

**An Invitation for Collaborative Research**  
**October 27, 2003**

**Dear Sacramento Valley Water Coalition Stakeholders:**

I am writing to invite the stakeholders of the Sacramento Valley Water Coalition to collaborate with me on a study of agricultural watershed groups in the Sacramento River basin. The main goal of the study is to understand the factors that encourage farmer participation in watershed groups and their views on agricultural waivers and best management practices. I believe that understanding the views of individual landowners and operators is critical for designing good public policy that addresses the concerns of the agricultural community. The study I propose will evaluate these views using objective social science methods. Attached to this introductory letter is an outline of the study.

I would like to study the Sacramento River Valley Water Coalition because the Coalition is one of the most prominent examples in California of a voluntary, collaborative approach to watershed management. As you know, the collaborative approach is being forwarded as a viable alternative to regulatory requirements for addressing water quality concerns. These concerns have been brought to the forefront by the recent changes in the agricultural waivers. My research will be an excellent opportunity to identify the factors that lead to a successful watershed program.

The research methods focus on a survey of individual farmers/ranchers, most likely targeting Sutter and Colusa basins, and Yolo County. The survey asks questions about the conservation practices on their farms, participation in Coalition activities, and a variety of social attitudes. The survey is based on a pilot study I conducted in collaboration with the Florida Farm Bureau on the Suwannee River Partnership in Florida; I can provide a copy of that survey upon request. All data collected will remain confidential and will meet University of California guidelines for human subjects research, which require the same level of privacy protections accorded to participants in medical studies. The main audiences for the study are academic researchers and agricultural policy stakeholders in California. The study is funded by the Russell Sage Foundation, a private, non-partisan research foundation that sponsors a variety of social science projects.

This study cannot be accomplished without collaboration from leadership in the agricultural community, both at the state level (e.g. NCWA and CURES) and within individual basins (e.g., Farm Bureau, RCD, Cooperative Extension). Agricultural leaders would review and help design the survey questions, to insure the survey is appropriately adapted to the Sacramento Valley and collects useful information. Agricultural leaders can also help identify the appropriate owners and operators to be contacted, and help design an effective method for delivering the survey. Lastly, agricultural leaders represent trusted organizations among the agricultural community and can help increase farmer participation in the survey.

In the next few weeks, I am hopeful that Coalition stakeholders will agree to help me launch the study, in particular by serving as a member of a review committee for the survey design. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions; my contact information is on the attached outline. I sincerely hope you are interested in collaborating on this study, and look forward to working with you.

Best regards,  
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**Trust and Cooperation in Watershed Management**  
**Presented to Coalition of Central Coast County Farm Bureaus, 3/19/2003**

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**Research Overview**

**Main Research Questions**

- Factors explaining farmer participation in local watershed groups, including perceptions of effectiveness, support for policies, and BMP implementation.
- Role of trust in facilitating cooperation, including effect of trust on behavior and precursors to trust

**National Importance**

- Emergence of TMDL and non-point source pollution on national policy agenda
- Debate between collaborative and regulatory approaches to controlling non-point source pollution

**Local Importance**

- Policy context: Agricultural waivers and watershed groups.
- Improving the effectiveness of watershed groups
- Fine tuning educational programs
- Targeting conservation leaders
- Provide foundation for long-term participation
- Demonstrate effectiveness to state policy-makers

**Methodology**

- Survey research of individual growers (target response rate 50%) in Colusa and Sutter Basins, and Yolo County
- Focuses on owner-operators as critical decision-makers (owners, renters, employees)
- Survey delivery: Local delivery versus professional survey research firm (most likely UC Berkeley)
- Privacy considerations: Confidentiality and human subjects procedures

**Relation to Previous Work**

- Collaborative watershed partnerships
- Suwannee River Partnership and Florida farmers

## Partnership with the Sacramento Water Quality Coalition

### **Research Infrastructure**

- Construction of sample frame: Contact information for sample of landowners and operators, with Agriculture Commissioner pesticide lists as basis.
- Sample design: Target all growers, or sample by county? Depends on total number of growers
- Survey design: Identification of relevant and forms of participation, policy concerns, and farm attributes like crop types

### **Survey Delivery**

- Importance of local knowledge and trust—study impossible without local support
- Possible to have local agencies actually deliver survey, with telephone follow-ups
- Alternative strategy is to only use survey research operation

### **Timeline**

- Overall, as soon as possible.
- Survey development: Immediately
- Sample construction: Immediately through summer 2004
- Target survey delivery after 2004 harvest season (or another recommended time)

### **Funding**

- Currently funded by \$120,000 research grant from Russell Sage Foundation Initiative on Trust; possibility of going back to them for more funding if needed
- Estimated cost for initial survey: \$30,000
- Long-term strategy provides basis for new funding requests to National Science Foundation, CALFED, or other appropriate agencies

### **Audience**

- Academic researchers in professional journals, through scientific publications
- Stakeholders in Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition, through reports prepared in collaboration with Coalition
- California and National agricultural and water policy leaders