

Imperial Valley Press
Farm Page
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I.V. Farmers Have it Good with TMDL Regulations

It is widely agreed that people, in general, tend to turn their heads to unpleasant choices or deadlines. Farmers are no different. Recently, I read an article in the Modesto Bee regarding new water quality regulation farmers are facing in the Central Valley and a thought came to my mind; do Imperial County farmers realize how good they have it with our Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program?

As reported in the Modesto Bee, if any storm runoff or irrigation water leaves a field, then the farmer who owns that field needs a state discharge permit. That permit essentially certifies that the farmer knows what is in the runoff. Farmers had until December 31, 2006 to obtain their permits.

These permits require monitoring and testing on a large scale. Setting up monitoring sites can cost approximately \$30,000 and conducting tests can be hugely expensive too. The report specifically noted that small farmers, like the majority living in the Northern San Joaquin Valley, can't afford such costs. If ever implemented in Imperial County, I'm sure the burden to our local farmers would be felt the just the same.

For this reason, every major farming organization in the Central Valley is urging those who discharge to join a coalition. Based on entire watersheds, these coalitions will develop individual monitoring plans, and if needed, do testing on collector waterways such as rivers and ditches during irrigation and storm seasons.

Does this sound familiar? It should, this is another example of TMDLs being placed on farmers similar to the TMDL regulations our own Imperial County farmers face every day.

In the Central Valley, the East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition was formed to assist growers in Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Tuolumne and Mariposa counties through this process. To join, farmers pay \$50 plus \$1.50 per acre per year. The coalition already has started testing and, surprisingly, has found that farming is responsible for far fewer waterborne pollutants than expected.

Unlike the Central Valley's coalition, the Imperial County Farm Bureau Voluntary TMDL Compliance Program costs nothing for a farmer to enroll and there is no monitoring on individual fields. All that is required of our participants is that they discharge the cleanest, clearest possible water into their drains using Best Management Practices (BMPs) suggested by the program or any other that they

have determined to work best on their fields. After doing this, each participant of the program is required to report their activities annually through their individual farm plans.

Farmers, remember, as long as water samples from the various watersheds throughout the valley continue to show we are making improvements on our water quality, the Regional Water Quality Control Board has agreed that they will not require any further regulations. However, if our farmers become complacent and lacks with their BMPs, chances are, our silt and sediment load numbers may increase, sending red flag warnings to state officials.

As is often the case, California farmers are used as the test subject in water quality issues. No other state requires runoff permits or such extensive testing. Regardless of how unfair this may seem to be, these regulations are real and fines imposed by the state tend to be extremely costly. For this reason alone, it is crucial that the farmers of Imperial County continue their positive work in reducing the silt and sediment loads leaving their fields.

If you have any questions regarding TMDLs or any other issue facing our agriculture industry, contact me at the Imperial County Farm Bureau office at 352-3831 or check out our website at www.ivtmdl.com.

By Linsey Dale