



## Delta Fish Friendly Farming Program Update Staff Report

---

This agenda item provides an update on implementation of the Fish Friendly Farming (FFF) program in the Delta and Conservancy staff's approach to environmental compliance.

### DESCRIPTION

The Delta FFF program seeks to implement best management practices to comprehensively manage pesticide inputs and improve water quality around Delta working lands. Currently, nearly 10,000 acres of farmland are enrolled in the Delta FFF program. In addition to working with farmers to develop Farm Plans and best management practices for water quality improvement, \$200,000 in construction funds were contracted to the California Land Stewardship Institute (CLSI) for the implementation of Water Quality Improvement Projects (WQIPs) on enrolled farms.

In accordance with the Conservancy's agreement with the State Water Resource Control Board (SWRCB), CLSI convened a meeting of the FFF Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) on July 7, 2022, to provide feedback, prioritize projects for implementation, and approve plans for the proposed projects. The Technical Advisory Committee is composed of members from the Delta Conservancy; SWRCB; representatives from the Contra Costa, Sacramento, Solano, Yolo and San Joaquin County Farm Bureaus; the Dixon Resource Conservation District; the Sacramento and San Joaquin County Water Quality Coalitions; San Joaquin County Cooperative Extension; Contra Costa, Sacramento, and Yolo County Natural Resource Conservation Service offices; the Almond Board of California; South Delta Water District; United States National Marine Fisheries Service; and the staff from the Agricultural Commissioners of Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, and Yolo counties.

In accordance with the Conservancy's agreement with SWRCB, Conservancy Staff and CLSI will prepare Notices of Exemption as required under CEQA for proposed implementation projects that qualify for CEQA exemptions. Conservancy staff and CLSI will work to obtain any necessary permits and submit the documentation to SWRCB before any project construction begins. Staff will continue to update the Board as additional projects are proposed and recommended for funding by the FFF TAC.

CLSI has worked with farmers to develop two proposed WQIPs. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has enrolled 9,200 acres of farmland on Staten Island located approximately two miles south of Walnut Grove. Rice, corn, potatoes, triticale, and irrigated pasture are grown on the island with a focus on supporting migratory waterfowl, endangered sand hill cranes, and economically viable agriculture. Due to the subsided nature of many Delta islands, groundwater must be periodically pumped off the island. Staten Island has a south pump and an east pump with an extensive system of main and field ditches. Irrigation water is brought in through a series of 48 syphons distributed around the perimeter of the island that move water from the South and North forks of the Mokelumne River. As part of the farm plan development, the instillation of a recirculation pump within the island was identified as a key

WQIP. This recirculation pump would move irrigation water from main ditches and re-apply it at the top of the series of fields to allow for a second irrigation event. The recirculation system will reduce pumping at the south and east pump sites and reduce the volume of irrigation water diverted from the Mokelumne river by approximately 2,100 acre feet per year, and reduce return flows from the operation. The south and east pump must lift water up and over 30 feet to discharge it off the island. This large lift requires a great deal of electricity. Using a recirculation pump will reduce energy use as the recirculation pump will not have to move water to as high an elevation. All the identified locations for the recirculation pump are dirt ditches on the site; no natural areas will be disturbed. Erosion control best management practices will be used as needed.

Tirupathi 3D Farm has enrolled 200 acres of farmland located on Roberts Island in the eastern Delta, approximately 10 miles southwest of Stockton. As part of the farm plan development, the instillation of improved irrigation was identified as a key WQIP. The property is currently flood irrigated and uses 917 acre feet of water per year to grow various crops. This project would partially pay for the conversion of the site to low flow sprinklers and save over 420 acre feet per year. This project will permanently reduce diversions from Middle River and reduce return flows from the operation. Installation of the system will not disturb any natural areas. Erosion control best management practices will be used as needed.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Conservancy, supported through a grant from SWRCB, has contracted CLSI to implement the FFF program in the Delta. The FFF Program works with farmers to improve Delta water quality by developing best management practices and identifying needed farm infrastructure updates. Learn more about Delta FFF on CLSI's website (<https://bit.ly/3bbLGmk>).

#### **CONTACT**

Dr. Rachel Wigginton, Senior Environmental Scientist  
Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy  
[rachel.wigginton@deltaconservancy.ca.gov](mailto:rachel.wigginton@deltaconservancy.ca.gov)  
(916) 375-4994