

SAC-VALLEY NEWS

SVWQC actions, accomplishments, and updates

1.1+ MILLION IRRIGATED ACRES

7300+ PARTICIPANTS

10 SUBWATERSHEDS

Denise Carter Recognized with the Crystal Clear Award

For more than two decades, owners and operators of irrigated lands, Northern California Farm Bureaus, County Agricultural Commissioners, Cooperative Extension crop advisors, and Resource Conservation Districts have been working in partnership to improve agricultural water quality in the Sacramento Valley. Beginning with the Regional Plan of Action submitted to the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) in 2003 and the formation of the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition (Coalition) this partnership has demonstrated through constructive action a commitment to improving water quality for agricultural, aquatic and drinking water beneficial use for both surface and groundwater. Since 2016, NCWA has recognized one organization or individual for their exemplary efforts in advancing the understanding of actions by agricultural operations to protect water quality, and characterize agriculture water quality in the Sacramento Valley with the Crystal Clear award.

Benjamin Franklin, one of America's Founding Farmers, once said, "If you want something done, ask a busy person." That captures the trait of this year's Crystal-Clear Award Winner. Farmer, 4-H Sheep Project Leader for five years, a soccer coach and a school volunteer, Farm Bureau Director and Second Vice-President of local Farm Bureau, President of North Valley Chapter of California Certified Organic Farmer, graduate of Agricultural Leadership Program, Class 38, recipient of Common Threads



North award, tirelessly advocate for local farmers, agriculture, and rural community flood protection, appointed to the Colusa County Board of Supervisors by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in November 2008, and subsequently won election to her seat three times, and director of Colusa Glenn Subwatershed Program from its inception.

While a director, this year's recipient was instrumental in delineating Sacramento agriculture from the Central Valley by testifying before the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board about how stewardship and using soil health-focused management to build resilient soils, productive crops, and a more sustainable farming system protective of water quality.



The latest in this issue:

CELEBRATING DENISE CARTER

2ND AG EXPERT PANEL

3 NEW MANAGEMENT PLANS

THE 4 RS

REGIONAL BOARD ENFORCEMENT

MEMBER INFORMATION

2025CY REPORTING

REMINDER TO NURSERY OPERATORS

Denise Carter... continued

She frequently can be found involved in harvesting or operating farm equipment on Benden Farms, growers of a diversified set of crops including conventional and organic prunes, walnuts, vine seeds, sunflowers, dry beans, wheat, alfalfa, and rice, protected water quality, using soil health-focused management to build resilient soils, productive crops, and a more sustainable farming system. She participates in every facet of agriculture: ownership, cultural operations, and policy,

For her foundational and enduring support of Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition as a Colusa Glenn Subwatershed Program director. For her role in advancing the Coalition's strategic planning goals by identifying the next generation of leadership. Denise Carter is recognized as the 2025 Crystal Clear Award winner.



Second Ag Expert Panel Releases Draft Report

The Second Statewide Agricultural Expert Panel released its Draft Report on whether limits on nitrogen application were necessary at this time under California's Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program. The panel concluded that in some regions there is sufficient data, analytical tools and assessment of N fertilizer use to set **long-term** crop-specific targets/limits.

The report recommends an incremental approach, where agronomically achievable targets are set initially and gradually tightened over time as more data becomes available. Progress would likely be evaluated every few years. For growers, the recommendations reinforce the importance of tracking nitrogen applied and removed through crop harvest, improving nitrogen use efficiency, and continuing adoption of best management practices that reduce nitrate losses.

While the recommendations are not regulations, they are expected to guide future updates to agricultural water quality programs, meaning nitrogen management requirements for growers could continue to evolve in the coming years. The Coalition is actively involved in the Working Group Sessions and closely monitoring how the recommendations will impact growers in the Sac-Valley. The Final Draft Report is expected to be released for public comment by March 30, 2026, for a 30 day Public comment period, during which public workshop sessions will occur with any revised Final Report presented to State Water Board following approval this summer.

3 New Management Plans for Unknown Toxicity

During the 2025 Monitoring Year (MY), 3 new Management Plans for Unknown Toxicity to *Ceriodaphnia* (water flea) were triggered.

