

January 13, 2025

To: Senate Appropriations Committee

RE: Nesson Valley Irrigation Research Project

Senate Appropriation Committee,

I am Tom Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Advisory Committee of Williston Research Extension Center and Eastern Agricultural Research Center. Our advisory board stresses the need for an irrigation research and technology transfer facility at our Nesson Valley Irrigation Project, 27 miles east of Williston to provide an office, lab, meeting room and heated shop. The irrigation staff currently utilizes a small office space in a chemical storage/chemical handling facility. This facility has been on the NDAES master plan needs for WREC since 2012 and is a high priority as ranked by SBARE.

There is an urgent need for ongoing and expanded irrigated research and education to aid producers in increasing crop diversity, adapt best management and irrigated practices and how to best integrate irrigated livestock grazing systems into their farming/livestock operations. The need for expanded irrigation in our region has never been more evident than the past years because of extreme drought conditions and the loss of the sugarbeet factory and sugarbeet production in our area.

Expanded agricultural economic development in western ND will be driven mostly by expanded irrigation research and development as the catalyst to promote new and expanded production of high value crops and increased agricultural processing capability. The MonDak Irrigation Frontier has the potential to expand to 500,000 acres.

This much needed facility will also be a great help in the recruitment and retention of WREC staff.

We respectfully ask for your consideration in supporting this budget request as a vital component in the mission of WREC.

Thank you,

*Tom Wheeler*

Thomas Wheeler