

California farmers flood fields to combat drought

Water Technology
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FRESNO, Calif. — Nov. 24, 2015 — A Central Valley farmer is convincing other farmers to flood their fields with stormwater to replenish groundwater, according to cnbc.com.

Don Cameron, who grows a variety of crops including almonds, grapes, carrots and tomatoes, experimented with the technique in 2011 on wine grapes, noted the article. He flooded a 300-acre vineyard with stormwater, letting them stand in more than a foot of water for five months.

The vines survived, and Cameron said in the article that probably 3,000 acre feet of water went into the aquifer underground. “A lot of our neighbors thought we were crazy.”

Cameron got the idea in 1983 after huge storms blew through the area, reported the article. He’s now quadrupling with the capacity of a canal to reap the benefits of the coming El Niño, a project that will cost \$7 million and which is supported by federal grants. The rationale is that farmers can flood fields when the water is not needed so that the water will be there during the growing season.

The underground aquifer has fallen to 250 feet beneath the surface, stated the article, so other growers have agreed to join Cameron to replenish it. Many farmers have been accused of over-pumping the groundwater to support their crops.

San Francisco-based nonprofit [Sustainable Conservation](#) joined the effort, and Cameron wants it and the [Almond Board of California](#) to head up a larger scale flooding experiment. “We’re looking to do 10 demonstration projects, not just almonds, but on other tree fruits and grapes as well,” said Daniel Mountjoy, director of resource stewardship at Sustainable Conservation, in the release. “Some growers say they want to do it on five acres, some say they’ll do it on 20, some say they’ll do it on 150, 160 acres.”

The method works best on sandy, porous soil to allow the water to easily seep underground, shared the article. According to Cameron, growers need to be more cautious about the effects flooding could have on crops such as almonds.

Mountjoy noted in the article that storm runoff also has new market potential. “That’s a new discussion that’s going on in the state capital right now around, ‘What are the rights to floodwater?’” Mountjoy said in the article. “No one’s asked that question before.”

You can find the entire article [here](#).