



**PROTECTING WATER
FOR WESTERN IRRIGATED AGRICULTURE**

**BUREAU OF RECLAMATION COLORADO RIVER BASIN STUDY:
PUBLIC STATEMENT BY THE FAMILY FARM ALLIANCE
DECEMBER 12, 2012**

The Family Farm Alliance today issued a public statement regarding the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) release of its Colorado River Basin Study.

"We applaud Reclamation and the Basin states for their collaborative effort that led to the completion of this important study," said Alliance President Patrick O'Toole, who operates a cattle and sheep ranch located along a headwater tributary to the Colorado River. "A key overall benefit of this study is that, from now on, all Colorado Basin parties can work from the same technical foundation."

The objective of the Basin Study is to assess future water supply and demand imbalances over the next 50 years and develop and evaluate opportunities for resolving imbalances. The study has been under development for nearly three years by Reclamation and the Basin States, in collaboration with stakeholders throughout the Basin.

Reclamation officials have emphasized that this is a planning study; it will not result in any decisions, but will provide the technical foundation for future activities.

However, Mr. O'Toole and other Family Farm Alliance representatives are concerned that virtually every scenario assessed by Reclamation shows a loss of Colorado River Basin irrigated acreage by the year 2060. The Basin Study assumes that irrigated acreage in the Colorado River Basin will decrease by 300,000 to 900,000 acres during the time period 2015 to 2060.

"Policy makers and Colorado River stakeholders must understand the critical implications of taking 6-15% of existing irrigated agriculture out of production," said Mr. O'Toole. "We are already behind the curve when it comes to meeting the future food needs of the world. Every single acre of land that is taken out of production puts us further behind that curve."

Last year, the Global Harvest Initiative released its Global Agricultural Productivity (GAP) Report, which quantified the difference between the current rate of agricultural productivity growth and the pace required to meet future world food needs. The report predicts that doubling agricultural output by 2050 requires increasing the rate of productivity growth by 25 percent – every year.

Irrigated agriculture is one of the largest economic engines in the Western U.S., according to the 2012 Alliance report, "The Economic Importance of Western Irrigated Agriculture". For a region that spans the 17 Western states, the total household income impacts derived from the "Irrigated Agriculture Industry", made up of direct irrigated crop production, agricultural services, and the food processing and packaging sectors, is estimated to be about \$128 billion annually.

And, perhaps the most striking economic fact centers on just how important domestic food production, especially food produced under irrigation, has been during the past 70 years for the average American's disposable income. During the Great Depression, roughly 25% of an American family's disposable income was spent on food. In 2011, that percentage had dropped to 6.7%, the lowest of any country in the world.

"At some point, we'd like to see Reclamation or other water policy officials run another scenario in the Study: one that assumes that Basin irrigated acreage will not be diminished, and may, in fact, need to be expanded," said Dan Keppen, Alliance executive director. "How would policy makers react if the projected impact was population loss, or a number of power plants or homes going without water in the future?"

The Family Farm Alliance is pleased that Reclamation and the Basin States are committed to the continued refinement of scenario planning as part of a robust long-term planning framework for the Basin. The Alliance believes that policy makers and elected officials must clearly understand the importance of Western irrigated agriculture and the implications associated with drying up land currently producing food in the Colorado River Basin and elsewhere.

"What is the true cost to American security and the economy if we continue to take irrigated agricultural land out of production, especially in a region like the American Southwest, which is one of the few areas that provides a significant portion of our Nation's supply of fresh fruits and vegetables during the winter months?" Mr. O'Toole asks. "We cannot continue to downplay or ignore the negative implications of reallocating more agricultural water supplies from the Colorado River or other Western watersheds to meet new urban and environmental water demands."

Reclamation will send representatives of the Study to participate on the Family Farm Alliance panel to discuss this topic at the February 21-22, 2013 Annual Conference in Las Vegas.

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*The Family Farm Alliance is a grassroots organization of family farmers, ranchers, irrigation districts and allied industries in 16 Western states. The Alliance is focused on one mission:
To ensure the availability of reliable, affordable irrigation water supplies
to Western farmers and ranchers.*