

Overview of the Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Program and Plan in Madera County

Introduction

The Madera County Multibenefit Agricultural Land Repurposing Plan (MALRP) is the County’s framework and plan for California’s Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP).

The purpose of the MLRP (the program) is to help address critical groundwater sustainability challenges while simultaneously providing economic, environmental, and other benefits to local communities. Madera County, as one of the grantees, received \$10 million through the Department of Conservation (DOC) to develop and implement a regional MALRP.

The purpose of the Madera County MALRP (the plan) is to represent the regional approach and plan for how MLRP program funds will be mobilized in Madera County. Specifically, it contains the RFP and guidelines for how landowners and stakeholders participate in the funding opportunity.

MALRP Goals

- 1. Groundwater Sustainability:** Madera County, with significant agricultural output, faces severe water overdraft challenges. To support long-term irrigated agriculture and meet Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) targets, a significant portion of the currently irrigated agricultural lands in the County will need to be transitioned to a new condition that uses less groundwater.
- 2. Irrigated Agricultural Land Repurposing:** The MALRP prioritizes projects that result in reduced groundwater use and create other benefits for communities and the environment. The strategy focuses on offering landowners financial and technical assistance to transition portions of currently irrigated ag land to an eligible project type such as lower water use crops, habitat, renewable energy, and more.
- 3. Community Benefits:** One of the program’s core objectives is to deliver meaningful benefits to local communities. The Madera County MALRP aims to ensure that land repurposing strategies and projects contribute to improving the quality of life for local residents, especially those who live in Disadvantaged Communities (DACs). For this reason, proposed projects that are located near DACs or are close to community and domestic wells will be prioritized.
- 4. Ecosystem and Environmental Co-benefits:** The plan also seeks to create or enhance wildlife habitats, promote resource connectivity, and buffer critical waterways. In particular, proposed projects that are adjacent to significant waterways and can support flood risk mitigation will score higher in the selection process.

Key Takeaway:

*The MALRP is focused on supporting land transitions on **irrigated agricultural lands** in Madera County.*

Project Solicitation and Funding Opportunity

RFP and Pre-Application

The MALRP presents the solicitation and pre-application requirements for interested parties to develop land repurposing projects in Madera County. On October 4, the Pre-Application Form will be released and posted on the MLRP Madera page: <https://www.maderacountywater.com/multibenefit-land-repurposing-program/>.

Eligibility Criteria

All applicants for MLRP Madera funding must meet the minimum eligibility requirements. A list and description of each of the edibility requirements is provided below.

1. The applicant must be the Owner (or the Owner’s designee) of the lands being offered for the program and willing to comply with all contract terms and program provisions. This includes requiring that lands be within a Madera County GSA.
2. The Owner must be willing to repurpose currently irrigated agricultural lands for another project use for the duration of the project period (a minimum of 10 years). Previously irrigated agricultural lands may be considered if the proposed project offers a unique opportunity for achieving multibenefits.
3. The Owner must comply with all program rules defined in the Madera County MALRP and by the GSA in which the project land is located.
4. The Owner must propose a project that would implement at least one eligible project type to convert irrigated ag lands to a less water intensive use. (See Section VI of the MALRP for more details regarding eligible project types).
5. The project must provide one or more co-benefits (community and environmental benefits) in addition to any water savings provided by the by the project.

Eligible Project Types

Agriculture	Habitat	Other Benefit
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dryland Farming• Less Water Intensive Crop• Rotational Strip Cropping• Rangeland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pollinator Habitat• Floodplain Habitat• Wildlife Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Solar• Recharge• Community Recreation• Tribal/Cultural Space

Key Dates:

Pre-Application Window – October 4 through November 22, 2024

Proposal Development and Technical Assistance – November 2024 through February 2025

