

## VCAILG monitoring reveals good news and bad

By Dale Zurawski

The results are in: We've got some water quality problems. The results of monitoring conducted by the Ventura County Agricultural Irrigated Lands Group (VCAILG) during the first five years of the Conditional Waiver regulatory program show significant levels of nitrogen and pesticides in irrigation and storm water runoff from some of Ventura County's farmland.

Not all areas are having problems. About half of the sites being monitored look good, but the other half need to show improvement if we are to avoid more intensive regulatory pressure from the state and federal governments.

As many Farm Bureau members are aware, the monitoring program is being conducted in order to comply with the "Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges from Irrigated Lands within the Los Angeles Region," which was adopted in November 2005 by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board. The purpose of the regulations described by the Conditional Waiver is to assess the effects of and control discharges from irrigated agricultural lands in Los Angeles and Ventura counties, including irrigation return flows, flows from tile drains, and storm water runoff.

The Conditional Waiver allows individual landowners and growers to comply with its provisions by working collectively as a Discharger Group. Various agricultural organizations, water districts and individuals joined together in March 2006 to form VCAILG, which is intended to act as such a discharger group for those agricultural landowners and growers who wish to participate.

The Regional Board approved a renewal of the Conditional Waiver in October 2010. Like the first waiver, this one will be in effect for five years. As the program moves into this new phase, regulators have made it clear that they expect Ventura County growers to modify their management practices to reduce the contamination revealed through the monitoring program during its first five years.

On the positive side of the equation,

many areas of the county are already in compliance. Monitoring from sites along the Ventura River, the upper Santa Clara River, and the upper Calleguas Creek watershed shows that contaminants do not exceed the limits of the law. That's good news.

On the negative side, VCAILG monitoring sites in the Calleguas Creek watershed south of Highway 101 are seeing nitrogen levels far above what is healthy for humans or fish. The lower Santa Clara River and the Oxnard Coastal monitoring sites are also prone to exceedances of legal standards for nitrogen. All of these areas frequently show high pesticide levels. Consistently, the runoff from irrigation has higher concentrations of pollutants than storm water runoff.

In the first five years of the Conditional Waiver program, VCAILG focused on getting the program up and running. After establishing the group, we and our consultants wrote a foot-high pile of reports that were required by the regulation, and we set up a monitoring network. We began analyzing the data to determine where there were problems and where there were not. We notified growers about problems in their drainages. We surveyed farmers on their farming methods. We've visited farms and ranches and nurseries to document changes that have been made in farming practices to reduce pollutants. And most important, we convinced the Regional Board that we had a good program that was improving water quality while minimizing farmers' costs.

The next five years of the Conditional Waiver program will be as busy as the first five years. In addition to continued monitoring and reporting, the new waiver requires at least one representative from every farming operation to complete eight hours of educational classes focusing on water quality. These classes will be organized around two types of sessions.

In the first four-hour general educational session, you'll learn about the monitoring results for not only your area but for all of Ventura County. Our presenters will talk about farming practices that improve the quality of the runoff from fields, and provide information about financial assistance available to growers for making changes. These sessions will be in June and July, and will be held in different parts of the county for your convenience.

The second four-hour session will be in-the-field farm tours. These site visits will demonstrate what some progressive farmers have done to improve crop performance and reduce pollutants in their runoff. Field tours will be planned for August through November.

The schedule of four-hour general educational classes

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### Save the Date!

#### Farm Bureau Annual Meeting

Thursday, May 19 • 8:30-11 a.m.

Martin V. & Martha K. Smith Pavilion

Museum of Ventura County

100 E. Main St., Ventura

### What's Inside?

- Regional Board recommends record fine against ranch owner
- Mulches benefit Ventura County agriculture
- Member Benefits

# Regional Board recommends record fine against ranch owner

A hearing panel convened by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (LARWQCB) has recommended that a Ventura County ranch owner be fined \$193,850 for failing to comply with state agricultural water-quality regulations.

If upheld by the full board, the penalty would be the largest such fine imposed on a property owner in the two-county region since the board began regulating agricultural discharges nearly six years ago.

