

# **The Modesto Bee**

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By Leslie Albrecht

## **Irrigate with waste water: Modesto says 'yes' to plan**

The water you flush down your toilet could one day water almond orchards on the West Side.

The Modesto City Council on Tuesday approved a plan to join forces with Ceres, Turlock and Stanislaus County on a proposal to sell the cities' treated waste water to farmers for irrigation.



In this March 31, 2004 file photo, Joe Dickens walks with the family dog "Jake" in his family's peach orchard on Wellsford Road in Modesto as he tends the irrigation . The Modesto City Council on Tuesday approved a plan to join forces with Ceres, Turlock and Stanislaus County on a proposal to sell the cities' treated waste water to farmers for irrigation. (Debbie Noda / dnoda@modbee.com) - -

Turlock's council unanimously approved the Partnership later Tuesday.

Leaders call the idea a "win-win" because it would create revenue for cash-strapped cities and replenish water supplies for farmers. Using treated waste water to water crops is considered safe. Growers in Castroville use recycled waste water on farmland.

Modesto and the other cities want to build a pipeline to pump treated waste water to the Del Puerto Water District, a 45,000-acre span along Interstate 5 that's been hard hit by the water shortage.

Building the infrastructure to deliver the water would cost tens of millions of dollars. The project will work only if the cities and county can win federal grants to pay for the delivery system, Councilman Brad Hawn said before Tuesday's meeting.

If Modesto and the other cities had to pay for the infrastructure, those costs would be passed on to customers and the water would be priced too high for farmers, Hawn said.

Working with Ceres, Turlock and the county boosts chances of winning federal grants because lawmakers prefer to support regional projects. Local leaders introduced federal legislators to the idea in February during a lobbying trip to Washington, D.C. The idea was well-received, said Mayor Jim Ridenour, who was on the trip.

"It's a really a good project," Ridenour said. "It's really thought of highly of back in D.C. We have a good chance of getting some funding."

The Del Puerto Water District's water deliveries have been slashed to 10 percent of its usual allotment. As a result, the water district has been forced to use lower-quality groundwater and buy expensive water from other sources.

Buying treated waste water would guarantee a steady supply of high-quality water for farmers, said Director of Utility Projects and Planning Nick Pinhey at Tuesday's meeting.

Selling the treated water could generate \$1.8 million to \$2.3 million in new revenue per year for Modesto, Pinhey told The Bee in January.