

Water Quality, the Ag Order, and Signing-up for the San Diego Region Irrigated Lands Group (SDRILG)

**A presentation to assist enrollees of SDRILG
June 2026**

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Who is involved?

- **The Regulators:**

- California State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board)
- San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board)
- County of San Diego Agriculture, Weights and Measures: Ag Water Quality Program (AWQP)
- Individual municipalities in San Diego County

- **The Regulated:**

- Any grower who irrigates and is selling or intends to sell the products they grow—all of you!

- **Who is Providing Assistance:**

- San Diego Region Irrigated Lands Group (SDRILG),
(a certified Third-Party Monitoring Group)
- UC Cooperative Extension
- Other agencies-Resource Conservation Districts etc.

Water Quality History in San Diego

- Water quality has been regulated in the San Diego Region for many, many decades. Many years ago, the dairy industry here was the focus of much of the regulation. Currently the focus is mostly on plant-based Ag.
- One program that affects many industries, including agriculture, is the MS4 (Stormwater) Program. Agricultural enforcement of the MS4 program is managed by the County of San Diego AWQP for properties in the County, and by cities within San Diego County.
- Water quality regulations go through a periodic renewal process with more rigorous regulations being developed with each new renewal. Currently, a new version of the “Ag Order”, the Regional Board’s water quality requirements pertaining to agricultural water use in San Diego, is under development.

What are these programs regulating?

Generally, water quality programs related to agriculture focus on many different potential pollutants: nutrients, pesticides, sediments, fuels, microbial contaminants etc. The MS4 program looks for pollutants entering any part of the storm drain system.

Current attention is on the newest version of the “Ag Order” that is being developed. Under this program, there is a strong statewide focus on nutrients in runoff and groundwater.

The main concern is that the nutrients will pollute ground and surface water that has other uses, particularly water that is used as a drinking water source.

Nitrogen is most regulated

- Fertilizer runoff is the focus of the Ag Orders in many parts of the state.
- High levels of nitrogen in groundwater are found in places where there is no alternative to groundwater for human consumption, and much of the drinking water exceeds legal levels of nitrogen.
- Currently regulations and legislation exist or are under development to standardize the requirements across the state.
- San Diego County has very little groundwater, and almost none is used for drinking water purposes in comparison to other parts of the state.



Who inspects your properties?

- For compliance with the **MS4** (Stormwater) program, you will be inspected by the AWQP program from the County Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures, if you farm in the County.

If you farm in an incorporated city, (Oceanside, Carlsbad, Encinitas, Escondido, for example) you will be inspected by the municipal office that handles the MS4 (Stormwater) program for the city in which you farm.

- For compliance with the **Ag Order**, you will be inspected by the Regional Board Staff whether you farm in an unincorporated area of the County or in a city.

We are working with the Regional Board and the AWQP to coordinate their programs and inspections.

In some parts of the state, growers are regulated by the Ag Order only. The MS4 (Stormwater) programs regulate only the urbanized areas.

Agriculture in San Diego is interspersed with urbanized areas. Both programs apply to agriculture here.

To the end user, (you), the inspections by both programs seem to be repetitive, and they sometimes are.

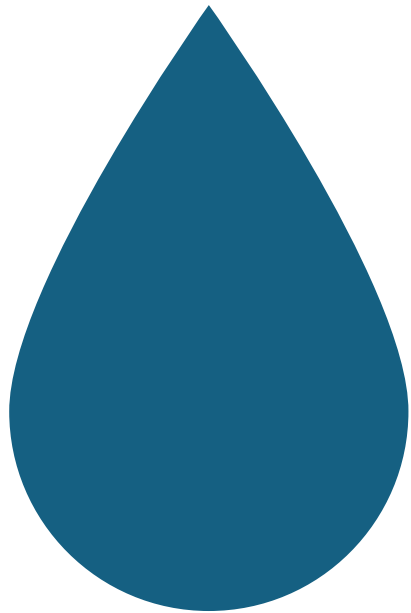
The SDRILG is working with both programs to coordinate inspections and requirements to make it more efficient and easier for the growers to comply.

How does this relate to membership in the SDRILG?

- The SDRILG is a 501(c)5 nonprofit created by the Farm Bureau in 2008 to assist its members with compliance with water quality regulations. Initially, the MS4 Ag Waiver was the focus.
- When the current Ag Order was adopted by the Regional Board in 2016, the SDRILG modified their strategy to assist the growers meet the requirements of the Ag Order.
- There will be a new version of the Ag Order, (still unknown exactly how or when, but it will affect growers here) and the SDRILG will continue to support the needs of the growers for monitoring, education and compliance.

How does the SDRILG help to keep you in compliance?

- Growers must enroll in the Ag Order to be in compliance. Enrollment in the SDRILG automatically takes care of enrollment in the Ag Order. The SDRILG will interface with the Regional Board to make sure growers are properly enrolled.
- The SDRILG is a “monitoring group”. It handles the water quality monitoring for Region 9. This is a major cost for the group.
- Monitoring water quality is a major requirement of the Ag Order.
 - Approximately 21 locations are monitored, during both the wet and dry seasons.
- Can you monitor on your own instead of being part of the SDRILG?
 - Yes, but it is not recommended. It is extremely costly to pay for monitoring. At this time, no one does it in Region 9 (San Diego and southern Riverside and Orange Counties).



There is also an educational requirement:

- The MS4 (Stormwater) program requires that growers take part in two hours of education per year on water quality, best management practices etc. This has been a requirement for about 20 years.
- Under the Ag Order, growers are also required to take part in two hours of education on water quality, best management practices etc. per year. The SDRILG coordinates educational events and online education to allow enrollees of the SDRILG to meet the annual requirement.
- SDRILG education hours also count toward the MS4 (Stormwater) program. Two birds with one stone!

So, how do I sign up for the San Diego Region Irrigated Lands Group (SDRILG)?

- It is easiest to sign up if you have a computer. If you do not have a computer available to you, please call us at: (760)745-2215. You will need to be a member of the San Diego County Farm Bureau to join the San Diego Region Irrigated Lands Group. If you are not a Farm Bureau member, please join through this link:
<https://www.cfbf.com/join>
- Here is the link join the SDRILG once you have become a member of the San Diego County Farm Bureau:
<https://www.sdirrigatedlandsgroup.org/> and click on Enroll/Member Login

Enrollment Responsibilities:

- You will need to complete a Notice of Intent (NOI) that specifies the number of acres under cultivation.
- The NOI consists of parcel information, operational details (irrigation type), maps of your growing operation, and a questionnaire that serves as your Water Quality Protection Plan (WQPP).

Complete quarterly reports:

- These reports are very simple, especially once you have done one. The questions asked are about your farming operation and growing practices. Be sure to include improvements you have made when you fill out these forms.

There is also an annual report:

- This will need to be completed by April 30 of the following calendar year. So your 2026 annual report is due by April 30, 2027. It is easy to complete especially if you are caught up on your your quarterly reports!

Did you know:

- Failure to do the paperwork is by far the most common occurrence that causes growers to be out of compliance with the Ag Order and the MS4(Stormwater) program. Be sure to complete your paperwork on time!
- Education opportunities are offered throughout the year, and there is a library of recorded presentations that may be accessed anytime you an enrolled grower is logged in to their online dashboard. <https://sdirrigatedlandsgroup.org/admin/education>
- If you have any additional questions or need assistance, please call Tasha at (760)-745-2215 or email at tasha@sdirrigatedlandsgroup.org