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USDA Unveils Strategic Approach and New Investments for Addressing Water Supply Challenges for Producers in the West

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NEW ORLEANS, February 13, 2023 – As part of the Biden-Harris Administration’s commitment to making Western communities more resilient to the impacts of drought and climate change, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced new investments and strategies to help farmers and ranchers conserve water, address climate change and build drought resilience in the West, supported in part by funding from the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) (IRA).

The Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action is a comprehensive, multi-state strategy under USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to address key water and land management challenges across 17 Western States. This is the latest NRCS-issued Framework for Conservation Action, all of which provide direction, support and coordination to address resource concerns and threats across state boundaries and leverage new scientific tools to guide strategic program implementation on the ground. The Framework includes guidelines for identifying vulnerable agricultural landscapes and 13 strategies to help NRCS state leaders, water resource managers, and producers respond to priority challenges.

Guided by this new framework, the [WaterSMART Initiative](#) will invest \$25 million in three new priority areas and 37 existing priority areas, assisting communities and producers in the West.



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climate challenges and build resiliency for the future. Complemented by investments from the Inflation Reduction Act, USDA is utilizing this framework and all available tools to deliver assistance that the severity of the water supply challenges in the West demand.”

NRCS leveraged stakeholder feedback from a public listening session, input from the field and the latest scientific data to shape and inform the framework.

NRCS Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action

Agricultural producers steward more than two thirds of the nation’s land resources. Water flows through these lands into reservoirs that supply communities with water. In many areas of the dry West, producers are struggling to irrigate their crops due to inadequate precipitation. Water supply in these areas is impacted by drought, increasing demand, and climate change.

NRCS has identified six major water and working land management challenges resulting from threats to water supply in the West:

1. Forecasting water supply.
2. Sustaining agricultural productivity.
3. Protecting groundwater availability.
4. Protecting surface water availability.
5. Managing and restoring rangelands and forestlands.
6. Responding to disruptions from catastrophic events.

For each of these major management challenges, opportunities exist to help individuals, entities and communities better manage water and working lands, conserve natural resources and build resilience to drought and climate change. Strategies include:

1. Improve reliability of water supply forecasts.
2. Improve soil moisture and irrigation water management.
3. Improve water and nutrient management in crop fields and pastures.
4. Modernize water infrastructure.
5. Improve community water supply by completing watershed projects.
6. Increase reuse of wastewater for agriculture and conservation.
7. Prolong aquifer life.
8. Complete managed aquifer recharge projects.



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13. Increase resilience during disaster recovery.

NRCS will use this framework to set comparable goals for effective program delivery and coordinate and track progress on helping individuals, entities and communities across the West address their management, conservation and resiliency needs.

From 2020 to 2022, more than \$410 million of annual conservation assistance NRCS provided to producers helped address drought in the West. Now, with the new Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action in place, NRCS can further leverage the tools and coordination to build upon these investments and expand support by advancing innovative targeting at the state, local and regional levels, while also utilizing additional funds from the Inflation Reduction Act that advance both climate mitigation and Western water priorities.

WaterSMART Initiative

The \$25 million investment in three new priority areas and [37 existing priority areas](#) in the West is the result of a collaboration with NRCS and the Department of Interior's (DOI) WaterSMART Initiative to help farmers and ranchers conserve water and build drought resilience in their communities. These investments complement projects led by irrigation districts, water suppliers and other organizations receiving WaterSMART program funds from the Department of Interior's Bureau of Reclamation. NRCS works with the Bureau of Reclamation to coordinate investments in the same community to accelerate water conservation and drought resilience and make a bigger impact where it is most needed.

The three new priority areas include:

- **California:** Madera Irrigation District Area (Funding amount: \$1.5 million)
- **Hawaii:** Kohala Watershed Partnership Area (Funding amount: \$345,000)
- **Washington:** Quincy Columbia Basin Irrigation District West Canal Area (Funding amount: \$1.8 million)

Today's WaterSMART announcements compliment ongoing efforts across the Biden-Harris Administration to increase water conservation and address the historic drought conditions in the West. This week, the Department of Interior Bureau of Reclamation also announced \$728 million in new investments for water conservation measures in the West.

Inflation Reduction Act and Climate-Smart Practices

Assistance delivered through the [Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action](#) and the [WaterSMART Initiative](#) also help build resilience to climate-change impacts such as



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The Inflation Reduction Act is supporting investments in these and other mitigation activities in concert with NRCS's ongoing work to help producers and communities improve their operations and protect our natural resources in the face of global challenges. NRCS also [announced today](#) \$850 million in fiscal year 2023 funding opportunities for producers in Western states and across the nation who want to participate in NRCS conservation programs and adopt climate-smart practices. This is part of a \$19.5 billion investment through the Inflation Reduction Act for climate smart agriculture.

More Information

Farmers, ranchers, irrigation districts, groundwater management entities, municipalities, tribes and others across the West are working together to secure clean and available water supplies, healthy soils, resilient landscapes and thriving agricultural communities, now and in the future. NRCS is working to assist them and accelerate voluntary conservation of water and working lands resources.

Visit the NRCS website for more information on the WaterSMART Initiative and to read the Western Water and Working Lands Framework for Conservation Action.

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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January 8, 2025


USDA is providing a total of \$14.4 million in grants and technical assistance through two separately funded projects.


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