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Courtesy Calif. Dept. of Food and Agriculture

More than 25,000 agriculture-themed license plates have been sold, renewed or transferred in California since the unveiling of the special plates in 2012. Proceeds from the plates have raised nearly \$500,000 for agriculture education in the state.

## Ag-themed license plates raise funds for education across state

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — In less than three years since they were first distributed, more than 25,000 agriculture-themed license plates have been sold, renewed or transferred in California, and their fees have generated nearly \$500,000 for education, state officials say.

The state Department of Food and Agriculture this month handed out \$249,352 in the second round of grants from the CalAgPlate program. The awards included \$212,000 for FFA leadership and development programs, \$12,630 for classroom resource kits on crop and plant sciences and \$24,722 for student field trips to the farm at the California State Fair.

The grants follow last year's \$237,000 in awards, including \$192,547 for FFA leadership and mentorship programs.

Since the Department of Motor Vehicles issued the first plates in April 2013, the proceeds have boosted agricultural education programs that

### Online

For information on the special plates, visit <https://www.cdffa.ca.gov/egov/calagplate>

“connect consumers to our farms and ranches” and provide “a greater appreciation for California’s agricultural diversity,” CDFA secretary Karen Ross said in a statement.

“We’re very happy and very pleased at the level of support for agriculture that exists in California to enable the program to meet the threshold that the program can exist,” said Steve Lyle, a CDFA spokesman.

At the urging of FFA members and ag educators, then-food and agriculture secretary A.G. Kawamura started the license plate program at the FFA’s state convention in 2010, announcing the DMV would need at least 7,500 paid orders before the plates would be manufactured and distributed.

“The FFA was a major proponent, and members of FFA helped us get up and over that threshold,” Lyle said. “It was

something that drew interest from across the agriculture educational spectrum, and Secretary Ross was keenly interested in bringing it into fruition.”

The distinctive plates, which can be personalized, show the sun rising or setting over a farm field and tout the state’s food, fiber, fuel and flora. The initial cost for a plate is \$50 with an annual renewal fee of \$40, in addition to the vehicle’s regular registration fee.

This year’s grant to the FFA will fund the organization’s statewide Leadership Continuum workshops, the state FFA Leadership Conference and outreach activities, according to a summary of recipients. In all, more than 11,000 students participate in the workshops and conferences.

The resource-kit grant, which was requested by the Stanley W. Strew Education Fund, will provide materials and training to 35 high school instructors with a goal of exposing more students to crop and plant sciences through contests and other projects.

## Stop-diversion water orders could be more targeted in 2016

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — State water officials have yet to issue new warnings to water right holders of potential shutoffs as recent storms have raised hopes that curtailment orders won’t be necessary.

If they are needed, curtailments could be more targeted to specific streams or areas this year because regulators learned so much about water needs in the past two years, said Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the State Water Resources Control Board.

“It really depends on the hydrology,” Marcus told the Capital Press during a conference call with reporters. “It’s a math issue about the supply-and-demand curves. We have so much more information than before. Each year we get more precise.”

A year ago, the state water board sent out letters to water right holders warning that more stop-diversion orders were again likely after the state curtailed about 10,000 water-right permits in 2014 in an attempt to leave enough for more senior right holders.

As it was, a dry spring and summer last year prompted shutoff orders to be issued to more than 300 senior right holders and more than 8,000 junior right holders around California.

However, while officials caution that recent storms haven’t ended the drought, they’ve held off on sending out warning letters for this year, Marcus said.

“We have our fingers crossed as well,” she said. “We know people are pretty aware of what could happen after the last two years.”

The board will consid-



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

An irrigation canal runs past a farm near Red Bluff, Calif. While state officials caution that the drought isn’t over, they hope this winter’s rains will enable them to ease up a bit on water restrictions and curtailments.

er curbing diversions from “critically important salmon streams” so that water levels don’t get so low that fish are trapped or can’t get through, she said. For instance, such measures have been needed in the past two years on Mill, Deer and Antelope creeks in Tehama County, where property owners were barred at certain times from taking water for irrigation.

Marcus’ comments came as water regulators signaled they could ease the state’s emergency conservation targets for urban areas that are in a dry climate or are rapidly growing.

The board in February will decide whether to allow as much as 8 percent reductions in conservation targets for some of the more than 400 water agencies or-

dered last year by Gov. Jerry Brown to use at least 25 percent less water than 2013 levels.

A draft unveiled Dec. 21 proposed reductions of up to 4 percent, but the board has since received more than 200 comments from suppliers and other affected parties and is aiming “to continue to be responsive and have more flexibility,” spokesman Andrew DiLuccia said.

The board deliberates as a persistent parade of storm clouds continues to dump rain and snow on California. California’s snowpack — which will be key to determining water supplies in the late spring and summer — was at 110 percent of normal for Jan. 15, according to the Department of Water Resources.

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