

# **Frequently Asked Questions for Avocado/Citrus Mulching after the Firestorms of 2007 in San Diego County**

Many orchards in San Diego County were severely damaged in the October, 2007 firestorm. As many as 20,000 avocado trees were burned. This represents a major economic loss to the agricultural community in San Diego County.

The Farm Service Center of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Indio (Tel: (760) 347-3675 Extension 110) and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) (Tel: (760) 745-2061) have initiated financial aid programs to remove debris from orchards, replace livestock fencing, protect newly exposed soil from severe erosion and install agriculture infrastructure.

Chipping and mulching vegetative materials whenever possible for immediate application to the soil will conserve water and soil. This fact sheet answers questions regarding the debris removal and management of the mulches.

## **Why chip and mulch instead of hauling the wood away?**

If you chip and mulch wood and spread it in the immediate areas of the orchard, you will prevent soil erosion. The mulch will also help conserve water. The application should not be more than five inches deep. After steep slopes are protected, excess chips and mulch can either be spread on remaining agricultural land, or hauled to central yards where they can be sent to commercial composting facilities, biomass plants, or properties within the community.

At the composting and biomass facilities, transportation costs and tipping fees represent additional costs

## **How proven are the results of applying mulch to avocado and citrus orchards, and is this practice accepted among professionals?**

The University of California completed extensive multi-year and multi-location studies with mulching of avocados and citrus in California, including San Diego County. Significant improvements using mulch were noted in water conservation and for protecting against pests. As much as 50 percent reduction in water use was observed. Improvements in tree vigor, yields and fruit quality can also result from using mulches and chips.

Of high importance is the control of *Phytophthora* root rot in avocados. Mulching has frequently resulted in control of root rot of avocados, the

greatest limiting factor for sustained yields in the industry. This practice is used in many parts of the world, including California and Australia.

For further information please refer to county internet at:

[www.sdcountyrecovery.com](http://www.sdcountyrecovery.com)

[www.sdcounty.ca.gov/awm/disaster\\_assistance.html](http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/awm/disaster_assistance.html)

[www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dpw/recycling.html](http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dpw/recycling.html)

[http://www.wildfirezone.org/your\\_property.asp?page\\_idno=1684](http://www.wildfirezone.org/your_property.asp?page_idno=1684)

[http://www.wildfirezone.org/editor/docs/Recovery%20from%20Fire%20Damage%20in%20Avocado%20Groves%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.wildfirezone.org/editor/docs/Recovery%20from%20Fire%20Damage%20in%20Avocado%20Groves%20(2).pdf)