
Environmental Stewardship Campaign

Project No.: 09-STEWCROP1-Looker

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Objectives:

- 1) Keep growers informed about environmental issues and regulations
- 2) Promote the industry's environmental stewardship efforts
- 3) Advance almond industry efforts in sustainability

Interpretive Summary:

The Almond Board of California (ABC) launched its Environmental Stewardship Campaign in November, 2003. Key elements of the campaign have been: 1) A web-based database focusing on environmental issues and providing up-to-date information on Almond Board sponsored research in air quality, water quality and crop and environmental protection; 2) A proactive public relations campaign highlighting environmental stewardship activities among almond growers; and 3) Grower newsletters and articles highlighting environmental issues impacting the almond grower community.

Major accomplishments for Year 6 (2008 - 2009) of the Stewardship Campaign included:

- 1) Publishing Articles in the ABC Newsletter "California Almond Newsletter."

Those articles were:

- Have You Registered Your Stationary Ag Engines?
- New Round of Meetings Slated for Irrigated Lands Program
- Eastside SJV Almond Growers: Manage Spray Drift to Avoid Exceedances in Sensitive Waterways
- Sign-ups Being Accepted for California EQIP Funds for 2009
- SJV Growers Face Jan. 1 Deadline for New Rules on Internal Combustion Engines
- Jury Verdict Against Dealer/Applicator Raises Liability Concerns about Pesticide Volatilization Drift

- Dormant Spray Alternatives
- Environmental issues to Be Featured at Almond Board Annual Conference
- Water Studies Abound
- Delta Vision: Dual Conveyance
- Orchard Replant Field Day Offers Insights on Soil Fumigants
- Meeting Regulatory Challenges
- DPR Issues Revised VOC Rules for Public Comment
- Air Board Passes New Rules for On-Road Diesel Trucks
- Sustainability: Responding to Consumer Demand
- More with Less?
- Greenhouse Gas Scoping Plan Passed
- Help with VOC Emissions
- Air Board Meetings to Address Regulations, Loans
- Environmental Stewardship Tour Highlights Efficiency
- Almond Growers Get Help for Coping with Drought
- Last Year for Guthion
- Start Process of Applying for EQIP Funds Now
- Almond Growers Planning Soil Fumigations Face Challenging Year
- Court Ruling Adds New Permitting Requirements for Pesticide Applications
- Almond Growers Call NRCS Conservation Planning Process a “Win-Win”

2) Environmental Stewardship Tour

More than 25 regulators and media members were among the nearly 100 invited guests who attended ABC's annual Environmental Stewardship Spring Tour on March 9, 2009 to learn the steps almond growers are taking to address environmental issues in their farming operations.

The spring tour at Quinn River Ranch in Waterford highlighted several new and emerging technologies grower Sharon Naraghi and farm manager Bavaro Farming Co. are utilizing to ensure that inputs are applied judiciously and with minimal impact on air, soil and water quality.

Regulators on the tour included representatives from several local, state and federal agencies, including the California Department of Pesticide Regulation, SJV Air Pollution Control District, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board. They saw first-hand how high-tech sampling and monitoring, precision agriculture and advanced sprayer technology are helping growers apply water, pesticides, fertilizers and other inputs with maximum efficiency to reduce off-site movement of those inputs. Equipment manufacturers also demonstrated the latest harvesting equipment designed to reduce engine emissions, dust, and the number of passes in the harvesting operation.

3) Publishing Op-Ed Articles in Trade Publication "Western Farm Press"

The Stewardship Campaign publishes a regular column in the trade publication *Western Farm Press* offering viewpoints on important environmental issues of concern to almond growers. Those articles included:

- Court's Decisions Affirm Efforts by Agriculture to Reduce Air Pollution in the San Joaquin Valley - June 15, 2009 Western Farm Press
- Almond Growers Embrace Technology for Water Management - April 6, 2009
- After Diesel Trucks, Air Board Turns Attention to Tractors, Farm Equipment - Feb. 12, 2009
- A Long-Term Commitment to Pollination and Honey Bee Research - Jan. 13, 2009
- Leaders Must Take Bold Action to Secure Safe Water Supply for All - Dec. 15, 2008
- Options for Dormant-Season Pest Management in Almonds - Nov. 6, 2008
- Almond Growers Must Navigate a Maze of Soil Fumigant Restrictions - Aug. 2008

