Conservation Programs

ON CALIFORNIA RICELANDS

California's rice fields serve as surrogate wetlands that sustain hundreds of species, support millions of waterfowl and shorebirds, and benefit broader ecosystems across the Central Valley—all while producing high-quality rice. Programs that support these outcomes can offer real value to your operation, from technical assistance to incentive payments for conservation practices.

California Winter Rice Habitat Incentive Program CWRHIP

Provides financial assistance for flooding harvested rice fields for 70 continuous days during the winter months. This program is funded by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. More details are available at **calricewaterbirds.org/cwrhip**.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) EQIP and RCPP

Provides financial assistance to implement a variety of conservation practices, including winter and shoulder season flooding, cover cropping for nesting habitat, and other habitat enhancements. Payment rates vary annually and details are available at local NRCS County offices.

California Ricelands Waterbird Foundation (CRWF) Bid4Birds

Provides financial assistance for rice farmers, through competitive auctions, to create shallow-flooded habitat for migratory waterbirds in the Spring and Fall shoulder seasons. More details available at **calricewaterbirds.org**.

California Trout (Cal Trout) Fish Food Program

Provides financial assistance for pulsed flooding of rice fields to produce food for fish (aquatic bugs) and export floodwater back to the rivers where fish can access this important resource. Concurrent enrollment with EQIP, RCPP and CWRHIP is allowed. Status for winter 2026-27 still TBD. More details available at **calricewaterbirds.org/fish-food**.

CalRiceNews.org

Whether you're new to conservation programs or looking to expand your participation, the Conservation Program Recommendation Tool makes it easier to find the right fit—tailored to your farm's needs and conservation goals.

BirdReturns (Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership; The Nature Conservancy, Audubon, Point Blue Conservation Sci)

This program is funded by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. More details are available at **birdreturns.org**.

- **BirdReturns–Late Summer Farmlands:** Provides financial assistance for farmers of various wildlife-friendly crops in the Delta and Sacramento Valley regions to create shallow-flooded habitat for migratory waterbirds during the late summer/fall shoulder season (July to September).
- **BirdReturns–Sandhill Cranes:** Provides financial assistance for farmers who have flooded and/or non-flooded rice or other wildlife-friendly crop to create a mosaic of habitats to support Sandhill Cranes in the winter (October to March).
- **BirdReturns–Wetlands:** Provides financial assistance for private wetland managers in the entire Central Valley to provide flooded habitat for migratory waterbirds in late spring and early fall, and nesting and brood-rearing habitat in summer.

Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program NBHIP (California Waterfowl Association; CWA)

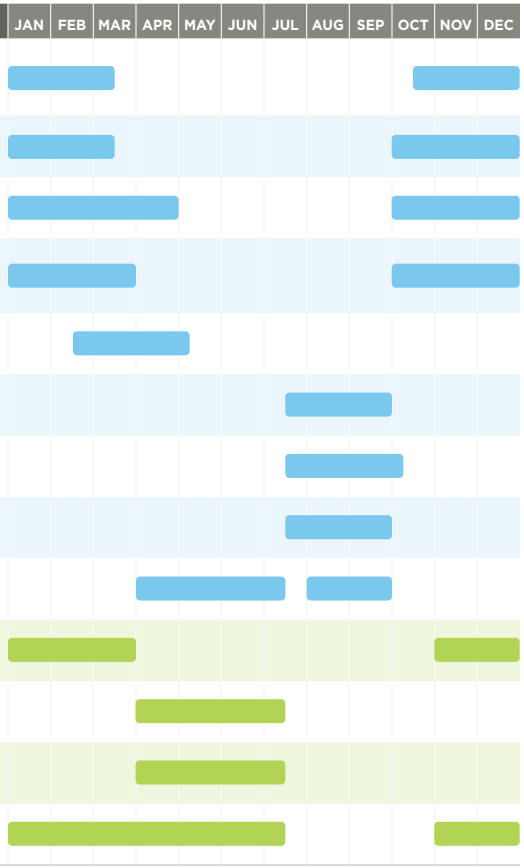
This program is funded by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. More details available at **calwaterfowl.org/nesting-bird-habitat-incentive-program**.

- **Fallow Agriculture and Cover Crop Program:** Provides financial assistance for farmers willing to delay the termination of the vegetation (cover crops or volunteer veg) in fallow agricultural fields until July 15 or later.
- **Rice Levee Program:** Provides financial assistance for farmers willing to leave rice levees vegetated from the winter through the duck nesting season (January 1–July 15 or later).

California Rice
It's in our Nature

Incentive programs may be stacked on the same field when they support different conservation practices or seasonal habitat objectives, but producers cannot receive payments from multiple programs for the same practice at the same time on the same field.

