

## Family Farm Alliance Offers New Supply Tool To Help U.S. In Meeting West's Future Water Needs

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There is a rapidly growing need throughout the West to make the most out of often limited water supplies and the Family Farm Alliance (Alliance) has offered a new tool to help. Pat O'Toole, a Wyoming rancher, told members of the House Water and Power Subcommittee during a Washington hearing today that the organization's recently completed Western Water Supply Enhancement Study is meant to be a beneficial means toward meeting Western water needs.

"Our goal was to gather together water supply enhancement ideas from around the West and put them into one master data base," O'Toole testified. The project is the Alliance's response, based upon water supply and storage needs, to the Bureau of Reclamation's recent Water 2025 planning process.

"In an age where more dams are being torn down than being constructed – even though Western water demands are growing every year – many people shudder when the 'D' word is uttered," said O'Toole, a former Wyoming legislator. "However, the types of projects contained in the Western Water Supply Enhancement Study database are not monstrous dams like China's Three Gorges project. Instead, they are supply enhancement projects that range from canal lining and piping, to reconstruction of existing dams, to integrated resource plans. There are also some very feasible new surface storage projects. The benefits from these projects include providing certainty for rural family farms and ranches, additional flows and habitat for fish, and cleaner water."

O'Toole stressed that what the initiative is not is a list of supply enhancement projects recommended for implementation by the Family Farm Alliance. Instead, it is intended to catalyze discussions on the need to improve Western water supplies, to encourage other Westerners to submit additional ideas to the Alliance, and to form the basis for further evaluation as to why these projects have never been implemented.

The Family Farm Alliance is a grassroots-based organization of agricultural water users and agencies, and water and farm-related businesses in 17 Western States, O'Toole explained. "For the most part, our members receive their primary irrigation water supplies from the Bureau of Reclamation. In a nutshell, we are Reclamation's customers. 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 water stored and delivered by Reclamation projects.”

O’Toole’s appearance before a Congressional panel was the second by an Alliance official in the past week. On April 5, Executive Director Dan Keppen was invited to speak during the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee 2005 Water Conference. Next week in Spokane, Washington, former Alliance President Bill Kennedy of Klamath Falls, Oregon, is to testify at a House Water and Power Subcommittee field hearing.

O’Toole told the panel, a subcommittee of the House Resources Committee, that water conservation or “demand management” are often viewed as solutions to water supply needs. In fact, he said, conservation is not the only answer.

“While conservation is surely a tool that can assist in overcoming water supply problems, it cannot be viewed as the single answer to water shortages,” O’Toole said. “Conserved water cannot realistically be applied to instream uses, as it will more likely be put to beneficial use by the next downstream appropriator or held in carryover storage for the following irrigation season. Moreover, mandated or one size fits all conservation programs are doomed to failure in light of the drastically different circumstances of water users across the West.” He said there has been massive investment in conservation and water management technology over many parts of the West.

“On the other hand, relatively little progress has been made on the “supply management” end of things,” said O’Toole. “While development has occurred on conjunctive management and groundwater banking projects, development of new surface storage projects have virtually ground to a halt in the past 30 years, especially if any sort of federal nexus exists for proposed projects.”

O’Toole said farmers and ranchers will continue to conserve. “However, water saving cannot be expanded indefinitely without reducing acreage in production,” said O’Toole. “At some point, the growing water demands of the West – coupled with the omnipresent possibility of drought – must be met.” O’Toole warned that “the water needed to meet these demands will either come from developing new water supplies, or it will be taken from agriculture. “

O’Toole said aging infrastructure must be modernized and opportunities to enhance supplies must be facilitated “before the West’s growing demand outstrips available water supplies, which is already happening in some areas.” He said strict

conservation, frequently employed during droughts, "cannot be the sole answer."

All of these factors and many others, he said, add up to preserving water supply certainty. "The goal of certainty is perhaps the most important aspect of Western water policy," said O'Toole. "Billions of public and private dollars have been invested in existing water supply systems. Without certainty, those investments in water supply facilities will be less efficient, and otherwise beneficial investments will not be made because of the fear that water supplies will be taken away. The loss of supplies will have a significant, if not devastating, economic effect on those who lose the benefit of their investment."

O'Toole called upon the United States government to support "new efforts to enhance water supplies and encouraging state and local interests to take the lead in the formulation of those efforts. Local interests have shown enormous creativity in designing creative water development projects. While onstream storage should not be seen as unacceptable, offstream storage, groundwater banking, and countless other forms of water development should be encouraged as a matter of federal policy and law. Local problems call for local solutions."