

Seasonal Land Fallowing: A Partnership Benefitting Agriculture and Cities



Building on their successful seasonal fallowing pilot program, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and Bard Water District developed a long-term partnership to boost water supplies for Southland cities and support Bard's agricultural economy. Under a seven-year agreement through 2026, participating farmers avoid planting lower-value, water-intensive crops during the spring and summer in exchange for financial incentives, while in the winter and fall they continue to plant higher-value crops, such as vegetables and lettuce varieties. The conserved water is then made available to Metropolitan for use in its service area, or to store in Lake Mead for future use. As part of the agreement, 25 percent of Metropolitan's payments fund improvements to Bard's water infrastructure.

Partner: Bard Water District

Bard is a unit of the Yuma Project, created by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and receives water via the All-American Canal. Through the seasonal fallowing program, Metropolitan diverts the water saved into its Colorado River Aqueduct at Lake Havasu, about 153 river miles upstream from Bard.



A Long-Term Partnership

The program offers Metropolitan an innovative, flexible and affordable water supply. At the same time, the program supports the local economy by providing a stable source of income for farmers and funding system improvements for Bard. Although participating farmers are paid to use less water, Bard retains all water rights.

Different Seasons, Different Crop Values

Desert agriculture realizes a market advantage in the winter for high-value vegetables such as lettuce and broccoli. In the hot summer, farmers typically grow lower-value, water-intensive commodities such as grains and grasses. By fallowing a portion of their land during hotter months, Bard farmers earn financial incentives in exchange for entering into fallowing agreements for conserved water.

Mutual Benefits

3,000*
acres of farmland
seasonally
fallowed

up to 6,000*
acre-feet of water
made available for
urban use

\$1.4 million*
maximum
payments to Bard
farmers

*Annual totals



Broccoli is a higher-value winter crop



Sudan grass is a water-intensive summer crop

Metropolitan and the Colorado River: Progress Through Collaboration

Drought conditions and climate change are exacerbating what is already an imbalance between supplies and demands in the Colorado River Basin. The seasonal land fallowing program exemplifies Metropolitan's commitment to finding new and workable ways to maintain agricultural productivity while providing reliable supplies to the Southland economy. With the Bard agreement, Metropolitan has now developed partnerships with all agricultural entities in California that use Colorado River water.

Metropolitan continues to develop partnerships and programs within California and throughout the Colorado River Basin to ensure water supply reliability.



Voluntary land fallowing with the Palo Verde Irrigation District



Funding water conservation projects in the Imperial Irrigation District



Storing water in Lake Mead for future use



Incentivizing lower water use with the Quechan Tribe

WHO IS METROPOLITAN

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a state-established cooperative that, along with its 26 cities and retail suppliers, provide water for 19 million people in six counties. The district imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies, and helps its members to develop increased water conservation, recycling, storage and other resource-management programs.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is to provide its service area with adequate and reliable supplies of high-quality water to meet present and future needs in an environmentally and economically responsible way.

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

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