



Farming in Drought:

Making the Most of Every Drop

Water in Sonoma County

The Western U.S. is undergoing its driest period in 1,200 years. Extreme drought in California has become more frequent and intense over the past two decades. The current drought, beginning in 2019, is one of the most severe California has ever faced.

Local food production

Sonoma County residents spend approximately \$2.1 billion on food and beverages each year, and Sonoma County imports nearly [96 percent](#) of the fruits and vegetables consumed. When we purchase food from local producers, money spent in our community multiplies the economic impacts of buying local. But without water to raise crops and livestock, our local farmers and ranchers will no longer be able to produce food in Sonoma County.

Policy focus areas

Will farmers and ranchers in Sonoma County have the water they need to continue producing local food? Policy in the following critical areas will help to guide how we use our water now and in the future.

- ❖ Consider a definition of “local food production” and develop policies to support it.
- ❖ Anticipate ongoing and recurring drought conditions and plan for long-term water reliability for farmers and ranchers.
- ❖ Support creation of more on-farm storage, such as ponds and tanks, to capture and store high winter flows and rainwater.
- ❖ Allow longer duration on-farm water storage.
- ❖ Support on-farm groundwater recharge, such as winter flooding of agricultural fields and installation of injection wells.
- ❖ Water curtailments: Prioritize food production as an essential use.
- ❖ Water allocations: Prioritize allocation of *appropriate* recycled water to food farming.
- ❖ Prioritize food production when developing well and pumping policies.
- ❖ Consider cumulative impacts of water use, for example the impact of new wells on existing wells which may be supporting food production.
- ❖ Provide fee exemptions and reductions for food production.
- ❖ Provide more technical assistance and education for enhanced water-smart practices, such as dry farming; soil health improvements such as cover cropping, reduced tillage, and compost application; and water use monitoring.
- ❖ Increase financial support for these practices, including match payments for federal assistance programs such as EQIP and increased funding for programs like the California Healthy Soils Program and the Resource Conservation Districts’ LandSmart plans.

Resources

Water tracking resources

- ❖ [California Drought and Water Tracker](#)
This dashboard provides current and historical perspective on water issues facing the state using a variety of publicly available datasets, and explores how droughts are making those issues worse.
- ❖ [Sonoma Water, Current Water Supply Levels](#)
Current Water Supply Levels for Lake Pillsbury, Lake Mendocino, and Lake Sonoma.
- ❖ [Permit Sonoma Groundwater Availability Map](#)
Groundwater availability in Sonoma County's priority groundwater basins.
- ❖ [SGMA Data Viewer](#)
The SGMA Data Viewer provides access to groundwater related datasets that are organized by the requirements of SGMA and the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) regulations for the purpose of supporting GSP development and implementation.
- ❖ [California's Groundwater Live: Groundwater Levels](#)
The latest groundwater level information from throughout California, based on the California Department of Water Resources groundwater level database.

Local well policy

[Permit Sonoma's draft well permit ordinance](#)

- ❖ To comment on the proposed amendment to the county's well ordinance, email Permit Sonoma at: [<PermitSonoma-Wells-PublicInput@sonoma-county.org>](mailto:PermitSonoma-Wells-PublicInput@sonoma-county.org)

CAFF's statewide advocacy for small farm relief & water resilience

This past year, CAFF successfully advocated for several new sources of state funding as well as the growth of existing initiatives that promote water-smart farming while providing emergency relief, including:

- ❖ **\$43.5 million in Emergency Drought Relief** through a combination of CDFA's [CA Underserved & Small Producers Program](#) (CUSP) and the [Gov's Office of Business & Economic Development](#) (GO-Biz). Funds specifically target small-scale farms and those from disadvantaged communities, with appropriate TA.
- ❖ **\$10 million Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) education and engagement of small farms.** Spurred by a [report](#) co-authored by CAFF showing that most GSAs failed to reach out to and nor did their plans mention smaller farms, tenant farms, or farms from disadvantaged communities.
- ❖ **\$2 million for dry-farming education.** Led by the Wine Institute and CAFF, funds will help growers—especially coastal vineyards—better understand [dry-farming practices](#), esp. on newly-planted vines.
- ❖ **\$85 million for Healthy Soils Program**, increase to CA's [ground-breaking fund](#) providing growers incentives to use on-farm practices that not only reduce climate change impacts but conserve water.