



North Dakota Irrigation Association

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Dedicated to strengthening and expanding irrigation to build and diversify our economy

Senate Appropriations Committee
House Bill 1020
Testimony of Steve Hansen, Chairman of North Dakota Irrigation Association
March 2, 2023

Chairman Bekkedahl and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee:

North Dakota irrigators support the agricultural research and education efforts of North Dakota State University and we encourage the legislature to continue the investments in this important role.

North Dakota irrigates about 300,000 acres to produce a variety of crops including corn and cereal grain crops, livestock forage, and high value crops such as potatoes, sugar beets, and onions. Irrigation provides strong economic return, with an acre of irrigated land producing four times that of dryland in regular conditions and as much as six times in times of drought.

Irrigation provides the opportunity to grow higher value crops where top yields and exceptional quality are necessary. High quality coupled with substantial yielding potatoes have made the French fry industry, located in Grand Forks and Jamestown, successful in the state. The acreage of onions in the state is smaller than the other crops, but this crop may have an important role in the future as markets are developed. Other fruit and vegetable crops can be produced and processed in the state and the development of the markets for these crops is needed. Irrigation does and can diversify and strengthen the agricultural economy of the state. We urge the dedication of additional resources to research the opportunities for high value crops.

Irrigation also provides producers and agricultural processors dependability despite weather conditions. The drought in 2021 heightened awareness of the need for additional irrigation to support the growing value-added agriculture processing in the state. The Association is proud to partner with other commodity organizations in the state to expand awareness of the benefits of irrigation and brainstorm ways to reduce barriers to irrigation development.

North Dakota has a substantial potential of increasing irrigation. For example, approximately 300,000 acres in the Missouri River corridor have the water and soils suitable for irrigation. The Missouri River is our most bountiful water resource and irrigation is an ideal way to put that water to use.

A key part of irrigation development is continued research on irrigation practices and irrigated crops. The State Board of Agricultural Research and Education priorities include a request for capital project improvements for the Nesson Valley Irrigation site. The researchers need office and lab space, a heated shop, and a conference room. This facility would support ongoing educational efforts for irrigators as well as meetings to support expansion of irrigation in western North Dakota.

Thank you for your past support of irrigation research. Please support the SBARE priorities for the 2023-2025 biennium.