

California center helps farmers make right irrigation choices

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

The current California drought is the worst in recent memory and could continue, said Sarge Green, project manager at the California Water Institute in Fresno.

"It could continue even with a 'wet' year because we have substantially over-extracted groundwater in the San Joaquin Valley since 1970 to the extent it is at its deepest average elevation ever," he said.

Groundwater, he said, makes up from 42 to 100 percent of the water supply, depending on the surface water availability and the location.

The original water center at California State University-Fresno was established to study irrigation technology in the 1980s. The California Water Institute was created as part of the 2000 voter-approved bond issue known as Proposition 13 and predicated on the idea that the region needs an impartial organization that



Sarge Green

could also develop sound water policy ideas and practices.

"Water availability has become a significant challenge for some areas of the state and especially in the San Joaquin Valley, and competition for water will likely force more rapid changes," Green said. "These changes include treatment and use of supplies with marginal water quality."

The resulting costs will force more investment in specialty crops, as their higher returns are needed to cover the higher costs of water, he said.

"There has already been a shift of cropping patterns, such as much-reduced acreages of alfalfa and cotton," he said. "That trend will continue."

Green had advice for farmers and ranchers regarding ways to save money and water on irrigation.

"Water and energy efficien-

cy investments have to be evaluated from the standpoint of their cost and benefits," he said. "Whether you elect to install new technology depends on factors like your soils, topography (slope mostly) and future water costs. If the investment returns better crop results that cover the investment and more, that is a good move."

However, he said, "There is often the assumption that automatically going to something like drip irrigation will save water, energy and money."

If a drip system is installed to conserve water and potentially increase crop yields, that design may force a farmer or rancher to constantly use pressure from a well rather than waiting for his or her turn of surface water, he said.

The energy costs of lifting the well water and pressurizing the drip system may not be economical if the crop returns are not adequate, he said. If that's the case, using surface water may have been the better choice.

Creek gets a makeover, with lots of help

By HEATHER SMITH THOMAS
For the Capital Press

The amazing transformation of a degraded segment of Pebble Creek in southeastern Idaho near Bancroft was 10 years in the making.

Two channels flow through the property of Mike and Roxy Holsten, and sometime after 1941 those channels had been straightened by a previous landowner for irrigation purposes.

Chris Banks, a water quality resource consultant for the Caribou Conservation District and conservationist for the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts, said that over time the channels had eroded, severely damaging their banks and widening.

get his equipment across these streams. His livestock went

down into the stream to drink

Turn to CREEK, Page 8

Irrigation Package for \$195

- Tests for minerals that can affect plant growth
- Different plants/crops can tolerate varying levels of such minerals as salt, boron, nitrate, etc.
- Use the information to check growing conditions for each specific plant/crop which would be grown

Tests in the Package: pH, Specific Conductance, Alkalinity, Boron, Calcium, Chloride, Hardness, Iron, Magnesium, Manganese, Nitrate, Phosphate, Ortho, Potassium, Sodium, Sodium Adsorption Ratio (SAR), Sulfate

*Arsenic testing free with package! (A \$35 value)

10% off any additional testing with mention of this ad

WATERLAB

www.waterlabcorp.com
Salem, OR
503-363-0473

W16-1/#14

Northwest FARM CREDIT SERVICES

Moving forward. Giving back.

Our mission is to support agriculture with reliable, consistent credit. As a cooperative, our members benefit through patronage dividends and our support of local communities.

A history of helping Northwest producers has prepared us well to address the challenges and opportunities ahead. And we'll continue moving forward alongside you for another 100 years.

800.743.2125 | northwestfs.com

100

Here to Help You Grow™