The Agriculture and Rural Lands Action Plan

- An Overview -
Sanctuary Advisory Council
February 25, 2002
Sanctuary Water Quality

- Good water quality is essential for a healthy ecosystem
- Offshore waters are relatively clean
- Nearshore waters, tributaries, estuaries and harbors are in need of improvement
Water Quality Protection Program
- Action Plans -

- WQPP established in 1994
- 7000 square miles of watershed in six counties
- Urban Runoff, Marinas and Boating Activities, and Regional Monitoring plans completed
- Agriculture Plan developed in 1999
Watersheds that drain to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Agriculture and Rural Lands Action Plan

**Goal:** Reduce agricultural runoff in the form of nutrients, erosion and pesticides

**Strategic Plan:** 24 strategies, 6 strategy types
- Agricultural industry plays key role
- Expanding on and leveraging existing efforts
- New programs based on identified gaps
Concerns of the Ag Community During Planning

- Landowner concerns that working with agencies would lead to fines and regulatory action
- Economic viability of agriculture would be further impacted
- Mutual mistrust between agriculture industry and environmental organizations
Ag Plan Components

1) Strengthen agriculture industry networks
2) Improve technical info and outreach
3) Increase education and public relations
4) Regulatory coordination and streamlining
5) Funding mechanisms and incentives
6) Public lands and rural roads maintenance
Strategy 1

Strengthening Agriculture Industry Networks

- Information spreads from farmer to farmer
- Goal: Working together on water quality improvements per watershed
- Coalition of Central Coast Farm Bureaus formed in 1998
Coalition of County Farm Bureaus

- Water Quality Action Plans for each of the counties identify priority watersheds
- Farm Bureau Watershed Coordinators organize watershed working groups
- Working groups address local water quality issues
Pilot Watersheds
Farm Water Quality Short Courses

- UC Cooperative Extension courses offered in all six counties
- Technical training, overview of water quality issues, introduction to agencies and staff contacts
- Land managers develop farm water quality protection plans for their properties
Monitoring Water Quality and Tracking Success

- Watershed scale water quality monitoring
  - Annual watershed reports
- Farm or field scale monitoring
- Conservation practice tracking
Strategy 2

Improving Technical Information and Outreach

- Coordinated field presence, interagency cooperation
- Increased NRCS technical field staff to support water quality projects
- Compilation of technical outreach materials and costs of conservation measures
- Development and promotion of self-monitoring tools
Technical assistance to promote conservation

-Cover Cropping-
Grassed Waterway
Technical Outreach Materials

Controlling Erosion on hillside farm roads

Do your roads wash out in the winter?
Do you lose crops due to sediment washout?
Do your farm ditches fill up with sediments?
Does the creek downstream from your farm look muddy?

were yes to any of these:

Furrow Alignment

soil erosion, runoff, and improving irrigation on hillside agriculture

A How-To Guide for Growers
Self Monitoring Tools: Nitrate Test Kits
Strategy 3

Education and Public Relations

- Increase grower and public awareness of watershed management
  - Watershed assessments
- Increase public knowledge of and support for agricultural conservation measures
Sediment Basin
Strategy 3

Education and Public Relations

- Increase grower and public awareness of watershed management
- Increase public knowledge of and support for agricultural conservation measures
- Marketing firm hired to encourage farmer participation and public support of Ag Plan implementation
- Website development for multi-agency field staff and farmers/ranchers and public
- Hispanic farmer outreach strategies
Strategy 4

Regulatory Permit Coordination for Conservation Measures

- Multi-agency permits can be costly and time consuming
- Goal: Remove regulatory disincentives for water quality improvement work
- Watershed permits protect resources while removing barriers to installing conservation measures on properties
Elkhorn Slough Permit Coordination Results

- 1998-2000 Elkhorn Slough Conservation Benefits:
  - 33,600 tons of soil captured on 26 farms
  - 9,000 tons annually retained on farm
  - 1.5 miles of stream enhancement
  - More riparian projects
  - More farmers using NRCS practice standard
  - Reaching new farmers
Strategy 5

Funding Mechanisms and Incentives

- Goal: Improve knowledge of and access to funding sources
- EQIP and other cost share programs
  - GPA status - Watershed based funding
  - RCD cost share grants
- Fields to Ocean program
Strategy 6

Public Lands and Rural Roads

- Road maintenance training
- Increase conservation measures on agency / public trust lands
Eroded culvert
Leveraging Resources

- Congressional USDA allocation to NRCS
- Multiple grants to Farm Bureau Coalition, Sanctuary, RCDs, UCCE, etc.
- Ag industry participation
- Enhanced collaboration with many organizations
- Increased awareness of water quality issues
- New staff hires set the stage for future implementation efforts
Lessons Learned

- Ag Plan brought together diverse, often adverse, stakeholders
- Collaborative planning process led to long-term stakeholder support and leveraged efforts of partner organizations
- Agency collaboration improved by strategic plan structure
- Industry-led program created momentum for farmer-led initiatives