



Our Region's Trusted Water Leader
San Diego County Water Authority

WEDNESDAY WATER TALK

by Sandra L. Kerl, General Manager



Good afternoon,
San Diego County leaders.

I'm pleased to share with you a significant success that will help farmers in our region – an important initiative by the San Diego County Water Authority to **boost our multi-billion-dollar ag industry** that not only supports our regional economy but also sustains our sense of place and our quality of life.

After many years of maintaining a temporary ag water rate program, the Water Authority's Board of Directors has approved a new and Permanent Special Agricultural Water Rate structure that **offers lower water rates to farmers in exchange for lower water supply reliability**. Unlike the current temporary program, the new program will **let new participants join** as a way to strengthen the region's farm economy. I want to thank the San Diego County Farm Bureau and our member agencies who worked closely with us on this issue.

We are working closely with our member agencies – especially those in rural North County – to launch this program in January 2021. Participating farmers and growers will receive a lower level of water service during water shortages or emergencies. That allows the Water Authority to reallocate those supplies to commercial and industrial customers who pay for full reliability benefits. In exchange, participating farmers are exempt from fixed water storage and supply reliability charges.

The Water Authority has provided lower-cost water to growers in exchange for lower reliability since October 2008, when the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California began phasing out a similar program. Since that time, the temporary Water Authority program continued with a series of extensions until the permanent program was approved.

San Diego County is unusual among major metropolitan areas in the United States because it includes **one of the nation's most valuable and productive farm sectors adjacent to one of the nation's largest cities.** The region sustains 3.3 million people and a \$245 billion economy, thanks to decades of regional investments in water supply reliability projects, including the nation's largest seawater desalination plant and the biggest conservation-and-transfer agreement in U.S. history.

There are other ways we can support our local farms, and I encourage to do so by buying local produce, shopping at farmers markets or subscribing to Community Supported Agriculture boxes. The San Diego County Farm Bureau has a great list of farms that are selling directly to the public during COVID-19 at www.sdfarmbureau.org/support-san-diego-farms/.

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