Project Proposals Due – February 28, 2025

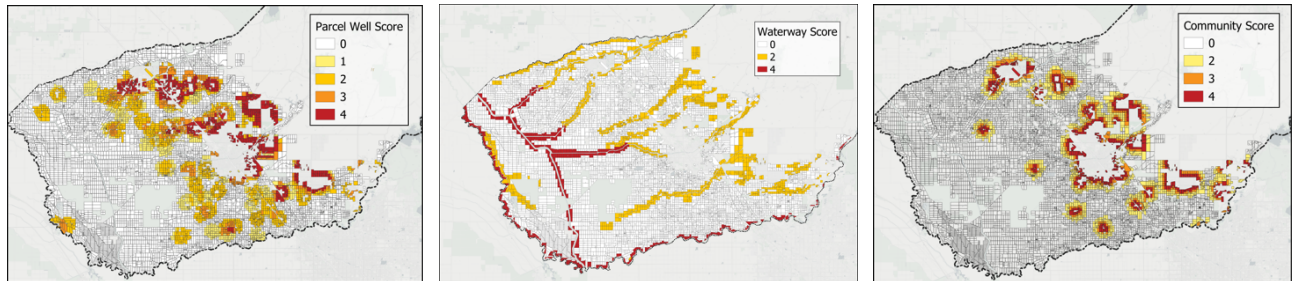
Project Scoring Approach

Projects will be scored based on a variety of factors. The scoring rubric divides evaluation into key goals (e.g., water savings and creation of co-benefits) and proposal quality (e.g., feasibility, budget, schedule, and monitoring plans). See Table 1 below for a summary of the project scoring rubric and refer to Section VIII of the MALRP document for more details regarding the rubric and scoring criteria.

Table 1. MALRP Project Scoring Approach Overview

Key Goals and Outcomes	Points	Proposal Quality and Feasibility	Points
Provide Other Co-Benefits	4	Overall Plan	4
Achieve Net Water Savings	2	Budget	8
Support Community and Domestic Wells	4	Schedule	4
Buffer Waterway Areas	4	Monitoring Plan	4
Support DAC	4		
Total	18		20

Spatial considerations are an important factor in the scoring rubric. Projects on lands that are in close proximity to DACs, at-risk community and domestic wells, and natural waterways can receive additional points. The following maps illustrate the geographic areas that present an opportunity for proposed projects to gain points according to the MALRP scoring criteria. This information is intended to be for quick reference purposes only. Please refer to Section VI of the MALRP for more detailed information, including larger versions of each map.



Incentive Payment Structure

The MLRP Madera program includes a \$1 million cap for the total incentive payment per project. Prospective projects with budgets that exceed \$1 million may be considered for MLRP Madera funding as an exception to this cap if the project clearly demonstrates that it provides a unique opportunity to deliver co-benefits that meet MLRP objectives.

The total incentive payment may include the summation of three budget categories, which are: (1) direct landowner costs for project development, design, installation, and operation, (2) any forgone income from removing the land from its current cropped use, appropriately adjusted for the income from the repurposed land use and the water supply available to the land, and (3) the public co-benefits created by the project.

Table 2. MALRP Madera Incentive Structure Overview

Category	Description	Subcomponents
1. Direct Project Costs	Compensation for project development, implementation, operating, and maintenance costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overhead/admin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Planning ○ Design ○ Permitting ○ Legal/professional review • Project construction • Project OM&R
2. Forgone Returns	Payment to cover returns that would have been realized under the existing land use, adjusted to reflect water use and/or any income from the repurposed land use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farming returns for the current crop(s), <u>adjusted</u> to reflect expected water availability • Other project financial impacts (e.g., removing land from Williamson Act)
3. MLRP Benefits	Additional bonus payment(s) for public “multi” benefits created by the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each MLRP co-benefit category is a potential subcomponent (e.g., alternative crops, solar, habitat, etc.)
TOTAL INCENTIVE PAYMENT = 1+2+3		

Reference Materials and Information:

Up-to-date information about MLRP Madera is posted on the web here:

<https://www.maderacountywater.com/multibenefit-land-repurposing-program/>.

Interested parties and stakeholders can send any questions, comments, and input on the MLRP Madera program via email to mlrp@maderacountywater.com.

Language assistance (including versions of MLRP documents and materials in Spanish) is available upon request. Contact mlrp@maderacountywater.com.

La asistencia con el idioma (incluidas versiones de los documentos y materiales de MLRP en español) está disponible a solicitud. Comuníquese con mlrp@maderacountywater.com.