4) Sustainability

Insuring a reputation in sustainability is consistent with ABC's strategic positioning as a "Crop of Choice". The sustainability program has incorporated the expertise of marketing company *Brandology* to develop a positioning statement and *SureHarvest* to design and develop a strategic practices program for the industry. Working in tandem, these two groups are analyzing and synthesizing background sustainability information through industry interviews, summarizing assessment findings, crafting positioning options, and defining the scope and scale of a sustainable practices program.

Increased population, both in the Central Valley and globally, increased consumer awareness that the world's resources are limited, and increased awareness by many corporations that reducing the amount of resources used often helps the bottom-line while satisfying consumers, has led to an increased focus on sustainability as a goal all of us should be working toward.

Sustainability encompasses:

- How to ensure that almonds remain the crop of choice for California growers to grow.
- How Californians continue to allow the resources of land, water, and air to be used for almond production.
- How almonds can be a food of choice for consumers.

More than four years ago, the Environmental Committee of the Almond Board tackled the question: What does sustainability mean to almond growing? Based on a series of grower focus groups, the following definition of sustainability for almond production was developed:

“Sustainable almond farming utilizes production practices that are economically viable and are based on both scientific research and common sense. It is motivated by a respect for the environment, neighbors and employees. The result is a plentiful, healthful and safe food product.”

This past year, the Environmental Committee has initiated development of a sustainability self-assessment program for growers. This will allow growers to review whether they have considered all of the factors in deciding which growing practices to employ with an eye toward reducing resources used and impacts on the environment, while keeping the trees healthy. The data will be anonymously compiled to document the extent to which almond growers are already implementing sustainable almond growing practices and where additional research or education may be helpful. Part of meeting the demands of customers, as well as regulators, is documenting that consideration for environmental and social factors was taken in choosing growing practices in the face of the complex biological, economic and regulatory environment with which almond growers must deal.

There is no single sustainable way to grow almonds in California as each location has different resources and issues. However, documenting the thoughtfulness and the continued effort to work toward being sustainable is critical to ensuring that almonds remain a crop of choice to grow in California.

5) Partnerships

Another element of the sustainability program is maintaining partnerships that facilitate reaching our stewardship goals. Some of the allied partners and projects the Stewardship project is partnering with to advance efforts in sustainability include, California Roundtable for Agriculture and the Environment (CRAE), UCD’s Agricultural Sustainability Institute (ASI), Coalition for Urban and Rural Stewardship (CURES), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), AgSIP workgroup, and Community Alliance of Family Farmers (CAFF).

ABC is participating in the Almond Pest Management Alliance, known as PMA II. This project led by CAFF provides a framework for advancing integrated pest management efforts in collaboration with UC IPM and DPR while providing the means to commit to successive years of outreach and demonstration to achieve maximum success. PMA II builds upon PMA I by committing to expanding outreach to pest control advisors, and by maintaining a dialogue with chemical suppliers for development of more reduced risk options for growers.

ABC works collaboratively with Project Apis m., which was established by beekeepers and orchardists to fund honey bee research on managed colonies. The organization's goal is to fund and direct research to improve the health and vitality of honey bee colonies while improving crop production. Emphasis is placed on research studies that have realistic and practical usefulness for beekeeping businesses.

6) Website Enhancement

The ABC website has been enhanced considerably, allowing easier user access to the vast array of information related to all ABC programs, including the many environmental issues facing growers. The revamped Environmental Stewardship section offers users constant updates on air and water quality, issues, along with crop and environmental protection information.

Future Goals:

For Year 7 (2009 - 2010), the Stewardship Project will continue to monitor regulatory and environmental issues of importance to the almond industry, provide website updates, provide newsletter briefs for 10 proposed monthly newsletters, do in-depth newsletter features promoting stewardship efforts, and press releases promoting stewardship and sustainability efforts. Another Stewardship Tour will be planned for key media and regulatory contacts.