

Proteus to train agriculture workers affected by drought for renewable energy jobs

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[Proteus](#) aims to train 120 agriculture workers affected by the drought in renewable energy jobs.

The Visalia-based education, employment and community services nonprofit expects to get some \$800,000 of a more than \$1.7 million grant awarded by the California Employment Development Department to [La Cooperativa Campesina de California](#). La Cooperativa is a Sacramento-based consortium of five nonprofits, including Proteus.

Mike McCann, CEO of Proteus, said the funds will be used to train low-income, underemployed agriculture workers in weatherization and solar installation. This is the third year of the grant.

“Farmworkers are working,” McCann said. “They’re just not working as many hours.”

An [economic analysis released in August](#) by the University of California at Davis estimates the drought has led to the loss of more than 10,000 seasonal farm jobs – about 5 percent – and 21,000 total job losses throughout the state.

267

The estimated number of agriculture workers to be trained in other fields throughout the state

The training can last 11 weeks, depending on the position. Proteus will seek workers from Tulare, Kings and Fresno counties.

The Employment Development Department grant will fund training for an estimated 267 workers total throughout the state. Most of the workers will have limited job skills and occupational options, and live in regions with higher unemployment.

Other organizations receiving funding:

- Employers’ Training Resource (Kern and Inyo counties)
- Central Valley Opportunity Center (Madera, Stanislaus and Merced counties)
- Center for Employment Training (coastal California)

Marco Lizarraga, executive director of La Cooperativa, said most of the funding is going to Proteus because the central San Joaquin Valley has the most demand for solar energy and is significantly affected by the drought. Plus, he said, farmworkers and other agricultural laborers have been hard-hit by machines replacing manual labor.

Lizarraga said between 60 percent and 70 percent of those trained get placed into related permanent jobs.

The training grant accompanies a [U.S. Department of Labor grant](#) of up to \$18 million, announced in July, that provides temporary work for those affected by the drought. La Cooperativa received \$13.2 million, of which an estimated \$4.6 million will go to Proteus.

Proteus is now [seeking workers to apply](#) for the temporary jobs.

The recent funding might be coming just in time. A [report released last month](#) by the Central Valley Community Foundation (formerly the Fresno Regional Foundation) said nonprofits in the Valley are stretched thin by the drought

and need more funding to keep up with demand.

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