

Press Release

Biden-Harris Administration Invests Up to \$400 Million to Address Drought, Conserve Water through Production of Water-Saving Commodities

USDA also announces record \$2.3 billion investments under the Western Water Framework; Funding builds on Administration's historic water conservation efforts, which have stabilized short-term western water supply and are investing in long-term solutions

WASHINGTON, Aug. 1, 2024 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will invest \$400 million with at least 18 irrigation districts to help farmers continue commodity production while also conserving water across the West. This funding – which will support irrigation districts and producers in using innovative water savings technologies and farming practices while producing water-saving commodities in the face of continued drought – is expected to conserve up to 50,000 acre-feet in water use across 250,000 acres of irrigated land in production, while expanding and creating new, sustainable market opportunities.

This historic funding builds on the Biden-Harris Administration's work to conserve water, increase the efficiency of water use, upgrade existing infrastructure, and overall strengthen water security in the West. With historic water conservation enabled by President Biden's Investing in America agenda, the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation announced in May 2024 it had [staved off the immediate possibility](#) of the Colorado River System's reservoirs from falling to critically low elevations that would threaten water deliveries and power production. Due to record conservation investments as well as improved hydrology, Lake Mead levels today, at elevation 1075 feet, are the highest since May 2021, when they were at 1073 feet. The Administration is now working to ensure the long-term sustainability and resilience by focusing on long-term water conservation in several basins across the west.

Agricultural producers are the backbone of rural communities across the West and many of them are struggling under prolonged drought conditions," Vilsack said. "USDA is taking an 'all hands' approach to help address this challenge, including these new partnerships with irrigation districts to support producers. We want to scale up the tools available to keep farmers farming, while also voluntarily conserving water and expanding markets for water-saving commodities."

Partnering with Irrigation Districts to Support Water Conservation, Produce Water-Saving Commodities

USDA worked to select irrigation districts based on several commodity production and water management-related criteria in order to maximize the ability to achieve program objectives, leveraging available data from the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation to ensure close alignment and partnership. USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) provided data and analysis to support the preliminary selections. Districts that have been preliminarily selected for potential inclusion in this program include:

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- Black Canyon Irrigation District, Idaho
- Brooklyn Canal Company, Utah
- Central Oregon Irrigation District, Ore.
- Central Arizona Irrigation and Drainage District, Ariz.
- Corcoran Irrigation District, Calif.
- East Columbia Basin Irrigation District, Wash.
- Elephant Butte Irrigation District, N.M.
- Glenn – Colusa Irrigation District, Calif.
- Greybull Valley Irrigation District, Wyo.
- Hidalgo & Cameron Counties Irrigation District 9, Texas
- Huntley Project Irrigation District, Mont.
- Imperial Irrigation District, Calif.
- Maricopa – Stanfield Irrigation and Drainage District, Ariz.
- Palisade Irrigation District, Colo.
- Quincy Columbia Basin Irrigation District, Wash.
- Solano Irrigation District, Calif.
- Sutter Mutual Water Company, Calif.
- Truckee-Carson Irrigation District, Nev.

The preliminary selected districts may receive up to \$15 million each in the awards and will enter into sub-agreements with the producers participating within the district. Depending on available funding, awards to additional districts may be possible.

Producers who participate will receive payments for voluntarily reducing water consumption while maintaining commodity production. The needs of producers will determine the specific strategies for water conservation, including irrigation improvements, shifts in management practices, shifts in cropping systems, and other innovative strategies. USDA will learn from the diversity of strategies used and identify additional opportunities to maintain and expand water-saving commodity production in the future.

Participating producers and irrigation districts will commit to ensuring continued commodity production in the areas where water consumption is reduced. USDA is working to finalize agreements with the preliminarily selected districts, which will include the details of each individual district's water-saving strategies, commodities to be produced, and specific budgets. Following the finalization of those awards, producers within the participating districts will work directly through their irrigation districts to participate. USDA and the preliminarily selected districts will provide more details on the agreements and opportunities for producers to directly enroll.

“Maricopa-Stanfield Irrigation and Drainage District is pleased to be working with USDA to implement practices and projects that save water and improve efficiencies at a time when the historic drought in the southwest has put so much pressure on our agricultural producers. Investing in agriculture is an investment in America,” the District said.

