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Courtesy of Organic Valley

Valley Ford, Calif., dairyman Jarrid Bordessa and family sells milk to the Organic Valley dairy cooperative, which is giving special premiums to producers suffering from the drought.

## Co-op helps dairies impacted by drought

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

VALLEY FORD, Calif. — For dairyman Jarrid Bordessa, the four-year drought in California has had a big impact.

The dairy's grass production is considerably lower because of the lack of water, so Bordessa has had to purchase feed, which can get expensive, he said. He's also had to move cattle around more and truck in water.

Fortunately for him, he's one of about 30 dairy operators in California who, along with several in Oregon and Texas, are getting a boost from their dairy cooperative.

In a pilot project, the Wisconsin-based Organic Valley is paying drought-affected growers as much as \$2 extra per hundredweight in areas of exceptional drought, above and beyond the price they receive for milk.

"It's really helping us," Bordessa said. "It's giving us a cash bonus basically every month that's classified as a drought, and I wouldn't say it's covering 100 percent of the cost of the drought, but it's definitely helping."

"Probably at the level we're at right now, it's covering about 50 percent" of added costs, he said.

The drought relief program, which will continue through the end of the year, comes

from funds set aside by the co-op for grower support. The higher premiums per hundredweight aren't being passed on to the consumer, Organic Valley spokeswoman Sasha Bernstein said.

"The idea behind what Organic Valley is doing is to help provide some relief for growers who are struggling with drought," Bernstein said. "There are all kinds of costs that struggling farmers are facing. Because it's a co-op, all the different farmers across the country are supposed to be on an equal playing field."

The 27-year-old Organic Valley represents nearly 1,800 certified organic farmers in 36 states who provide milk for dairy products as well as soy, eggs and produce. Milk is produced, bottled and distributed in the region where it is farmed.

Earlier this year, the cooperative increased prices paid to growers and issued a "thirteenth check," or additional profit-sharing bonus given to growers in successful years, according to a news release.

For Bordessa and his family, who operate a couple of dairies near Bodega Bay on the Northern California coast, the co-op's drought relief program is a helpful supplement to relief programs administered by the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service, he said.

# California water board may scrap statewide grazing regs

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — A California cattlemen's group's effort to stave off statewide restrictions on grazing near streams may be paying off.

After numerous meetings with ranchers the State Water Resources Control Board will consider discontinuing its efforts to craft grazing regulations at its Sept. 16 meeting.

Cattle producers filled the rooms at several workshops earlier this year and hosted ranch tours for board members and their employees to persuade them that ranchers' current practices are environmentally sound.

Water officials also attended the Rustici Rangeland Science Symposium in Davis earlier this year, at which speakers sought to correct what they believe are misconceptions about the science regarding grazing and water quality, the California Cattlemen's Association noted in a newsletter.

"We're certainly pleased they are considering eliminating the process of developing a statewide grazing regulatory program," said Kirk Wilbur, the CCA's director of government relations. "That said, all the concerns we've brought up in the past year about the veracity and science behind their ... list of impaired water bodies and their overlooking (producers') proactive measures to improve water quality are concerns we still have at the state and regional levels."

Water board spokesman Tim Moran said



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

From left, Vicky Whitney, the State Water Quality Control Board's deputy director for water quality, makes a presentation as Esther Tracy of the water board and Matt St. John of the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board listen during a meeting in Redding, Calif., on proposed grazing regulations earlier this year.

the testimony that officials received at stakeholder meetings prompted them to recommend discontinuing the statewide effort.

"Feedback from those meetings indicated that regional differences in rangeland type, grazing practices and water quality factors supported a regional approach to grazing rather than a statewide approach," Moran said in an email.

The resolution being considered by board members at their 9 a.m. meeting would encourage the state's regional water quality boards to consider imposing best

management practices, Moran noted.

"These strategies would consider regional differences in hydrology, topography, climate and land use, and include watershed-wide or regional monitoring programs to assess the effectiveness of the BMPs implemented," he said.

The state water board began working on the Grazing Regulatory Action Project, or GRAP, last year, asserting that it would enhance the environmental benefits from grazing while addressing its impacts on water quality.

## Trinity water release upheld to aid salmon

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

A federal judge has denied San Joaquin Valley water districts' request to halt the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's releases of as much as 88,000 acre-feet of water from the Trinity Reservoir in Northern California to aid fish.

The Westlands Water District and the San Luis and Delta-Mendota Water Authority asked for the injunction after the bureau began releasing water into the Trinity River to provide cooler and higher water for chinook salmon returning to the Lower Klamath River.

U.S. Eastern District Judge Lawrence J. O'Neill denied the motion on Aug. 26, prompting cheers from the Yurok Tribe, which had joined the Hoopa Valley Tribe and Humboldt County in requesting the releases.

"This is a great victory for the Klamath River and its salmon," tribal chairman Thomas P. O'Rourke said in a statement. "We are gratified that the judge saw through their desperate efforts to disparage the needs of the fish and to discredit our science."

The water districts had argued that more than 200,000 acre-feet of water had already been flushed down the Lower Klamath River for fish in the last four years. They said federal water officials were sending mixed messages about the drought by denying water for farms while appearing to have extra available for fish.

Bureau officials said the measure was necessary to stave off a large-scale salmon die-off like the one that occurred in the Klamath River in 2002, which environmentalists blamed on Reclamation's decision to restore irrigation water to farms in the Klamath Basin.

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