

Written Testimony

Patrick M. Janssen, Board Chairman

Water Protection Association of Central Kansas

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Chairman Bennett, and Ranking Member Marshall, thank you for the opportunity to appear today at this Hearing on the High Plains: Combatting Drought with Innovation. My name is Pat Janssen and I serve as the Board Chairman of the Water Protection Association of Central Kansas (Water PACK). As an organization Water PACK is committed to finding solutions to water issues in the counties we represent. At present Water PACK has 750 members with a vested interest in irrigated agriculture operating in Kiowa, Edwards, Pawnee, Barton, Pratt, and Stafford Counties in south Central Kansas. The primary roles Water PACK serves are research, education, political communication, and conservation. We have many partners ranging from the Nature Conservancy of Kansas to the Kansas Water Office.

The federal government plays a large role in ensuring the food security of our nation, as well as keeping the agricultural economies of our rural communities viable for future generations. It is with this, and the future of irrigated agriculture in mind that I submit my testimony today.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

The CREP program has had great success in retiring water rights in areas that were experiencing significant declines. It has protected the aquifers in those areas, helped to stabilize water levels, and prevent water quality from degrading. Now that those areas of concern have been addressed the program is trying to retire water rights in areas that are still viable for irrigated crop production. My experience has been in the area of recent CREP expansion into the Rattlesnake Creek Basin in Stafford county Kansas.

There are several challenges preventing adoption of the CREP program in the Rattlesnake basin, and other areas that still have abundant water supplies:

1. The first is economic. The value of an acre of irrigated farm land in Stafford county Kansas is \$7000/acre. The value of a comparable non irrigated acre is \$2400/acre. This makes the net value of 18 inches of irrigation water \$4600/acre. At present the CREP price for this water is \$2250/acre or about 51% of the value that water represents in actual land value.
2. The second is program flexibility.
 - a. At present Kansas does not have the option to continue non irrigated crop production on property that has been enrolled in CREP.
 - b. There is also no option that would allow the retirement of a partial water right through CREP.

- c. The program is very rigid on what type of cover is acceptable for the establishment of grasses in the program, specifically established stands of alfalfa must be destroyed to plant an “acceptable” cover. In the sandy soils of central and western Kansas any sort of cover should be acceptable to prevent wind erosion, and help facilitate the establishment of grass.
 - d. In the event that non irrigated cropping is approved in Kansas the restrictions on hours of field operations currently imposed in Colorado are not conducive to efficient planting and harvesting of crops on any acreage of scale.
3. It came to my attention this morning that any changes to CREP policies in Kansas will require an Environmental Impact Assessment. This adds another delay to meaningful progress, and further complicates a program that is desperately needed to be as user friendly as possible.

Crop Insurance

Wheat receipts at our local coop have been 50-60% of normal for the last three years. Effective crop insurance programs are critical to keeping farms viable in years of extended drought. They will not make a producer rich, but they will keep them in business. Affordable crop insurance is a must have in today’s challenging environment.

There are crop insurance regulations that are not conducive to conserving water. In the event that a field is damaged in a hail storm the producer must keep watering it until an adjuster arrives to appraise the field in ten to fourteen days.

Producer, and agent education is an issue. Policy changes at the Risk Management Agency are often not brought to the attention of the affected parties until a claim is being processed. In the past universities did a good job of providing opportunities for education on crop insurance changes, but it seems to be less of a priority now.

As the move towards water conservation continues we will need a more diverse offering of products. These will need to cover different grain crops, as well as better protection options for forage crops.

Culture/Communication

As I have worked with government, and non- government organizations over the past 20 years I have noticed that the relationship has changed between these agencies and the producers that they serve. When I started with the older generation of agents there was more of a partnership, and a spirit of cooperation as both parties worked together to make improvements in farming operations. These older agents wanted their producers to succeed, and thusly were willing to be more flexible as they realized that when dealing with mother nature nothing fits exactly in the box you want to check. We are losing those agents at a rapid rate, their legacy is dying.

Communication is a constant problem. One specific example is a DOC grant for irrigation technology funding became available in March with a two week sign up period. None of the offices in the counties I operate in were aware of the program, and once they were aware each one interpreted the program differently. For the most part there a very good people in these offices they just need to be given the opportunity to succeed.

Summary

In closing I believe that we have all the ingredients to improve things moving forward. We have the people, the science, and the vision to do a better job for the world we live in. I encourage more input

from the producers who have worked this land for generations, more program flexibility, and a culture of cooperation rather than one of administration.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on these very important issues.