

NRCS Chief Tours On-farm Irrigation Improvements in Los Banos

Written by Australian Business

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LOS BANOS, Calif., Sept. 24, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Jason Weller toured local farmland today that is benefiting from a federal partnership between NRCS and the U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to protect the Bay-Delta Watershed. Approximately \$6 million was invested by the two agencies, from 2011 – 2013, to upgrade irrigation water delivery infrastructure and on-farm irrigation equipment to conserve water for San Luis Canal Company farmers.

"Water is the lifeblood of agriculture and the environment," said Cannon Michael, a local farmer. "Farmers have a duty to be good stewards of our resources and conservation is a key element of good stewardship. Improved water use efficiency and reduced runoff benefits farmers and the environment. Our partnership with NRCS has yielded very positive results and their programs encourage conservation on a large scale."

Weller toured Michael's new drip irrigation system, funded by NRCS, and nearby infrastructure improvements funded by Reclamation. Reclamation funded concrete-lined ditches and long crested weirs to deliver irrigation water more efficiently to San Luis Canal Company farmers. The canal company works closely with Henry Miller Reclamation District 2131 to deliver water to all its landowners via a gravity diversion system off of the San Joaquin River. NRCS, in turn, funded on-farm pipeline and concrete ditch upgrades, land leveling and installation of sub surface drip systems or comparable equipment to link up to the new delivery system. The work has resulted in 14,850 acre-feet of water saved.

"The Bay-Delta is a critical ecosystem and a natural treasure that we must protect," said Weller. "This partnership allows us to work with Reclamation to leverage our federal funds to protect billions of gallons of precious water for farmers in California's Central Valley."

The NRCS/Reclamation partnership was born out of a shared appreciation for the importance of

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the Bay-Delta Watershed and the urgency to protect its water resources. The federal agencies teamed up to identify critical conservation practices that would protect water in select geographical areas around the Bay-Delta and worked with local farmers, nonprofits and other partners to complete the projects.

In addition to work accomplished through this partnership, NRCS is funding a number of other strategic projects, through its Bay-Delta Initiative, in other areas of the Bay-Delta Watershed - encompassing two thirds of the state of California. These projects include improving habitat for waterfowl, nutrient management on dairies and irrigation improvements on orchards.

Since 1935, NRCS provides leadership in a partnership effort to help America's private landowners and managers conserve their soil, water and other natural. For more information on NRCS, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

CONTACT: Jonathan Groveman (530) 792-5692 Alan Forkey (530) 792-5653

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