The panel recommended on March 17 that the owners of Balcom Ranch – a 108-acre citrus and row-crop operation off South Mountain Road east of Santa Paula – be fined for violating the Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Discharges from Agricultural Irrigated Lands, more commonly referred to as the Conditional Waiver. The LARWQCB adopted the waiver in 2005 to regulate storm water and irrigation runoff

from farming operations in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties.

Similar waivers have been adopted in other regions of California, including San Diego-Riverside, the Central Coast and the Central Valley.

The waiver requires water-quality monitoring in streams and rivers that receive runoff from irrigated farmland. Results of the monitoring must be reported to the Regional Board, and if contaminants such as pesticides and fertilizer residue are found at levels that exceed state standards, property owners must develop water quality management plans and modify their practices to reduce the contamination.

Property owners may comply with the waiver as individuals, or as members of a discharger group authorized by the Regional Board. Most of Ventura County's agricultural landowners have chosen to comply as mem-

bers of the Ventura County Agricultural Irrigated Lands Group (VCAILG), which enrolls about 94 percent of the county's irrigated farmland.

At the time of the board hearing, Balcom Ranch was not enrolled in VCAILG, and Regional Board staff contend the owners had failed to submit the paperwork and information required for individual compliance despite repeated notification over the past four years. The Regional Board filed an Administrative Civil Liability Complaint against Balcom Ranch in January 2010, notifying the owners that they were violating state law and ordering them to come into compliance by joining VCAILG or filing their own discharge reports. As they acknowledged during the March 17 panel hearing, which lasted nearly four hours, the owners did neither.

The panel, comprising three members of the LARWQCB, voted unanimously to recommend the full penalty sought by staff. The recommended fine includes \$35,700 for the owners' failure to comply with the waiver after receiving the original notice of violation, and an additional \$144,800 for continuing failure to comply after the civil liability complaint was issued. Balcom Ranch submitted a VCAILG enrolment form shortly after the hearing, after being warned that the fine would continue to grow by \$400 a day until the property owners submitted notice of their intent to join VCAILG or to comply with the waiver in some other manner.

The panel's penalty recommendation will be forwarded to the full LARWQCB, which has the authority to uphold, modify or reject it. That ruling is then subject to appeal to the State Water Resources Control Board.

The LARWQCB voted on Oct. 7, 2010, to renew the Conditional Waiver for an additional five years. All VCAILG members have been sent enrollment renewal forms, which must be completed and returned in order for them to remain members of the group and thereby avoid penalties similar to those levied against Balcom Ranch. VCAILG filed its compliance documents – including the list of re-enrolled members – with the Regional Board on April 7. Those members who have not filled out and returned their paperwork are encouraged to do so immediately, so they can be added to that list, an updated version of which will be provided to the LARWQCB.

For more information about the enrollment process, contact Farm Bureau at (805) 289-0155.

## Mulches benefit Ventura County agriculture

By Jim Downer

In 1989, state law mandated diversion of recyclable wastes from landfills, targeting 50 percent diversion by 2000. Green waste such as yard clippings was identified as one of the more easily divertible portions of the waste stream, and successful curbside collection programs were initiated all over California.

The availability of huge quantities of green waste from nearby urban population centers such as Los Angeles has led to several research projects in Ventura County. Some of the earliest mulch projects initiated by Farm Advisors Ben Faber, Oleg Daugovish and me assured growers that mulches applied to the soil surface do not deprive underlying soils of nitrogen. Even very fresh green waste stays on the soil surface and decays, eventually adding nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium to underlying soils. Consequently, additional fertilizer use may be reduced by the second or third years of mulch application. (Note that generally perennial but not annual crops benefit from green waste application because of the amount of time required for organic matter mineralization.)

Another important finding is that applied mulches significantly reduce evaporation of water from the soil. Therefore, growers should expect to irrigate roughly half as frequently on mulched lands compared to unmulched crops. If mulched trees are irrigated as if they had no mulch, soils will saturate, creating prime conditions for root rot and negating any disease control effects the mulch would normally provide. Paying careful attention to soil moisture and the irrigation demand of trees is sound orchard management that becomes even more important when using mulch.