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“Quincy-Columbia Basin Irrigation District is excited to enter into partnership with USDA to help bring Federal dollars to local growers. Our top priority is providing efficient and dependable irrigation water to our constituents, and we look forward to working with USDA to explore new water-efficient practices in the Columbia Basin,” the District said.

“Greybull Valley Irrigation District (GVID) is extremely excited to explore water conservation efforts with the USDA Water-Saving Commodities team, this is a great opportunity for the District and their producers. GVID is always looking for ways to conserve water while supplying their producers with a steady flow for their crops, livestock, underground pipelines and pivots. The District is looking forward to discovering other conservation measures that would be very beneficial for all GVID members,” GVID said.

Historic Investments in Western Water Complement Water-Saving Commodities Program

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is working to help producers and communities conserve water, manage and prepare for the effects of climate change and build drought resilience in the West through its [Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action](#) (Western Water Framework), which was launched in 2023. The Western Water Framework describes how NRCS assistance is used to address water resource related issues in 17 states in the West. In fiscal year 2023, NRCS provided \$2.3 billion in conservation investments that help producers and communities in Western states better steward water resources, including investments that also support climate change mitigation. This total includes a boost of 9.7 percent or \$213.3 million from the Inflation Reduction Act.

The Western Water Framework includes key NRCS conservation programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Within EQIP NRCS has created a WaterSMART Initiative (WSI), to coordinate investments with the Bureau of Reclamation’s WaterSMART investments in priority areas.

For Fiscal Year 2024, NRCS selected 9 new priority areas and is continuing to offer funding in 36 prior approved areas, making \$29.7 million in EQIP funding available through the WSI across 16 states.

EQIP and CSP provide conservation planning and funding to help with implementation of conservation practices. Practices like irrigation water management improve irrigation efficiency and mitigate climate change. Meanwhile, practices like conservation crop rotation, cover crop, residue and tillage management, no-till, and nutrient management help producers build resilience to future drought. ACEP gives producers and landowners tools to protect wetlands, grasslands and agricultural lands which can be used to conserve water.

Together, these efforts by FSA and NRCS advance USDA’s efforts to create more, new, and better market opportunities, [sustainably grow agricultural productivity](#) to feed a growing

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population, and help farmers and natural resource managers [manage and prepare for the effects of climate change](#).

[Learn more about the Western Water Framework](#).

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit usda.gov.

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Talking Points

- There is an increasing demand for water in the West, but available water is in fast decline. Impacts of climate change, including the increasing frequency, intensity, and duration of drought, are already being experienced across the West and are projected to worsen.
- USDA is taking an all-hands approach to help address this challenge, which includes working directly with irrigation districts.
- We are one of the irrigation districts that has agreed to participate in this effort.
- We are working with USDA to scale up the tools available to producers in our irrigation district to voluntarily conserve water as well as create and expand markets for water-saving commodities.
- Our district is one of at least 18 irrigation districts working on this new initiative.
- This partnership will support producers in utilizing water efficient technologies while maintaining and increasing commodity production and consumption in the face of continued drought.
- We are looking forward to working with USDA and our producers in the irrigation district to adopt innovative strategies to produce water-saving commodities, expanding and creating new market opportunities.
- In total, USDA is investing up to \$400 million from the Commodity Credit Corporation in this effort that will help farmers produce commodities during drought through increased water efficiency.
- USDA selected irrigation districts based on several commodity production and water management related criteria in order to maximize the ability to achieve program objectives.
- In the coming weeks, our irrigation district will continue to work with USDA to finalize the details of the planned reductions in water consumption and water-saving commodities produced.
 - We understand that as part of the whole effort, USDA is targeting a reduction of up to 50,000 acre-feet of water across more than 250,000 acres of irrigated land in production.

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How the Partnerships Work

- The Irrigation District will work with USDA.
- The Irrigation District will in turn work with producers in their district to provide payments for voluntarily reducing water consumption while maintaining commodity production.
- The needs of producers will determine the specific strategies for water conservation, including irrigation improvements, shifts in management practices, shifts in cropping systems, and other innovative strategies.
- USDA will learn from the diversity of strategies used and identify additional opportunities to maintain and expand water-saving commodity production in the future.
- USDA and our Irrigation District will work on finalizing agreements. The agreements will include the details of each individual district's water-saving strategies, commodities to be produced, and specific budgets.
- Following the finalization of the agreement, we'll work with producers in our district to participate.