



THE FARMER'S GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE SALINAS VALLEY BASIN IN MONTEREY COUNTY

May 2025



What is SGMA?

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) is California's first effort to regulate groundwater. Groundwater is water stored in underground aquifers and extracted via wells. Depending on the snow and rain available for surface water (lakes, streams, or reservoirs), groundwater accounts for 40-60% of our total annual water usage in California. In the Salinas Valley, groundwater makes up over 95% of the water used supporting domestic, agricultural and other beneficial uses.

In 2011-2017, California was in a multi-year drought. As wells went dry and portions of ground started to sink, it became clear that in many parts of the state, groundwater was being used faster than it could be replenished. In response, SGMA was passed to ensure sustainable groundwater management. Basins or subbasins that were identified by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) as "high" or "medium" priority had to implement regionally specific Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSP). While the GSPs include water quality goals, they are separate from the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program, Ag Order 4.0, for the Salinas Valley.



The Farmer's Guide to Understanding the Salinas Valley Basin in Monterey County

So, what does this mean for my farm or ranch?

Farms and ranches in the Salinas Valley depend heavily on groundwater for irrigation. On average, agriculture uses an estimated 90% of the groundwater pumped in the Salinas Valley. We know that growing food requires water, and agriculture is an important user of groundwater. To achieve sustainability, either supplemental supply project(s) need to be constructed, or demand management methods adopted. Both types of actions require accurate information about groundwater conditions, evaluation of the benefits and impacts, funding strategies and community participation.

To comply with SGMA in the Salinas Valley:

All wells will need to be registered and most (larger production) wells will need to report water use annually.

Groundwater pumping may become regulated, with potential allocation limits.

Projects like land repurposing or fallowing may be implemented to reduce overdraft.

To fund its operations, the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGSA) adopted fees in 2019 that are placed on property taxes for most groundwater users. These fees are calculated either per irrigated acre or per connection, and vary by subbasin. See the table below for details.

Action Steps for Farmers:

Stay Informed: Regularly check [SVBGSA's website](#) and subscribe for updates on new efforts and activities. Contact Rogelio Ponce, CAFF's groundwater outreach contractor at rogelio@caff.org or 831.254.2982 with questions or concerns.

Participate: Attend public meetings and workshops to engage with the planning process and represent your interests. All public meetings are held in person and remotely (via a Zoom link).

Prepare: Assess your water usage and explore water saving techniques. Consider getting a flow meter for your well to track the water usage. Adopt soil-building practices, like compost or cover crops, to improve water retention. If you're a small-scale farmer, you may qualify for free hydrologic services and legal support through the DWR URCTA Program. Contact us to check your eligibility at SGMA@caff.org or (559) 424-3667.

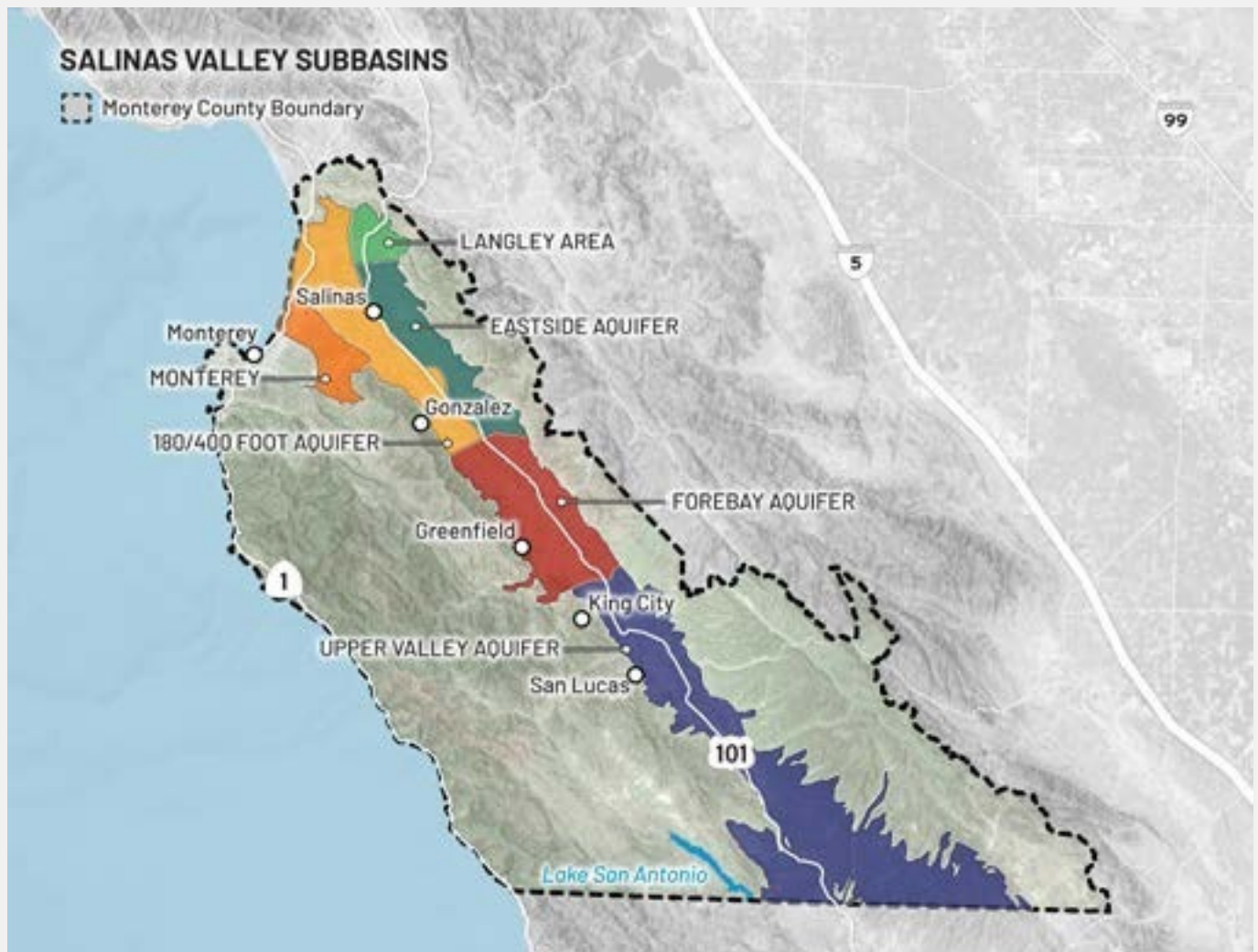
By staying informed and proactive, you can adapt to upcoming changes and contribute to the sustainable management of groundwater resources in the Salinas Valley.