Green waste application also helps fight avocado root rot caused by *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. In newly planted avocado orchards, a thick mulch layer stimulates tree root formation and retards plant pathogen development, resulting in about the same level of control as a resistant rootstock or fungicide application.

Another pest management benefit of mulches is suppression of weed germination in new orchards, which minimizes herbicide application. Apply green waste at an effective depth of at least 3 inches, covering as much of the exposed soil surface as possible. Mulches should be coarse – 1- to 2-inch particle size or greater. Avoid surface application of fine mulches (composts), which actually support the growth of weed seeds that blow in on top of them.

Growers also have wondered if pests or pathogens could be spread in the mulches they receive. With industry-threatening pests such as the Asian citrus psyllid, these concerns are especially valid. In an extensive study, we evaluated survival of insects, nematodes, fungal pathogens, and weed seeds, tubers, and rhizomes in fresh and partially-

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## VCAILG monitoring reveals good news and bad *(from front page)*

follows. Please begin making plans now to decide which session you or your designate will attend, and call Farm Bureau at (805) 289-0155 to register. The courses are free, but your attendance must be verified in order for you to receive credit.

If you are a VCAILG member, then you are part of one of the most successful agricultural water-quality programs in the state. The renewal of our Conditional Waiver without significant changes or imposition of additional regulatory requirements shows the Regional Board believes we can make changes to improve water quality in our local rivers and streams. And there is more good news. The same practices that improve runoff also produce higher yields at a reduced cost. Water, nutrients, and soil leaving your property are costly to both your farming operation and the environment.

We look forward to seeing you at the upcoming educational classes. If there is anything you would like to see addressed in the classes or you have any questions, contact me at (805) 289-0155 or [dale@farmbureauvc.com](mailto:dale@farmbureauvc.com). You also can go to the Farm Bureau website to learn more: [www.farmbureauvc.com/water\\_quality.html](http://www.farmbureauvc.com/water_quality.html).

— Dale Zurawski is water quality program manager for Farm Bureau of Ventura County.

## VCAILG General Educational Classes

*(Note: attendance at one of these sessions will satisfy half your eight-hour education requirement under the new Conditional Waiver.)*

### Monday, June 20, 2011

8 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Santa Paula Community Center  
530 W. Main St.  
Santa Paula, CA 93060

### Wednesday, June 22, 2011

8 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Courtyard by Marriott  
600 E. Esplanade Drive  
Oxnard, CA 93036

### Monday, July 25, 2011

8 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Santa Paula Community Center  
530 W. Main Street  
Santa Paula, CA 93060

### Tuesday, June 21, 2011

1 p.m. - 5 p.m.  
Ventura Beach Marriott  
2055 Harbor Blvd.  
Ventura, CA 93001

### Thursday, June 23, 2011

8 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Camarillo Community Center  
1605 E. Burnley St.  
Camarillo, CA 93010

### Tuesday, July 26, 2011

8 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Pierpont Inn  
550 Sanjon Road  
Ventura, CA 93001

### Wednesday, July 27, 2011

8 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Courtyard by Marriott  
600 E. Esplanade Drive  
Oxnard, CA 93036

### Thursday, July 28, 2011

1 p.m. - 5 p.m.  
Freedom Center  
515 Eubanks Drive  
Camarillo, CA 93010

February 15, 2011

VENTURA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL  
IRRIGATED LANDS GROUP (VCAILG)

## 2010 Annual Monitoring Report

### DRAFT

submitted to:

LOS ANGELES REGIONAL WATER QUALITY  
CONTROL BOARD

prepared by:

LARRY WALKER ASSOCIATES

On behalf of the

VENTURA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL  
IRRIGATED LANDS GROUP (VCAILG)



## NOTARY SERVICE

Free to Members\*  
Call Kathy at 289-0155

\*Exception: Home  
loan documents



## Member Benefits

### TICKETS & DISCOUNTS

Farm Bureau members qualify for discounts on admission to many of Southern California's most popular theme parks and other attractions. To take advantage of any of these special offers, drop by the Farm Bureau office at 5156 McGrath St. in Ventura. You can also place an order and pay by phone, and have the tickets mailed to you. For more information, contact Cissy Perez-Haas at (805) 289-0155. Have your membership number handy. We accept Visa and MasterCard.

