



Press Release

For Immediate Release
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Contact: Brad Sherwood
707.521.6204

Grape Growers Heed Call for Water Conservation

Santa Rosa, CA– This week grape growers from the Russian River watershed, including Alexander, Knights and Dry Creek Valleys met with the Sonoma County Water Agency (Agency) to introduce a voluntary irrigation schedule program to conserve water this summer and help better manage the Russian River water system. The proposed voluntary irrigation schedule, the first of its kind in Sonoma County, would call for growers to coordinate pumping water from the Russian River.

Current pumping schedules coincide at the same time of the day, and can dramatically reduce flows in the Russian River. Participants in the new irrigation schedule would instead work collaboratively to schedule pumping to ensure flows are maintained in the Russian River and irrigate at night. Of the water diverted from the Russian River, the agriculture community diverts nearly thirty percent.

“Grape growers in the Russian River watershed have the opportunity to make a major water saving difference this summer,” said Pam Jeane, deputy chief engineer of operations. “The irrigation schedule would allow the Agency to keep more water in Lake Mendocino instead of flushing more water down the Russian River to make up for lost flows as a result of irrigation pumping at one time in a day.”

The Agency has never known when grape growers turn on their water pumps to irrigate, it is often caught off-guard by a loss of water in the Russian River that results in reduced flows. The reduced flows can and have made the Agency drop below State mandated instream flow requirements this summer. Currently, the Agency has been releasing an additional 20 cubic-feet-per-second (cfs) from Lake Mendocino in order to create a buffer between State required instream flow requirements and irrigation diversions by grape growers. Since the mandatory conservation Order took affect on July 1, more than 900 acre-feet of water have been released down the Russian River to the Pacific Ocean in order to create that buffer. It is the goal of the Agency to eliminate the buffer so water can be stored in the reservoirs for the fall migration and spawning of endangered fish species.

“Grape growers are responding to a call from the Sonoma County Water Agency to help them conserve water this summer,” said Dennis Murphy, a grape grower in Alexander Valley. “We are currently looking for ways to help the Agency save water by voluntarily modifying our irrigation schedules. By irrigating at night and scheduling irrigation times, we can reduce impacts to the Russian River flow which ultimately saves water in Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma.”

Creating the irrigation schedule and taking actions to conserve water is just a part of the grape growers drive to become more sustainable. The grape growing industry as a whole is competing with a global market that is demanding growers to become certified by the International Standards Organization (ISO). Conserving water by implementing new irrigation techniques and standards is one method of achieving ISO certification and fully embodying the sustainability goal.

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Sonoma County Water Agency provides water supply, flood protection and sanitation services for portions of Sonoma and Marin counties. Visit us on the Web at www.sonomacountywater.org.