How does SGMA work in the Salinas Valley?

The Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGSA) is responsible for sustainable groundwater management in the region along with 3 other GSAs in the Salinas Valley: Marina Coast Water District Groundwater Sustainability Agency, Arroyo Seco Groundwater Sustainability Agency, and Monterey County Groundwater Sustainability Agency. The Salinas Valley is split into six subbasins, and the SVBGSA is developing subbasin specific solutions to meet sustainability goals and address challenges like seawater intrusion and over pumping.

Under SGMA, critically overdrafted basins (like the 180/400-Foot Aquifer Subbasin in the Salinas Valley) must achieve groundwater sustainability by 2040 and all others by 2042. Each subbasin under SVBGSA jurisdiction has developed a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) that describes the groundwater conditions and outlines potential projects and management actions. The Department of Water Resources (DWR) reviews and approves all GSPs. The State Water Resources Control Board acts as a backstop, stepping in to take control if local agencies don't make progress on the groundwater sustainability goals.



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The six subbasins within the Salinas Valley are 180/400-Foot Aquifer, Eastside Aquifer, Forebay Aquifer, Monterey, Langleys Area, and Upper Valley Aquifer.

With the partner GSAs, SVBGSA is implementing the GSPs in these six subbasins. SVBGSA has the authority to charge fees, conduct investigations, register wells, require reporting, and take other actions to sustainably manage the groundwater. SVBGSA's activities are funded in part by the Groundwater Sustainability Fee which is paid for by groundwater users within SVBGSA jurisdictional boundaries. The majority (97%) of fees are added to property tax bills. A groundwater user is someone who owns agricultural land or a water user served by a publicly or privately owned water system. De minimis extractors (i.e. small domestic users), tribal lands, and federally owned properties are exempt from the Fee. Visit [SVBGSA website](#) to learn more about the Fee.

How does SGMA define sustainable groundwater management?

Sustainable management means using groundwater without causing undesirable results, such as:

Seawater intrusion

Saltwater polluting freshwater aquifers.

Chronic declines in groundwater levels

Groundwater levels going down.

Reduction in groundwater storage

Less groundwater available for pumping.

Land subsidence

Sinking land damaging infrastructure.

Degraded water quality

Increases in the presence of specific chemicals in the groundwater due to pumping.

Depletion of Interconnected Surface Water

Less surface water available due to pumping.

What does SVBGSA have planned for the future?

As a small farmer in the Salinas Valley, it's essential to stay informed about the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency's (SVBGSA) efforts aimed at achieving sustainable groundwater future. Key projects and measures differ by subbasin and some examples include:

1. Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP):

SVBGSA is collaborating with local partners to repurpose less productive, flood-prone agricultural lands into areas that enhance groundwater recharge and storage. This

initiative aims to reduce flooding, improve water quality, and provide habitat enhancement. The program focuses on the 180/400-Foot Aquifer, Eastside, and Langley Subbasins. Landowners interested in participating can engage with the Recharge Work Group or contact Emily Gardner (gardnere@svbgsa.org) directly.

2. Well Registration and Groundwater

Extraction Reporting: As a farmer, you will be required to register your wells and report water usage if you are extracting more than 2 acre-feet per year.