Subwatershed	Monitoring Site
Colusa Glenn	Freshwater Creek
Shasta Tehama	Anderson Creek
Butte-Yuba-Sutter	Lower Honcut

A Management Plan is triggered when there are two or more exceedances of the same constituent at the same site within a three-year period. Management Plans can only be completed after a minimum of three years have passed since the last exceedance and with the thorough documentation of management practices.

The Coalition strongly advocated that no Management Plans be required since no pesticides sampled for during the same events appeared to cause or contribute to the observed toxicities. However, after nearly a year of fighting to avoid the Management Plans, the Regional Water Board officially denied the Coalition's request for no Management Plans in February 2026. The Coalition plans to submit official Management Plans in March, which then must be approved by the Regional Board.

The overarching message to members is that the two observed toxicities at each site are **potentially** indicative of one or more pesticides being present in the waterbody at levels that have potential for affecting aquatic life. The pollutants that caused the toxicity have not been identified, so they may or may not be associated with pesticides applied by irrigated agriculture. The Coalition will be focusing on providing general outreach and education and gathering feedback on specific management practices employed by growers and applicators applying pesticides. **Members are asked to maintain their already high levels of management practice implementation to control or reduce the risk of agricultural discharges of pesticides to surface waters.**

For members in the Management Plan areas, your Subwatersheds will be in touch with what this means for you specifically, if they haven't been already. If you have more questions or would like to speak with the Coalition about, contact your Subwatershed or Bruce Houdesheldt (916-442-8333, bruceh@norcalwater.org).

Follow Best Management Practices to reduce the risk of drift and off-site movement of agrichemicals:

- Follow label restrictions
- Shut off nozzles at the end of the row
- Attend trainings
- End of row shutoff when spraying
- Avoid surface water when spraying
- Monitor wind conditions
- Monitor rain forecasts
- Use appropriate buffer zones
- Use PCA recommendations

Nitrogen Resource: The 4 Rs of Nutrient Management

Makena Savidge and Daniel Geisseler – <http://geisseler.ucdavis.edu/Guidelines/4R.html>

The 4Rs of Nitrogen Management are a science-based framework for improving fertilizer efficiency, crop productivity, and environmental protection. The concept was developed and promoted by the International Plant Nutrition Institute and is widely used in UC Cooperative Extension programming and California irrigated agriculture. By implementing 4R nutrient stewardship practices, you optimize the nutrients you apply to maximize plant uptake and minimize field losses. Using the 4Rs allows you to keep the nutrients in the root zone and available when the crop needs them the most during the growing season.

RIGHT SOURCE: Though selecting the right nutrient source seems simple, it can actually become quite complex when considering all that must be "right" about it. Considerations include plant nutrition requirements, soil conditions, fertilizer delivery issues, environmental risks, product price, economic constraints, and how accessible the fertilizer and application tools are. The specific source of nitrogen fertilizer you choose can have differing rates of loss and impacts on air and water quality. Creating a nutrient management plan that minimizes losses begins with the source, but is highly dependent on the rate, place, and time of application.



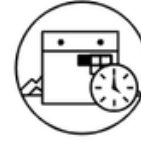
RIGHT SOURCE

Matches fertilizer type to crop needs.



RIGHT RATE

Matches amount of fertilizer type crop needs.



RIGHT TIME

Makes nutrients available when crops need them.



RIGHT PLACE

Keep nutrients where crops can use them.

Image Credit: <https://www.tfi.org/insights/nutrient-stewardship/what-are-the-4rs/>

RIGHT RATE: It is also essential to target nutrient application to the right place, or more specifically, to the zone in the soil that is most accessible to the plant. This takes a careful consideration of nutrient source properties, crop needs and development, as well as field management to create the ideal fertilized soil volume in one targeted location. Banding or increasing fertilizer in the root zone are great ways to create a more precise nutrient placement that will enhance plant nutrient uptake while minimizing losses. Considering the crop type, its development and growth patterns, as well as accompanying management practices will help inform better nutrient placement and enhance nutrient concentrations where they will be more accessible to the plant. However, there is a limit to root's ability to absorb nutrients quickly and over fertilizing will not result in faster or greater nutrient uptake. This limit varies by crop type, crop growth rate, and crop age. Thus reminding us to consider another nutrient right - timing.