#### Aquarium of the Pacific — Adult (Age 12+):

\$18.95 (save \$6); Child (age 3-11): \$10.95 (save \$2).  
Valid through 12/31/11.

#### California Adventure and Disneyland one-day

**Park Hopper** — Adult (age 10+): \$96 (save \$5); Child (age 3-9): \$88 (save \$3). Valid through 12/31/11.

**Cinemark Theatres** — Platinum ticket, valid any show time at all Cinemark & Century locations: \$8 (savings \$3.50). Additional premiums may be applied for specially priced films and/or events priced higher than normal box office. No expiration.

**Knott's Berry Farm** — Adult (12 yrs.+): \$31.95 (save \$25.04); Junior/Senior (age 3-11 yrs.) (62 yrs.+): \$22.95 (save \$2.04). Valid through 12/31/11.

**Legoland** — General use ticket: \$55.95 (save \$13 adult, \$3 child) + 2nd day FREE. Resort Hopper General: \$65.95 (save \$23 adult, \$13 child). Valid through 12/31/11. Includes two visits to Legoland, including new Water Park when open, and two visits to Sea Life Aquarium.

**Magic Mountain** — General use ticket: Adult (48"+ tall): \$27.95, (save \$32.04); Child (under 48" tall): \$18.95 (save \$16.04). Valid through 12/31/11.

**Regal Cinemas** — Unrestricted tickets \$8.25 (regularly \$9.50 Sun.-Thurs, \$10 Fri.-Sat). Good at Edwards, Regal, Signature and United Artists Theaters. No expiration.

**San Diego Sea World** — \$49.95 (Save \$20 per adult; Save \$10 per child) Adult /Child Ticket (3 yrs.+). Valid through 12/31/11.

**San Diego Safari Park** — (Formerly Wild Animal Park) Adult-African Tram Safari: \$33.95 (save \$6.05) (12 yrs.+); Child-African Tram Safari: \$26.95 (save \$3.05) (3-11 yrs.). Africa Tram Safari includes admission, unlimited use of the Journey into Africa Tour, Conservation Carousel and all shows/exhibits. Valid through 01/31/12.

**San Diego Zoo** — Adult (age 12+): \$33.95 (save \$6.05). Child (age 3-11): \$26.95 (save \$3.05). Valid through 01/31/12.

**See's Candy** gift certificate — One-pound box \$13.45 (Save \$2.65). No expiration.

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We represent the broad and dynamic interests of the agricultural industry through our diverse membership. We serve members by delivering services, promoting policies, developing coalitions, and fostering community action that will ensure the long-term success of agriculture in Ventura County.

## FARM BUREAU OF VENTURA COUNTY

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Ventura, CA 93006

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## Mulches benefit Ventura County agriculture *(continued from page 2)*

composted yard-waste piles. We found that most propagules survived only a few days, and that simply stockpiling the yard waste for two weeks controlled almost all pests.

Little mallow (*Malva parviflora*) and California burclover (*Medicago polymorpha*) seeds as well as sclerotia from the plant pathogen *Sclerotinia minor*, however, survived 56 days of stockpiling and pile temperatures of 158 degrees F. While it is very unlikely for Asian citrus psyllid to be moved in ground yard wastes, it was not a pest we could study then or even now. Still, it is important for growers to question the origin of their mulch and their suppliers' methods to reduce pest survival (i.e. turning piles to bring persistent organisms from the pile surface to the interior and stockpiling for at least two weeks).

Mulches can supply nutrients, reduce water use, and control soil-borne pathogens and weeds. While plant pathogens and some weeds may be controlled in the short term, the effects of mulch on other plant diseases as well as on nutrient availability may take years to develop. Although mulch depth must also be maintained to achieve desired results, a mulched orchard in the long term will require fewer inputs of pesticides and fertilizers to produce high yields of quality fruit.

— Jim Downer is landscape horticulture and plant pathology advisor with the University of California Cooperative Extension office in Ventura.

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