

## Recycled water touted for landscaping, crops

By Zeke Barlow

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In the future, the most reliable water for Ventura County might not come from the Sierras, the Colorado River or even the sky; it could come from your toilet, sinks and showers.

As the dependability of imported water sources becomes increasingly unpredictable, a number of water officials around the county are looking into how to ramp up recycled water programs and expand the ones already in existence. An \$11.4 billion bond measure recently proposed by the state Legislature would set aside about 10 percent of the funds to enhance and expand recycled water programs if voters approve it.

Though the likelihood of drinking recycled water in the county is small, it is being looked at to offset the amount of potable water needed for irrigating crops, golf courses and lawns, thereby increasing the amount of available drinking water.

Recycled water is wastewater from homes and businesses that undergoes at least three levels of treatment before being made available for limited uses on landscaping and crops, which consume the most water in Southern California.

"When you look at the horizon, the most cost-effective and environmentally sensitive solution is to reuse the water that we have already put into our system," said John Krist, CEO of Farm Bureau of Ventura County and a member of a task force examining how recycled water use can be increased. "What is the most reasonable, viable means of increasing the water supply? Increasingly, people are looking at this highly treated purified water."

Around the state, an estimated 3.5 million acre feet of wastewater that could be reused with some or no additional treatment is sent to the ocean, said David Smith, managing director of the California section of the WateReuse Association. That's about 8 percent of the water used in the state annually.

Smith said the amount that has been recycled has doubled in the past 10 years and the industry group would like to see 2 million acre feet reused by 2020. One acre foot supplies a family of four with one year of water.

"This water that is being directed to the ocean represents our future water supply,"

Smith said.

Currently, only about 17 percent of treated water in Ventura County is being recycled, said Frank Royer, general manager of Camrosa Water District, which supplies 70 percent of the recycled water in the county.

The challenges of increasing the amount of recycled water fall under three categories, Krist said: pricing, plumbing and perception.

Recycling water only works if it is cheaper than imported water and it can get to the growers and other people who need it. There also needs to be a public campaign to teach people that the treated water is safe for use on food crops.

Ken Ortega, Oxnard's Public Works director, said when the city started its innovative water recycling program, educating farmers and others on the safety of the water was first.

"This is all about changing people's minds and perspectives about recycled water," he said.

The water the city will produce is cleaner than imported water, he argues, so there should be no concerns about putting it on edible crops.

Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner Henry Gonzales said some growers have expressed initial concern about safety, but he reassures them it is cleaner than well water in many instances. In Monterey County, where he used to work, more than 12,000 acres of edible row crops are irrigated with recycled water.

Oxnard is in the process of building a state-of-the-art Groundwater Recovery Enhancement and Treatment Program — or GREAT — which will treat water, then sell it to farmers and others who want to use it to water parks, golf courses and agriculture. It will also be used to pump the treated water back into the eastern edge of the Oxnard plain as a barrier against seawater intrusion. As farmers pull water from wells, there is a threat of seawater intruding into the groundwater.

The program is already in the first phase of development and as new water sources are needed, the complex infrastructure can be expanded, said Ortega. The project could cost more than \$200 million and produce about 28,000 acre feet of water when finished. As an incentive to use it, farmers would be charged 85 percent of the cost of imported water.

"This project is designed to be expanded based upon needs," said Ortega, who is already looking into how potential state bond money could be used. "We are trying to create a reliable, sustainable water supply."

Calleguas Municipal Water District, which supplies imported water to about 75 percent

of the county, is one-third of the way into a \$100 million project to build a 32-mile pipeline from Simi Valley to an outfall pipe off Port Hueneme. The pipe will carry treated wastewater that can be tapped into for irrigation along the way. At other times of the year, it will carry brine-laden water that is a produced during purification that will be dumped into the ocean.

Much of the water that will be recycled started as water that was imported from the Sierras.

"We all pay dearly for imported water, so we should use the water we paid for," said Calleguas General Manager Don Kendall.

As the cities of Thousand Oaks and Camarillo grow, they will send more water from their treatment plant down Calleguas Creek, which is where Camrosa Water District grabs water to be recycled.

The district, which supplies water to Camarillo and the Santa Rosa Valley, currently imports about 85 percent of its water but hopes to decrease that amount to 59 percent by 2015.

Part of what is needed for Camrosa and the other districts to expand is money. Many are hoping the bond measure passes and funds can be diverted to get the projects moving.

Beyond the funding, Royer said, there needs to be a realization that reusing the water is not only safe and smart but also could be the only shot we have of getting more water in a thirsty state.

"People are beginning to warm to the idea of giving this water a second life," he said. "It is what we need to do in Southern California."



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