

## Watershed Coalition Coordinator Will Assist Local Growers

By Kay Mercer, Southern San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties Agricultural Watershed Coalition

In a watershed, every type of land use effects water quality and the quality of the environment in general. Local agricultural growers are concerned about using water efficiently and reducing pollution, and also about new water quality regulations that will affect their operations. In response to this, the Southern San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties Watershed Coalition has hired a new coordinator, Kay Mercer, to assist growers in improving their operations and meeting the new requirements.

The Agricultural Watershed Coalition comprises the Central Coast Wine Growers Association; Santa Barbara County Farm Bureau; The Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association; Santa Barbara County Flower and Nursery Growers Association; and Santa Barbara County Cattleman's Association. The Watershed Coalition is partially funded through grants from the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The balance of the funding comes from the coalition members.

As the Coordinator, Kay's goal is to assist growers in complying with the Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Irrigated Agriculture, which was adopted by the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) in July 2004. The purpose of the Waiver is to reduce impacts to surface water and conduct monitoring to measure overall water quality improvement, particularly in the impaired watersheds. The Waiver is unprecedented in that it was crafted by consensus among 23 agricultural associations and several environmental, conservation, and special interest groups.

Initially, Kay will target the Carpinteria Creek, Carpinteria Marsh (Franklin and Santa Monica creeks), Santa Maria River, and Oso Floco River watersheds. Her first objective is to inform growers about Waiver requirements so that they may file a Notice of Intent to enroll by Jan 1, 2005. A grower must submit the following to enroll: 1) an application form which identifies owners and operators; 2) a copy of a farm map; 3) a management practice checklist; 4) certificates of attendance at RWQCB-approved courses; 5) the status of a farm water quality plan; and 6) election for cooperative or individual monitoring. If a grower has not completed the above items, she/he should still enroll and submit a report of what has been accomplished.

Kay is particularly well-suited to this type of challenge. She has B.S and M.S. degrees in Agronomy with specialties in Range Management and Weed Science. She has worked for an environmental analytical laboratory and groundwater remediation firm, and is a licensed Pest Control Advisor. Kay's diverse background will give her an advantage in tackling the challenges of water quality.

Over the next few months, Kay will inform growers of RWQCB approved seminars; have a series of grower meetings; develop a website; and work with a variety of associations

and coalitions to continue outreach. Additionally, Kay will be involved with development and implementation of a region-wide Monitoring Program. Agricultural growers will administer this program, with input from other non-agricultural stakeholders and RWQCB approval. In 2005, Kay will work with growers and other interested parties to implement appropriate Best Management Practices.

To find additional information on the Waiver, check the RWQCB website <http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb3/index>. You may contact Kay at [sbagcoalition@verizon.net](mailto:sbagcoalition@verizon.net) or call (805) 928-6301. The Coordinator's headquarters will be located in Santa Maria, California.