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Ag group honored for water work
Multicounty alliance wins environmental award for self-monitoring program

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The Gilroy Dispatch

A new cooperative to ensure that local waterways are protected from fertilizers, pesticides and other waste products from irrigated land has been awarded the state's highest environmental ward.

The Agriculture Water Quality Alliance includes a number of regional agencies as well as farm bureaus and farmers in Monterey, Santa Clara, San Benito, Santa Cruz, San Mateo and San Luis Obispo counties.

On Tuesday, the alliance was honored with the Governor's Economic and Environmental Leadership Award for a program in which farmers agree to update their methods and monitor each other to ensure they're meeting the latest environmental regulations.

"I'm happy that local farmers are getting recognized for being good stewards of the land," said Jenny Derry, executive director of the Santa Clara County Farm Bureau. "Our local farmers have committed to protecting water quality. It's nice to see them rewarded for their efforts."

To be certified in the program, farmers must attend 15 hours of classes on water quality issues and prepare a plan that details how they intend to maintain good water quality.

Since the program was established last year, 21,819 acres, or more than half of the county's farmland, have been covered with Farm Water Quality Plans. To date, 120 farms have sent employees to water quality classes.

A statement from the governor's office said the alliance was honored for "innovative and sustainable approaches to land and water management that restore or protect natural conditions, functions and processes, and provide economic, social and environmental benefits."