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## **NEW REPORT ILLUSTRATES STRIDES IN AGRICULTURAL WATER CONSERVATION AND EFFICIENCY**

### ***Innovative Farmers and Water Managers Show the Way to Sustainable Water Use***

**March 3, 2010 – Oakland, Calif.** –*Madera County almond grower Tom Rogers has reduced water use by up to 20% in some fields with careful monitoring and irrigation scheduling.* With sustainable water policies and practices, innovative growers like Rogers and irrigation districts are already moving California toward more equitable and efficient water management and use. A new report and video from the Pacific Institute, [California Farm Water Success Stories](#), uses seven case studies to showcase agricultural water use innovations and demonstrate how these alternatives to traditional approaches can help California meet its water management challenges now and into the future.

“Mounting evidence of the effectiveness of farm water conservation and efficiency strategies is good news for policymakers and water managers,” said Dr. Juliet Christian-Smith, senior research associate at the Pacific Institute and lead author of the report. “Our study demonstrates that long-term sustainable use of water doesn’t require drastic advances in technology or heroic or extraordinary actions. It requires a commitment to sustainability and efficiency and the will to expand positive trends that are already underway.”

The cases in the Pacific Institute report and accompanying video demonstrate diverse strategies that can reduce pressures on scarce water resources, from planning and management practices, technological improvements, and use of recycled water, to quantitative targets and financial incentives. The results are efficient water use or enhanced water quality, increased crop yields or quality, and multiple benefits for other water users, such as providing increased flood protection, drought-resilience, or habitat for wildlife.

“Official state water policies now often lag behind—rather than define—the state-of-the-art,” said Dr. Peter Gleick, president of the Pacific Institute. “But when you see what farmers and progressive water agencies are already accomplishing on-the-ground, you immediately see how great the water-savings potential is if we promote and support these strategies.”

The *California Farm Water Success Stories* report and eight-minute video can be downloaded from the Pacific Institute website at [http://www.pacinst.org/reports/success\\_stories/index.htm](http://www.pacinst.org/reports/success_stories/index.htm). The video features five California growers and water managers: Karen Ross, the past president of the California Association of Winegrape Growers; Craig McNamara of Sierra Orchards; Dale Huss of Sea Mist Farms; almond grower Tom Rogers; and Panoche District Water Master Marcos Hedrick.

On the Rogers farm, they use a combination of careful soil-moisture monitoring and weather information from in-field monitoring stations to help them decide when and how much to irrigate. Tom Rogers said of the technological irrigation practice, “In order to know what’s going on, you have to monitor... it’s just absolutely imperative that you know where your water is, and if you’re actually using it or flushing it through the system.”

(more)

Dale Huss, general manager of Sea Mist Farms for over two decades, is an advocate of recycled water for agriculture, saying “We are proud of the fact that we are the biggest user of recycled water in the world... Our water, from a food safety standpoint ...is one of the safest water sources in the world...It is actually better, from an agronomic standpoint, than what the well water was.”

Karen Ross describes the Sustainable Winegrowing Program that created a self-assessment program to provide the industry with data to communicate their progress to customers and regulators and a mechanism through which their farmers can identify opportunities to increase efficiencies, manage risks, improve product quality, and cut costs.

The report finds several cross-cutting themes, including:

- **Managing for multiple benefits.** Growers are working with the Department of Fish and Game to manage some of California’s last remaining seasonal wetlands—the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area, a critical habitat for migrating birds—while still maintaining crop production.
- **Accurately measuring and monitoring water use.** The value of good information is demonstrated by the Coachella Valley Water District’s agricultural water-efficiency initiative, known as the Extraordinary Water Conservation Program, which documented savings totalling more than 75,500 acre-feet of water over six years.
- **Capturing the untapped potential of existing technologies.** In recent years, California farmers have made progress converting appropriate cropland to water-efficient drip-irrigation systems. Nevertheless, 60% of California’s irrigated acreage is still flood irrigated. In addition, the vast majority of farmers still do not receive irrigation water on-demand, limiting their ability to flexibly manage their water resources.
- **Setting targets and providing economic incentives to accelerate progress.** Several of the case studies show how quantitative targets and economic incentives can both be effective tools to accelerate water management improvements.

“These success stories are just a few examples of the innovations already occurring throughout California agriculture, with committed individuals and groups finding better ways to manage our state’s scarce freshwater resources,” said Gleick. “It is important to incorporate the lessons drawn from these case studies in future water policy and planning in order to accelerate the adoption of sustainable water management principles and practices.”

Based in Oakland, California, the Pacific Institute is a nonpartisan research institute that works to create a healthier planet and sustainable communities. Through interdisciplinary research and partnering with stakeholders, the Institute produces solutions that advance environmental protection, economic development, and social equity – in California, nationally, and internationally.

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