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## 13 local farmers awarded Healthy Soils grants

By RACHEL MAGOS, Special to This Newspaper  
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It is widely known that the California Department Food and Agriculture has been providing financial initiatives to what is known as the Healthy Soils Program to California growers and ranchers.

The mission is to allow applicants to implement conservation management practices that sequester carbon, reduce atmospheric greenhouse gases and improve soil health.

CDFA Secretary Karen Ross has stated, "Soil has the transformative power to help us stabilize our changing climate by capturing greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere and storing them underground, through the assistance of living plants and microbes, that improve both the atmosphere and the soil."

This year CDFA's HSP received 578 applications requesting \$37.87 million, exceeding the \$22 million available funds. With a maximum award of \$100,000 per award, this grant was a great opportunity for California farming operations to pilot conservation management practices such as compost application, cover crops, nutrient management and reduced till/no till for three to 10 years (depending on the practice) with minimal financial investment on their part.

This is a groundbreaking achievement of our county and a huge jump from last year's HSP solicitation period, demonstrating that farming operations in this region are becoming very interested in adopting climate smart agricultural practices, provided funding availability.

Ronnie Leimgruber, one of the 13 Healthy Soils grant recipients said, "These climate smart agriculture incentive programs assist farmers in doing their part to try to sequester carbon and help sustain the environment." He further stated, "Being awarded this grant will allow me to apply more compost than I normally would."

The UCCE Imperial County and ICFB partnered as technical assistance providers for the Healthy Soils Program and Alternative Manure Management Program for 2020. Together we conducted outreach, held a series of workshops and assisted with individual grant applications. The goal was to bring awareness to these Climate Smart Agriculture incentive programs and assist growers in applying and maximizing their chances of being awarded.

Overall, Imperial County saw great progress from the prior year in the amount of applicants and awards. We are optimistic that these programs will continue to grow in future years, assisting local farmers in implementing additional farming practices that continue to benefit the environment. We encourage awarded applicants to contact us for any project implementation and data collection.

For more information, please contact Kristian Salgado at [kmsalgado@ucanr.edu](mailto:kmsalgado@ucanr.edu) or call at (442) 265-7700.

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For the farmers and ranchers interested in the environmental benefits but unable to afford the cost of implementing these practices on their own, this program is a chance to try them firsthand.

The implementations of these conservation management practices are known to promote on-farm sustainability by building organic matter, encouraging nutrient cycling, increasing water-holding capacity, reducing soil compaction and lessening the need for synthetic fertilizers. In general, if you enrich your soil, it will boost the productivity of your cropping systems.

However, every agricultural operation varies in its needs, the benefit it obtains from different conservation management practices depends on the location, size, crop rotation, irrigation system and soil type.

To enhance applicability according to site specific needs, CDFA allows applicants to choose from four categories, totaling 28 eligible practices selected from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Services' conservation practices standards.

Of the many subsequent application years, it was only in 2020 that Imperial Valley growers and ranchers applied for this incentive program. Many of the local farmers and agricultural operation applicants have been eagerly awaiting to hear who got awarded this year's HSP grants.

We would like to congratulate the 13 Imperial County applicants who received a total of \$1,073,697.97 in funds. These award-winning projects will have an estimated greenhouse gas emission reduction of 3,689.1 metric tons of carbon dioxide per year, which is equivalent to 797 passenger vehicles driven for one year.