requirements for all farms?

- No, the draft Order is scaled based on threat to water quality and lessens or maintains similar requirements for approximately 97% of farms in the region. Farms that are lower threat or in unimpaired areas are lower priority.

- The draft Order does increase requirements for the farms that are the highest risk to water quality and drinking water sources (Tier 3).

Is the draft Order a rigid, one size fits all document?

- No. The draft Order gives growers flexibility in choosing how to comply, and provides many alternatives available to meet the requirements. It encourages and provides incentives for cooperative water quality improvement efforts in monitoring and treatment to reduce costs and maximize effectiveness.

Does the draft Order prohibit water discharges from farms?

- No. The draft Order requires growers to use management practices to minimize wastes leaving the farm in irrigation runoff, stormwater runoff, or percolation to groundwater.

Does the Order prohibit tile drains, or require growers to line their ponds?

- No. The draft Order does not affect the use of tile drains or require growers to line ponds.

Will growers have to maintain a 1,000 foot buffer between crops and water bodies?

- No. The draft Order does not limit where crops can be grown. It uses location 1,000 feet from an impaired water body as a criterion to help determine in which tier a farm may belong.
- A subset of Tier 3 growers (about 2% of all farms in the region) will be required to prepare a water quality buffer plan to protect adjacent streams from erosion and sediment loading or other waste discharges due to absent or compromised vegetative cover. The buffer must be at least thirty feet wide and is required by the region's Basin Plan. Growers can prepare an alternative plan if it is similarly protective.

Do growers have to drill new groundwater monitoring wells?

- No, growers are NOT required to drill new wells. The protection of groundwater, especially drinking water sources, is the highest priority for the draft Order. Growers are required to sample the primary irrigation well and any drinking water well on their farm twice in the first year. The types of analyses required (nitrate and standard minerals) are relatively low cost. Growers can also comply by submitting existing groundwater data and can also work with neighboring growers on cooperative groundwater monitoring. The draft Order will protect the location of wells from public disclosure.

Will proprietary information be released to the public as a result of the draft Order?

- No. The Water Code and other laws protect trade secrets from public disclosure.

Do the proposed new requirements related to certified Irrigation and Nutrient Management Plans, Water Quality Buffer Plans, and individual discharge monitoring apply to all farms?

- No, these new requirements only apply to a SUBSET of Tier 3 Farms that have a relatively higher risk to water quality and drinking water sources (currently less than 3 percent of the region's farms).

What is an Irrigation and Nutrient Management Plan?

- The purpose of the Irrigation and Nutrient Management Plan is to protect groundwater and surface water, especially drinking water sources, from nitrate contamination, by preventing the excessive application of water and nutrients.
- The Irrigation and Nutrient Management Plan includes nutrient budgeting information such as crop nitrogen uptake values, amount of nitrogen applied, the nitrogen balance, and an estimate of nitrate loading to groundwater and reductions.
- The Irrigation and Nutrient Management Plan requirements, including specific nutrient balance targets, were developed in coordination with UC Cooperative Extension, Certified Crop Advisors, and other qualified professionals who recommended the specific targets.
- Nutrient balance targets compare the amount of nitrogen applied to the amount of nitrogen needed to produce a crop. Existing data demonstrate that, in many cases, growers are already achieving these targets.
- The draft Order does not require 100 percent crop efficiency.
- This requirement to prepare an Irrigation and Nutrient Management Plan only applies to a SUBSET of Tier 3 Farms that have a relatively higher risk to water quality and drinking water sources (currently less than 3 percent of the region's farms).

How will growers benefit from the draft Order?

- Growers already using sustainable and environmentally sound best practices will get credit for their efforts. This draft Order focuses primarily on growers who are not using the best practices and are contributing to pollution.
- Growers using more efficient practices should save money by using less water, nitrogen and other chemicals.
- More effective and efficient irrigation practices will reduce energy costs.
- Reduced waste discharges will mean fewer clean up and enforcement costs.
- Growers will benefit from having cleaner water available for their own families, their crops, farmworkers and their families.

What will it cost growers to implement the draft Order as it now exists?

- Costs will depend on the individual grower.
- Growers already using effective management practices, such as efficient irrigation management and nutrient budgeting techniques, and growers who have made progress

towards water quality improvement as a result of efforts related to the existing Order, may comply with the draft Order at relatively low cost.

- The Water Board and other agencies have offered extensive financial assistance to help growers utilize effective management practices. Additional funding will likely continue.

Why does this draft Order emphasize nitrate contamination?

- Protection of public health and drinking water sources is among the highest priorities for the draft Order.
- High concentrations of nitrate in drinking water can trigger a condition that robs the blood of oxygen. This is of special concern with pregnant women and infants since a baby's system is not developed enough to compensate for that lack of oxygen. Research indicates there may be adverse health effects (i.e., increased risk of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, alzheimers, endocrine disruption, cancer of the organs) among adults as a result of long-term consumption of nitrate.
- In the Salinas Valley area, more than 23 percent of the municipal drinking water wells sampled exceed safe drinking water limits for nitrate and must be blended or treated to meet standards.
- In the Santa Maria area, more than 27 percent of the municipal drinking water wells sampled exceed safe drinking water limits for nitrate and must be blended or treated to meet standards.
- About 44,000 private wells are not monitored, but are generally drilled in shallow ground water more prone to higher nitrate concentrations than deeper municipal wells.
- Fertilizers are the primary source of nitrate pollution in groundwater.
- Nutrients also feed algae and other life forms that choke off oxygen in water which is harmful to the aquatic food chain and fish.

Why does this draft Order focus so closely on Chlorpyrifos and Diazinon?

- Chlorpyrifos and Diazinon are heavily used pesticides in the Central Coast Region.
- Both pesticides have been detected in area waters, and found to be the primary source of severe toxicity in surface waters in the region. Many creeks in agricultural areas suffer from toxicity due to these two chemicals.
- Ample research describes significant toxic effects of both chemicals on people and the environment.