

2019 brings new funds to Kern County farmers

By Cassandra Melching

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The San Joaquin Valley is the top agricultural producing region in the nation.

Kern County is home to thousands of acres used for farming and there are thousands of pieces of heavy equipment operated daily to maintain crops, fields, orchards and overall day-to-day business practices.

Over the past 10 years, public and private investments in clean air projects through voluntary incentive grants have dramatically increased. This reflects the ongoing commitment of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, businesses, farmers and valley residents in making clean-air investments that improve the quality of life for all. Funding from the Valley Air District's grant programs plays a critical role in the valley by helping to reduce emissions and health risk that can occur from daily agricultural operations.

Kern County farmers are encouraged to take advantage of the robust grant programs offered by the Valley Air District. The Valley Air District is currently accepting applications for three new incentive programs to benefit local businesses in agriculture. The following funding opportunities are available:

Agricultural UTV Voucher Program

Provides incentives up to 75 percent of the eligible cost of new, zero-emission UTVs to replace existing diesel or gasoline-powered UTVs. Eligible costs may include base vehicle, roof, windshield, doors and an extended warranty, but not attachments, such as winches, storage bins, plows, cab heaters or additional batteries.

Low-Dust Nut Harvesting Equipment

The Low-Dust Nut Harvesting Pilot Incentive Program will promote the deployment and evaluation of low-dust technology on a broad scale. Growers and custom harvesters are eligible to apply for low-dust harvesting equipment that has shown to achieve at least 40 percent reduction in particulate matter in available peer-reviewed information and/or district-approved methodology. Participants will receive an incentive amount of 50 percent of the eligible equipment cost, must commit to use the new equipment for a minimum of five years or harvest seasons, and are required to report on equipment usage, harvest information and other relevant activities throughout the program. The program will be limited initially to one piece of new equipment per participant.

Ag Burning Alternatives

The Alternative to Agricultural Open Burning Incentive Pilot Programs supports efforts by the ag community to develop, demonstrate and evaluate the viability of new options for orchard removal. Only commercial agricultural operations are eligible to apply. Funding will be provided for chipping and on-farm reuse of the wood material, such as soil incorporation and land application. Incentive amounts will range from \$300 to \$600 per acre of agricultural material removed, depending upon alternative practice utilized, up to a maximum of \$60,000 per applicant per year. The program includes pre- and post-project requirements by participants and inspections by district staff.

For more information, please visit www.valleyair.org/grants, or call 559-230-5800 to speak to a representative.

Cassandra Melching is an outreach and communications representative with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.