



**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & BUILDING
SMALL FARM ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

Paso Robles Groundwater Basin

The Small Farm Assistance Program offers monetary incentives for property owners to remove irrigated agriculture and fallow the land through December 31, 2039.

Eligible lands shall be those with existing irrigated annual or rotational crop production, where satisfactory evidence is shown that those crops are currently irrigated, using groundwater pumped from the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin (PRGWB), excluding the Atascadero sub-basin, as defined by The Department of Water Resources Bulletin 118. Eligible lands shall be identified as *Farming Units*. A *Farming Unit* shall be a collection of contiguous or semi-contiguous agricultural properties, which are greater than 5 acres in total, that are managed as a single irrigated farming operation. The boundaries of the eligible lands shall overlie the PRGWB (excluding the Atascadero sub-basin). In no case shall a request for eligibility be granted for a site not using groundwater from the PRGWB (excluding the Atascadero Sub-basin).

Proposed sites will maintain an eligible use in compliance with the provisions of any existing Williamson Act contract for the property and County of San Luis Obispo Rules of Procedure to Implement the California Land Conservation Act of 1965.

The program will be rolled out in two phases; phase one is designed to incentivize small growers (between 5 and 20 acres of irrigated crops) while phase two is open to both small and large growers. Phase one will begin January 1, 2026 and end June 30, 2026. Phase two will begin July 1, 2026 and end when available funds have been exhausted. Rebates over \$600 may be considered taxable income. Consult a tax professional when reporting rebates.



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Applicability

1. The property where the irrigated agriculture will be removed must overlie and receive water from the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin.
2. The proposed project area must have a dedicated irrigation system at the time of application and the proposed removal area must have been actively irrigated within the past year. Conversions that are initiated prior to County inspection and approval are ineligible for a rebate.
3. A minimum of 5 acres of actively irrigated agriculture must be removed to qualify for a rebate. Prior to June 30, 2026, the maximum acreage to qualify for a rebate is 20 acres. After June 30, 2026, there is no maximum acreage, however, funds are limited.
4. Application must be received and approved prior to irrigated agriculture removal.

Application:

Program applicants must submit a completed application via email to
waterprograms@co.slo.ca.us

or mail a hardcopy to

Water Conservation Program
SLO County Department of Planning & Building
976 Osos Street, Room 300, San Luis Obispo, CA 93408



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Process

1. Before you begin your project or remove any irrigated agriculture, you must submit an application and receive confirmation from the Department of Planning and Building before proceeding. The application must be received and approved prior to irrigated agriculture removal.
2. To help ensure you submit a complete application attached, please provide the following with your application:
 - a) Farming Unit designation (to be assigned by the County).
 - b) Ownership information for the enrolled lands (i.e. a Farming Unit may contain parcels under different ownership).
 - c) APN designations for all parcels located within the Farming Unit.
 - d) A Map (or Maps) delineating the irrigated fields that are the subject of the application. The map(s) shall depict the crop type for each field, estimated crop age, type of irrigation system(s) installed, and source of water supply, including the location of the irrigation supply well(s).
 - e) A description of the proposed land repurposing/fallowing strategies to be implemented. Examples of these strategies can include but are not limited to:
 - Creation or restoration of habitat, including pollinator habitat, wetland habitat, upland habitat, and riparian habitat.
 - Conversion of irrigated land to dryland farming or non-irrigated rangeland.
 - Planting non-irrigated cover crops or conservation cover.
 - On-Farm storm water capture/recharge measures.
 - Repurposing irrigated land to land uses that require zero or significantly reduced groundwater use (bare soil to be planted with non-irrigated cover crop).
 - Conversion of irrigated lands to non-irrigated areas of landscaping and hardscapes (bare soil to be planted with non-irrigated cover crop).
 - Other measures as may be determined by the landowner and/or their consultant subject matter experts.
 - f) A description of what measures are going to be taken to avoid unintended consequences such as dust, weeds, pests, and soil degradation. The property must be actively managed to avoid weeds growing out of control and using groundwater to thrive.
 - Examples:
 - i) Keep disced/sprayed and free of weeds.
 - ii) Plant a native cover crop.
 - iii) Cover crops must be kept mowed or grazed.
 - iv) Cover crops cannot be harvested or irrigated.



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- v) Leave non-irrigated winter crop stubble.
- vi) Other management practices as deemed appropriate by the applicant and approved by the County.
- g) A current title report or lot book guarantee.
- h) Landowner consent form.
- i) A signed Terms and Conditions page.

3. Once your application is received, County staff will provide general project feedback and schedule a pre-conversion inspection.
4. Within 5 business days of your pre-conversion inspection, you will receive a post-inspection letter via email confirming tentative approval of your project. The letter will include the total approved rebate amount and next steps for the project.
5. Within 180-days of receiving pre-approval, the applicant shall sign and record a deed restriction which restricts, or limits uses or activities on a property to those which are consistent with the approved plan and ensures that groundwater continues to be offset by the termination of irrigation operations through December 31, 2039. The deed restriction shall be executed and recorded with the deed(s). These restrictions shall be binding legal obligations passed from the seller to the buyer and are recorded in the deed itself.
6. Schedule a final site inspection after crop removal.
7. Property owner records deed restriction at Clerk-Recorder's office.
8. After the final inspection and proof of deed restriction recordation is provided to County staff, a rebate incentive will be issued within 4-5 weeks. If the project area does not meet the program requirements at time of the final inspection, the applicant may be permitted to bring the area into compliance with program requirements.
9. County staff may require future inspections in order to approve all program requirements before issuing the rebate incentive.



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Irrigated Agriculture Removal Standards:

- j) All irrigation lines and associated equipment shall be removed from the area in which the irrigated agriculture is occurring.
- k) Cover crops are required on all exposed soil surfaces.
- l) Any associated irrigation implementation (i.e., water lines, drip emitters, etc.) must be removed.



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Agreement

I (print name), _____, am the legal owner of the property described above or have obtained written consent from the property owner to participate in the "Small Farm Assistance" program. I am voluntarily participating in the County of San Luis Obispo's "Small Farm Assistance" program and will remove irrigated agriculture to the extent described above. I agree that all work performed complies with applicable state and local laws, ordinances and regulations. I agree to record a deed on my property which prohibits new irrigated agriculture from being planted through December 31, 2039. I understand that if I sell the property, I must inform the future owners of their obligation to participate in this agreement.

I will allow the County to conduct site visits to my property through December 31, 2039 for the purpose of collecting data and photographs of the project site. The County will contact me in advance to arrange times for these visits.

I agree to defend, indemnify and hold harmless the County of San Luis Obispo, its directors, officers, agents and employees against any and all loss, liability, expense, claims, suits and damages, including attorney's fees, arising out of or resulting from the removal of irrigation equipment and planted agriculture or from participation in this program.

I am responsible for complying with all applicable laws, regulations, ordinances, or other legal requirements, and nothing in this agreement shall excuse or modify any such requirements. If my rebate exceeds \$600, I will consult a tax professional and report my rebate information to the IRS if deemed necessary.

I certify that the information on this Application is true and correct and that I have read, understand and agree to the standards, process, terms, and conditions of this rebate program.

Signature: _____ Date: _____