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Farmers Offered Funding to Help Protect Nesting Tricolored Blackbirds in their Fields

DAVIS, Calif., March 10, 2015 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Farmers who have Tricolored Blackbirds nesting in their fields may be eligible for financial assistance from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to delay silage harvesting and allow the birds 35 days to fledge their young. Interested producers should submit an application as soon as possible because the application-ranking period closes April 17 for available funding.

"A unique partnership of dairy farmers and environmental experts continues to work together to help protect both an imperiled bird and the long-term sustainability of California's dairy industry," says Carlos Suarez, NRCS state conservationist for California. "The goal is to create a strong incentive for farmers to voluntarily help these birds recover."

Each spring, Tricolored Blackbirds build large colonies of nests in the Central Valley areas that were once marshy ecosystems and are now cropland. About 43 percent of the birds now use silage crops such as triticale and wheat to build their nests. Since Tricolored Blackbirds are colonial nesters, thousands of birds may be impacted by harvest operations that conflict with the fledging dates of the young birds. The species is now federally listed as a Bird of Conservation Concern, emergency listed as a State of California Endangered Species, and also protected under the provisions of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Entering its third year, this NRCS Tricolored Blackbird Initiative helps farmers who have Tricolored Blackbirds nesting in their fields by providing incentive payments to delay harvest until the young birds have fledged. Each year, approximately 65,000 breeding birds are saved – one-fifth of the species' entire global population – by participating farmers delaying their harvest schedule.

Last month, this initiative was selected as one of the first NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) recipients, providing expanded federal funding and technical assistance. RCPP was launched in the 2014 Farm Bill to bring together partners with shared conservation causes. This partnership effort includes the Western United Dairymen, Audubon California, Dairy Cares, California Farm Bureau, and Sustainable Conservation organizations.

Tricolored Blackbirds may choose different fields in different years and only farmers in Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Riverside, Stanislaus, and Tulare counties, who actually have Tricolored Blackbirds on their property in a winter silage crop, are eligible to participate.

More information on NRCS' products and services can be found on the NRCS California web site at www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov (<http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/>).

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