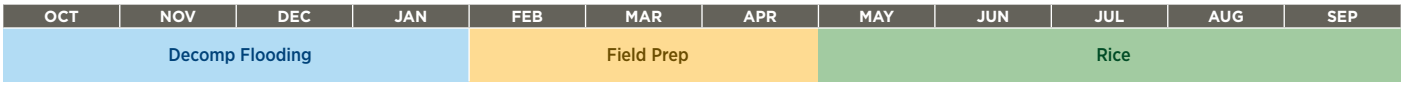
Program Name	Admin	$/Acre	Practices	Requirements
CA Winter Rice Habitat Incentive Program	CRC	$30 West side; $15 East side	Flooding	Fields must be planted to rice in current season. 70 days of flooding at depths of 2–10″
EQIP/RCPP	NRCS	$27 – $118**	Flooding	90 days of flooding at depths of 4–8″ plus a gradual drawdown after Feb 10th
Fish Food Program	Cal Trout	Bid	Pulsed Flooding	At least 3 weeks of flooding plus a drawdown with multiple cycles possible
BirdReturns – Sandhill Cranes	TNC	$95	Flooded and/or Dry not-tilled	8 weeks of dry or flooding at depths of 2–9″
Bid4Birds – Spring	CRWF	Bid	Shallow Flooding	4–12 weeks of flooding at depths of 1–4″
EQIP/RCPP	NRCS	$118**	Shallow Flooding	2 weeks at depths 2–4″ plus an evaporative drawdown
Bid4Birds – Fall	CRWF	Bid	Shallow Flooding	3–4 weeks at depths of 1–4″ plus an evaporative drawdown
BirdReturns – Late Summer Farmlands	TNC	Bid	Shallow Flooding	3 weeks of flooding at 1–4″ plus a 2-week evaporative drawdown
BirdReturns – Wetlands	Audubon	Bid	Flooding	Gradual drawdown in spring or flood-up in late summer
EQIP/RCPP*	NRCS	$74 – $99**	Cover Crop	Plant cover crops
RCPP*	NRCS	$24**	Cover Crop	Leave cover crops/vegetation on unplanted rice fields for nesting birds
NBHIP – Fallow Ag*	CWA	$30 – $110	Cover Crop	Leave cover crops/vegetation on unplanted rice fields for nesting birds
NBHIP – Rice Levees	CWA	$0.80/ft	Rice field levee	Leave vegetated levees undisturbed for nesting birds



*Incentives for planting cover crops can be stacked with incentives for retaining those cover crops or volunteer vegetation into the breeding season. These programs are compatible with both prevented planting insurance and water transfers.

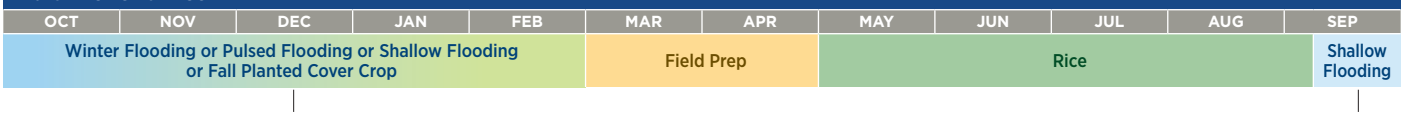
**Rate subject to change.

Standard Practice



Alternative Conservation Practices and Incentive Opportunities

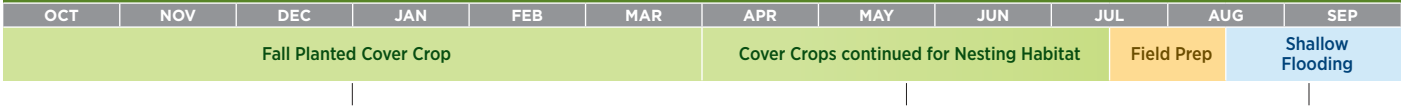
Multi-Benefit Rice



CWRHIP *or* BirdReturns–Sandhill Cranes *or* EQIP/RCPP *and/or* Fish Food *and/or* Bid4Birds–Spring

Bid4Birds–Fall

Fallow – Cover Crop Rotation



EQIP/RCPP

RCPP *or* NBHIP–Fallow Ag

Bid4Birds–Fall *or* EQIP/RCPP *or* BirdReturns–Late Summer Farmlands

Fallow – Flooding Rotation

CWRHIP *or* BirdReturns–Sandhill Cranes *or* EQIP/RCPP *and/or* Fish Food *and/or* Bid4Birds–Spring

Bid4Birds–Fall *or* EQIP/RCPP *or* BirdReturns–Late Summer Farmlands