



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

helping people help the land

LANDOWNER PROFILE

“Once you find out about the benefits of some of the government programs, you tend to get more involved. But you have to make a commitment. We talked about our involvement in these programs as a family, and made the decision to do those things that are good for the environment.”

— **Kevin Chiesa**

It's like taking 153,000 cars off the California highways

Take away emissions from 153,000 cars in California. That's the equivalent air quality improvement California farmers made last year by traded in 582 inefficient old tractors and other engines and replacing them with cleaner engines through their local resource conservation district offices.

“The reduction in emissions we achieved together is like taking 153,000 cars off California highways every year,” said Gayle Norman, Deputy State Conservationist for NRCS. “That’s a significant achievement, but we want to do more.” Norman says the 582 EQIP applications funded were only a fourth of the applications made by California farmers, an indication of the demand for funds and willingness of farmers to participate.

Kevin Chiesa, a Hughson, Calif. ranch and shop manager, who traded an old, polluting orchard field tractor for a new, fuel-efficient model through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offered by NRCS, is one grower who wants to do more.

“I am going to apply to do the same thing with two more old tractors,” said the walnut and almond grower and part owner of the Grower Direct Nut Company.



Kevin Chiesa

Chiesa says their operation received 50 percent EQIP cost-share and a 20 percent grant from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to help purchase the new tractor. A number of conditions had to be met to retire an old tractor in running condition, including proving use of the old tractor within the past two years, purchase a replacement that was within 25 percent of the horsepower of the old tractor and significant emissions reduction.



NRCS and the local resource conservation district used EQIP to help Kevin Chiesa retire his old tractor, above, for a new one, below, that's at least 60 percent better on emissions.



“There have to be incentives to get producers to take voluntary action,” said Chiesa.

Getting more involved

“Once you find out about the benefits of some of the government programs, you tend to get more involved,” said Chiesa, a third generation farmer in the family operation at Ronald Martella Farms, Inc. “But you have to make a commitment. We talked about our involvement in these programs as a family and made the decision to do those things that are good for the environment.”

That started in 1997 when Chiesa worked with the NRCS through the East Stanislaus Resource Conservation District to begin switching from flood irrigation to micro

sprinkler systems on his land.

“The micro sprinklers allow us to spoon feed the walnut trees to get only the root zone wet,” explained Chiesa. “Walnuts don’t really like to be wet, so that’s a big advantage over flood irrigation. It’s also going to be more economical as water gets more expensive.”

Chiesa upgraded a stationary diesel irrigation pump that offered him a 15 percent fuel savings and runs cleaner than an older pump. Now, he intends to replace the diesel pump with a new electric pump that has no emissions. He has had five different applications submitted for assistance to convert to more micro sprinkler replacement systems and currently has two applications in process. He chips and mulches the annual prunings from his 1500 acres of walnut and almond trees instead of burning them.



MICRO SPRINKLERS: Kevin Chiesa's first contract with NRCS was in 1997 to begin converting to micro sprinklers for improved irrigation on his walnuts and almonds.



“The workload in air quality improvement, a high priority for the East Stanislaus RCD, has been gradually building since 2004,” said Melanie Fisher, a resource technician for the RCD. “We worked with producers who applied for cost-share for air quality improvement practices like replacing diesel engine tractors, shredding brush instead of burning it and conversion to conservation tillage systems. Other practices farmers implemented were dust suppression and replacing stationary irrigation pump engines.”

“The 345 EQIP contracts in the Stanislaus Resource Conservation District obligated more than \$9 million for better air and water quality in 2009, a figure that’s more than four times what it was in 2007,” said NRCS District Conservationist Chris Hartley of Modesto, Calif. “We’ve all been busy around here.”

CHIP VS. BURN: Joe Mota of NRCS and Jonna Wilkinson of the East Stanislaus Resource Conservation District talk about the merits of chipping, rather than burning, brush in orchards. Kevin Chiesa is one of many farmers who now chip.