

Valley farmers face deadline, possible fine on groundwater

Posted by Mark Grossi on April 28, 2014



Farmers in a vast swath of the San Joaquin Valley must sign up for the groundwater protection program by May 19.

KINGS RIVER CONSERVATION DISTRICT — KRCD

State water quality enforcers are telling farmers it's time to join a groundwater protection program that has been in the making for many years -- sign up by May 19 or face fines.

The deadline is for farmers in Fresno, Kings and parts of Tulare counties. The land is within the Kings River Conservation District, which is leading a coalition of growers to comply with the order.

Many farmers already are in the program, but for those who miss the deadline, the state may remind them with a notice of violation. Those who continue to delay could eventually be fined up to \$1,000 a day.

The idea is to monitor underground water and control discharges of contaminants, such as fertilizers and pesticides.

Water activists consider the decade-long campaign to regulate irrigation discharges an important step in dealing with contamination of wells in rural San Joaquin Valley towns.

The Valley's most widespread drinking-water problem is nitrates, according to a study from the University of California at Davis. The 2012 study says 96% of the problem comes from agriculture, and it threatens the drinking water of 250,000 Valley residents.

Nitrates are chemicals from farm fertilizers, septic systems, animal waste and decaying plants. They can cause a potentially fatal infant blood disease, called blue-baby syndrome. Nitrates also have been connected to several cancers.

Farm leaders say the nitrate problems are from past decades, and that modern, efficient farming does not include the overuse of fertilizers.

For the groundwater protection program, state water officials have mailed thousands of signup reminders to farmers.

They can either join the coalition of farmers in the Kings River Conservation District, called the Kings River Water Quality Coalition, or they can sign up directly with the state and possibly have to hire a consultant, adding to their costs.

To sign up with the coalition, call (559) 365-7958 or go to the website. To sign up with the regional board, (559) 488-4396 or go to the website.

"They have an obligation to sign up, one way or the other," said Clay Rodgers of the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board in Fresno.

Read more here: <http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/04/28/3899785/farmers-face-deadline-possible.html?sp=/99/406/263/#storylink=cpy>