

## **Domenici – Wilson Bill is One Step Towards Meeting Western Water Demands**

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I work for a grass roots organization called the Family Farm Alliance, which advocates for family farmers, ranchers, irrigation districts, and allied industries in seventeen Western states. The Alliance is focused on one mission – To ensure the availability of reliable, affordable irrigation water supplies to Western farmers and ranchers.

Alliance irrigators use a combination of surface and groundwater supplies, managed through a variety of local, state, and federal arrangements. Western family farms and ranches of the semi-arid and arid West– as well as the communities that they are intertwined with – owe their existence, in large part, to the certainty provided by these water supplies. With this certainty, the United States is dependent on no other nation for its food supply.

Rapid urban growth and increasing environmental demands combined with the ever-present threat of long-term drought have put the future of Western irrigated agriculture– an unparalleled national resource – at great risk. Meeting this challenge will require expanding and enhancing water supplies in the West.

In June 2003, then-U.S. Interior Secretary Gale Norton rolled out the Water 2025 program, intended to meet the water demands for Western people, cities, farms and the environment. *Water 2025* focused on stretching existing water supplies through collaboration, technology and innovative, market-based solutions. It was designed to produce results and meet the challenge of preventing crises and conflict in the West

The Water 2025 Challenge Grant program is intended help local authorities enhance existing water supplies with projects that improve system monitoring and control improvements, create water banks and provide for installation water-saving measures, all the while protecting irrigators' basic water rights. Using Water 2025 grants, several members of the Family Farm Alliance have been able to make significant improvements in their water supply and distribution works.

In the past three years, Reclamation supported a total of 68 projects representing \$58 million in water system and management improvements. And these projects often provide seed money that grows into even bigger non-federal contributions. For every dollar the Federal government has invested there has been an approximate \$3 non-Federal investment.

U.S. Senator Pete Domenici and Congresswoman Heather A. Wilson on April 10<sup>th</sup> announced that they are sponsoring legislation to authorize and expand the Water 2025 grant program. Domenici has introduced legislation in the Senate, and Wilson followed with a measure in the House, to authorize the Water 2025 grant program. The Domenici-Wilson legislation will formally sanction the Water 2025 grant program, which would ensure a steadier flow of federal funding. This legislative effort would allow up to \$25 million annually for grant awards through 2016. Any grants will require a 50 percent non-federal cost share.

The Family Farm Alliance Board of Directors on April 14<sup>th</sup> formally supported this legislation, and we will work with Congress to try to bring about its enactment. If successful, this legislation would ensure that the Challenge Grant program can continue to provide such benefits to willing partners in the West.

The Domenici-Wilson legislation obviously represents an important step towards meeting growing Western water demands. However, we cannot provide water to meet the demand simply by conserving and improving our water use techniques.

This legislation should mark the start of moving forward with a new vision; a vision that includes new water supply projects that are environmentally sound, fiscally responsible and designed to meet the needs of our fast growing Western population.

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