



USDA-CSREES 2007 National Water Quality Conference

Improving water quality through regulatory compliance on grazing lands – what is Extension's role?

In the early 1990's, California's ranching industry worked with a broad coalition of regulatory agencies, University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE), and various state and federal agencies to develop and implement the California Rangeland Water Quality Management Plan. This voluntary program, initiated in 1995, led to voluntary development of ranch water quality plans by more than 1000 ranches covering more than 2 million acres. In May 2004, the State Water Resources Control Board adopted the Nonpoint Source Implementation and Enforcement Policy, which will regulate nonpoint source pollution. The policy affects landowners and agricultural producers throughout California. This policy stipulated that runoff from agricultural lands, including grazing land, must be regulated by either a permit to discharge, a Conditional Waiver to a permit, or a prohibition. The specifics of the waiver will be determined and approved by 2007. Once approved, grazing land owners and managers will need to understand the waiver and comply with its requirements. Previously, to help ranchers inventory, assess, prioritize and monitor sediment, UCCE developed a sediment checklist in collaboration with the regulatory agency that was endorsed by agricultural associations and USDA NRCS. A similar tool, a pasture checklist, is being developed to aid landowners in assessing grazing lands to ensure compliance with the new water quality regulations. The checklist will assess individual pastures where water courses flow and impact the overall watershed. The primary educational objective for UCCE will be to maximize participation and minimize administrative demands for both the regulatory agency and the regulated communities. UCCE is reviewing its role in this regulatory process and how it will participate in the future.

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