RIGHT PLACE: It is also essential to target nutrient application to the right place, or more specifically, to the zone in the soil that is most accessible to the plant. This takes a careful consideration of nutrient source properties, crop needs and development, as well as field management to create the ideal fertilized soil volume in one targeted location. Banding or increasing fertilizer in the root zone are great ways to create a more precise nutrient placement that will enhance plant nutrient uptake while minimizing losses. Considering the crop type, its development and growth patterns, as well as accompanying management practices will help inform better nutrient placement and enhance nutrient concentrations where they will be more accessible to the plant. However, there is a limit to root's ability to absorb nutrients quickly and over fertilizing will not result in faster or greater nutrient uptake. This limit varies by crop

RIGHT TIME: Careful planning of the right time for nutrient application will help to optimize nutrient uptake and minimize nutrient losses. To do so, you must consider the properties of the nutrient source used, the crop type & its needs, soil structure & its ability to retain nutrients, and any climatic impacts that could accelerate losses. Some nutrient sources are inherently more susceptible to loss than others and the rate of loss may be accelerated by environmental conditions. A crop's nutrient needs are dependent on its stage of growth. It is best to apply fertilizer when the crop's needs are the highest. It is also important to consider a soil's supply capacity (i.e. its ability to retain and supply nutrients) to determine how frequently fertilizer needs to be applied to meet and maintain a crop's needs.

Regional Board Will Begin Progressive Enforcement to 2025CY Late Reporters in April

Coalition member requirements are specified in Sacramento Valley's Waste Discharge Requirements Order No. R5-2014-0030-12 (WDR). One of the most important requirements is the completion of annual reports, such as the Irrigation and Nitrogen Management Plan Worksheet and Summary Report, Farm Evaluation Plan, and Management Practice Implementation Report in areas with an active Management Plan. When a member fails to complete reporting, they become non-compliant and under the WDR the Coalition must report their names to the Regional Water Board. The non-compliant members are then subject to enforcement actions from the Regional Board.

The Regional Board performs progressive enforcement. After the Coalition submits the list of names to the Regional Board, members move along an enforcement pyramid. As members move up the pyramid, the severity of the enforcement increases. For late annual reports, the process begins with a Reminder Letter. Members who do not respond to the Reminder Letter – either by completing the report(s) or notifying the Coalition why they no longer need to report (e.g. sold the parcel, the parcel is fallow, etc.) – will move on to a Notice of Violation (NOV). For members who simply do not respond at all, the process may reach an Administrative Civil Liability (ACL) with fines of up to \$1000 per day.

The Coalition makes every attempt to help members avoid enforcement. Around the first of each year, members receive comprehensive reporting packets which outline the requirements, including reporting, for the year. Many Subwatersheds have online reporting tools which make reporting as simple as possible. In the weeks before the deadline, members receive many reminder letters/emails and even phone calls from their Subwatersheds reminding them to complete the reports. This is all so the member does not have to be reported to the Regional Board as a non-compliant late reporter.

Late reporters take staff time and resources to track down and assist during a time when the Coalition is making all efforts to keep costs down. Additionally, the fine that is cited in the NOV's can be alarming (but remember, as long as the report is completed, the fine goes away). **In the end, the easiest way to help contain costs and to avoid enforcement from the Regional Board is simply to complete reporting ON TIME and be in contact with your Subwatershed if you are experiencing unforeseen circumstances.** If you are ever a recipient of an enforcement letter, respond immediately to avoid being moved on to the next level of enforcement.

Your Subwatershed's contact information is always included in the letter. You may also contact Bruce Houdesheldt (916-442-8333, bruceh@norcalwater.org).



The Timeline

2025CY reports that were required to be submitted to the Coalition include:

- INMP Summary Report
- Farm Evaluation Plan
- Management Practice Implementation Report for areas with a Management Plan

These reports were due March 1, 2026 according to the WDR.

The Regional Water Board will begin sending Reminder Letters to 2025CY late reports in April 2026.

Members who do not respond within 15 days, will receive a Notice of Violation.

