

Statement to U. S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns RE: 2007 Farm Bill

Presented in Hutchinson, Kansas, September 12, 2005 by:

Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 4

In discussions with irrigated producers in NW Kansas the current structure of the farm bill comes up almost every time as a significant factor in their choice of irrigated crops - very predominately corn - a high consumptive water use crop.

Since passage of the current farm bill Kansas has developed new objectives for the High Plains Aquifer which require reductions in consumptive water use. Additionally, the US Supreme Court has approved a negotiated settlement for the Republican River Compact also involving significant reductions in consumptive water use within the basin. Both are new environmental goals set relative to historical water use which are real and need to be achieved.

We would encourage the new farm program to offer producers in specially recognized or identified areas (required to achieve lower water use goals) an economically viable alternative to produce lower consumptive water use crops on the same acres, or, to reduce their irrigated acres.

To be eligible as a recognized or identified area, the region must have as a minimum: 1) a publicly established policy, or, a court order to reduce consumptive water use; 2) regulations in place which prevent significant new water development; and 3) a credible process of water use reporting.

Possible approaches, in concept, might be:

- 1) Restructure the farm payments in the specially recognized areas to better encourage lower consumptive water use crops.
- 2) In specially recognized areas provide, at the discretion of the producer, a "Conservation Option" instead of the standard program, which would encourage lower consumptive water use crops or the transition of irrigated acres.
- 3) Increase the loan rate per bushel for the appropriate crops if there is a reduction in irrigated acres.

We also believe any changes made must be accomplished in a way that is as "revenue neutral" to the current program as possible.

In closing, there are clearly many ways a new farm bill can be crafted to encourage lower consumptive water use in areas that must achieve new environmental goals involving less consumptive water use. We are not conversant enough on farm bill at this time to offer anything more than the above conceptual input. If USDA is in agreement with the basic issues, we trust the appropriate language can be drafted. We also pledge to work with USDA and others in the further development of these concepts.

These comments have been respectfully submitted for open consideration. Thank You.

Approved for submission by the GMD 4 board of directors on September 9, 2005 via e-mail discussion and consensus. GMD 4 can be contacted at: PO Box 905, Colby, KS 67701. Tel: (785) 462-3915. E-mail: wab@gmd4.org.