3. Brackish Groundwater Restoration Project Feasibility Study:

This project involves extracting and desalting groundwater affected by seawater intrusion to create a new water supply and to mitigate continued progression of seawater intrusion inland. The treated water could be used for agricultural irrigation, potentially reducing dependence on traditional groundwater sources. The feasibility study is

ongoing, and outcomes may present new water sources for farmers. For more information, please contact Sarah Hardgrave at SVBGSA, hardgraves@svbgsa.org

4. Demand Management Program: SVBGSA is exploring methods for managing groundwater demand, through incentives for efficient water use, rotational fallowing with cover crops, automatic metering, or allocations. The specific measures are still under consideration and it's crucial to stay informed about potential changes that could affect groundwater usage.

5. Aquifer Storage and Recovery Feasibility

Study: SVBGSA is examining a project concept that aims to reduce seawater intrusion by increasing surface water diversions for recharge during the wet season and injecting diverted surface water inland of the seawater intruded area to raise groundwater elevations.

What is happening with sea water intrusion?

When groundwater from coastal aquifers is pumped faster than it can be replenished, the resulting drop in water pressure lowers groundwater levels, creating conditions that allow seawater to move inland into freshwater aquifers. Seawater intrusion is a significant issue in the 180/400-Foot Aquifer Subbasin and parts of the Monterey Subbasin. As the shallower 180-Foot aquifer was over-pumped and intruded with seawater, deeper wells were drilled into the 400-foot aquifer which subsequently was impacted by seawater intrusion. As the 400-foot aquifer was over-

pumped and intruded with seawater, deeper wells were drilled into the underlying Deep Aquifers which have declining groundwater storage. While engineering efforts like the Castroville Seawater Intrusion Project (CSIP) and the Salinas Valley Water Project have slowed its progression, seawater intrusion remains an ongoing threat. If you are experiencing increasing salinity levels in your wells, you can contact SVBGSA to determine if you are in an area at risk of seawater intrusion (hardgraves@svbgsa.org).

How does Salinas Valley handle new wells?

All wells must be registered with the Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA) as part of the Groundwater Monitoring Program (GMP), launched in partnership with SVBGSA. Wells extracting more than 2 acre-feet per year are required to report their water extraction to MCWRA through the Groundwater Extraction Management System (GEMS). Registration includes submitting detailed information about the well, and extraction data collection may utilize flowmeters, electrical meters, or hour meters. Per well fees for well registration and extraction data reporting are planned.

How do I get more information?



CAFF Small Farmer Outreach:

Rogelio Ponce is the Groundwater Community Engagement Contractor for the Salinas Valley. Call/email him with any questions! He can be reached at rogelio@caff.org or 831-2982.

DUDEK



Legal & Technical Support:

CAFF can connect small farmers with legal advice and technical hydrological services with our partners in this project, **UC Davis Water Justice Law Clinic and Dudek.**



SVBGSA Resources:

Connect with the **Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGSA)** by attending their public meetings, joining an Advisory Committee, or reviewing their projects on their website svbgsa.org or calling (831) 471-7512 x204.

For state-wide questions, email SGMA@caff.org or call 559-424-3667



California Department of Water Resources (DWR)

Underrepresented Communities, California Tribes, and Small Farmers Groundwater Technical Assistance (URCTA) Program
URCTA@water.ca.gov

This document has been prepared by CAFF Water Policy Program and is funded in full by the Budget Acts of 2021 and 2022 through the Department of Water Resources (DWR), Underrepresented Communities, California Tribes, and Small Farmers Groundwater Technical Assistance (URCTA) Program.

This outreach document provides basin or subbasin specific information and identifies local groundwater management actions that may affect small scale farmers in these areas. This document does not reflect official positions or regulatory standards applied or used by the Department when administering its function under SGMA.

	180/400	Eastside	Langley
Priority	High	High	High
GW % of Total Supply	~97%	100%	100%
Annual GW Extraction	129,800	82,700	1,460
Seawater Intrusion	Yes	No but at risk due to proximity to 180/400	No
GSA Fee for Ag Users in 2025	\$11.73 per irrigated acre + \$5.47 per connection	\$10.14 per irrigated acre + \$4.53 per connection	\$13.54 per irrigated acre + \$10.90 per connection

↑*All numbers are in AF/yr

	Forebay	Upper Valley	Monterey
Priority	Medium	Medium	Medium
GW % of Total Supply	~98%	100%	99%
Overdraft	None	None	1,632 (Marina-Ord) 2,803 (Corral de Tierra)
Seawater Intrusion	No	No	Yes
GSA Fee for Ag Users in 2025	\$9.56 per irrigated acre + \$4.49 per connection	\$9.56 per irrigated acre + \$4.49 per connection	\$13.54 per irrigated acre + \$10.90 per connection

↑*All numbers are in AF/yr