

MWD Urges Growers to Cut Costs and Water Use with Water Savings Incentive Program

By Gary Tilkian

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The Metropolitan Water District (MWD) of Southern California wants to help avocado growers save water and money, without seeing their yields drop. Through Metropolitan's Water Savings Incentive Program (WSIP), avocado growers in the agency's service area can receive cash incentives for improving their water-use efficiency. Growers are paid based on the amount of water they save by installing more efficient equipment or changing agricultural processes to reduce water use.

Being more water efficient should not mean growers have to settle for diminished yields, stressed California Avocado Commission (CAC) President Tom Bellamore at the May 17 Water Savings Incentive Program for Avocado Growers seminar.

"We see big water-saving potential among Southern California's agricultural and commercial water users. That savings can come from efficiency, not through decreased production," agreed Brandon Goshi, water policy and strategy manager for Metropolitan.

So far that sentiment has rung true for one avocado grower in north San Diego County. In January the grower started modifying irrigation schedules based on soil moisture data. According to CAC Research Program Director Tim Spann, initial data indicates the grower has reduced water use, but not reduced yields.

Metropolitan has been working closely with CAC to streamline the WSIP process by certifying relevant technologies that reduce water use, such as soil moisture sensors. CAC also is working with Metropolitan to provide growers with guidance concerning complete soil moisture sensor systems — including sensors, data logging, transmission equipment and computer software — that growers can consider for installation.

In general, WSIP incentives are available to agricultural, commercial and industrial customers for the installation of high-efficiency equipment, process improvements, agricultural and landscape water efficiency improvements and contracted water management services. The amount customers are paid depends on how much water they save:

- The maximum incentive is \$0.60/1,000 gallons of water saved per year over a project's life, up to 10 years. Projects are monitored for 12 months after they are operational to verify the anticipated savings. If projects save more than expected, growers can receive an additional incentive of up to 10 percent of the estimated savings.
- Incentives are limited to 50 percent of the projects' eligible costs, not including the 10 percent additional incentive. Eligible costs may include audits, design, engineering, construction, equipment and materials, shipping, third-party labor and contract water manage-

ment services.

- Incentives are usually provided in two payments. An initial payment of 20 to 50 percent of the total estimated incentive is usually made once the project is operational and the balance is paid when the savings are verified after the monitoring period.

“We want to work with avocado growers across our service area to cut water use without hurting their bottom line,” said Gary Tilkian, a resource specialist with Metropolitan’s Water Efficiency Team and the current WSIP manager. “Saving water saves them money, plus we provide these incentives.”

Metropolitan Water District is a cooperative of 26 member cities and water agencies, serving more than 19 million people in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego and Ventura counties. The district imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies and helps its member agencies develop water recycling, storage and conservation programs to provide additional supplies to reduce regional demands.

In addition to WSIP, Metropolitan also offers several other programs aimed at promoting water use efficiency.

- **Landscape Irrigation Surveys:** Metropolitan will provide, at no cost, a certified landscape irrigation auditor who will survey qualifying irrigated landscapes (one acre minimum) and provide written recommendations to the customer. The free reviews include checking irrigation system pressure; evaluating irrigation controllers, valves and scheduling; noting general site conditions; and providing a written report documenting findings and general recommendations. The survey is a good first step for customers seeking to identify potential upgrades to more water-efficient equipment.

- **SoCal Water\$mart Rebate Program:** The Water\$mart program offers cash rebates for a wide variety of water-saving technologies, including outdoor irrigation equipment. Rebates are offered for

a variety of devices, including “smart,” weather-based irrigation controllers, central computer-controlled irrigation systems, and installation of soil moisture sensors that connect to new or existing irrigation controllers. Controller-based rebates are currently \$35/station, up to the actual device costs.

More information about Metropolitan’s water savings incentive programs is available at bewaterwise.com. Applications for the WSIP program are available at www.bewaterwise.com/water-savings-incentive-program.html. 🥑

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