If you receive an enforcement letter, contact your Subwatershed ASAP to complete the missing report(s). The Subwatershed will notify the Regional Board that the report(s) is complete.

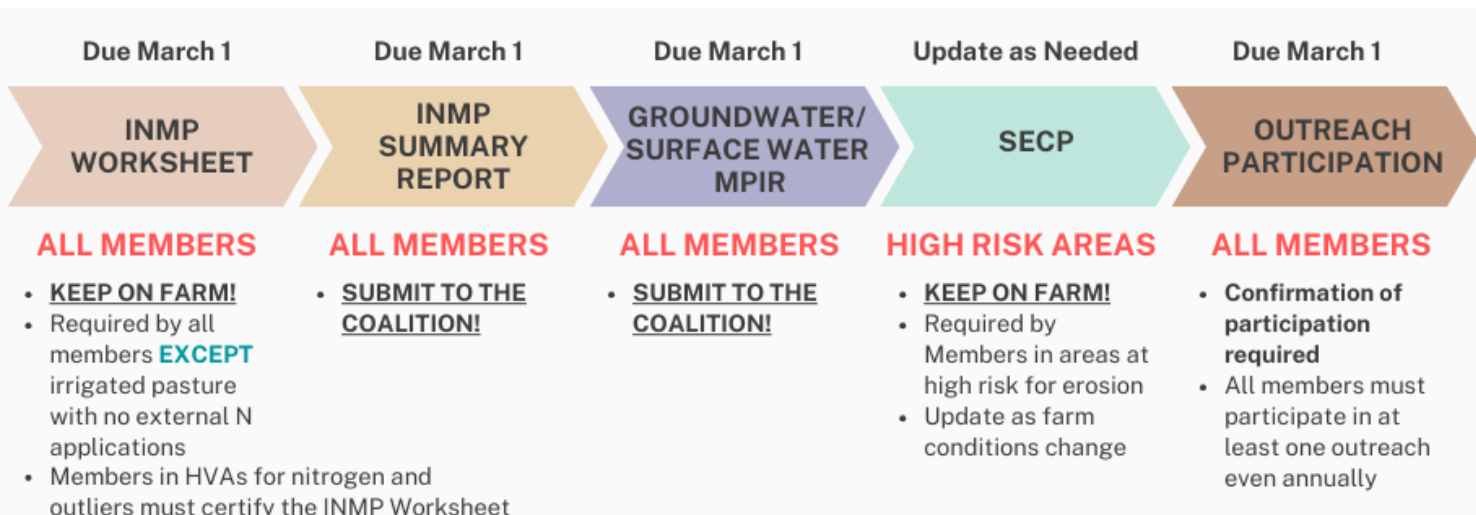
And remember to report on time next year to avoid future letters!



Coalition Member Information Hub



COMPLETE YOUR REQUIRED MEMBER REPORTS ASAP TO REMAIN IN GOOD-STANDING



The end of the reporting season is here and a majority of the deadlines to complete member reports have passed. According to the Waste Discharge Requirements, all 2025CY reports were due March 1, 2026. **If you have not already completed your member reports, please contact your Subwatershed ASAP.** Completing member reports is an important component to remain a member-in-good-standing. **Members who fail to complete their reporting will have their name reported to the Regional Board and face potential fines of up to \$1000 per day.** Avoiding the fine is simple, contact your Subwatershed and submit the required reports!

2025-2026 Outreach Presentation Available

At the end of each year, the Coalition produces a video presentation to assist members in fulfilling their annual outreach requirement as a landowner enrolled in the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program. The 2025-2026 Online Outreach Presentation, which reviews the 2025 surface water monitoring results, is now available.

Visit:

<https://www.svwqc.org/outreach-and-education/>
and scroll to [2025-2026 SVWQC Outreach Presentation](#)
to view the most recent video.

Reminder to Nursery Operators

The Regional Board recognizes that nursery operators have had trouble completing the INMP Summary Report due to confusion related to the large number of plant varieties grown. In response to the feedback on the difficulty of completing the report, Regional Board Staff has issued guidance to help nursery members complete the INMP Forms. They can be found at: <https://www.svwqc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Regional-Water-Board-INMP-Reporting-Guidance-for-Nurseries.pdf>

General Questions

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