



North Dakota Irrigation Association

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

House Appropriations Committee Energy and Environment Division

Senate Bill 2020 Committee Hearing March 9, 2021

Testimony of Loren DeWitz, President of North Dakota Irrigation Association

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 has approximately 290,000 acres of irrigation used in the production of a variety of crops including corn and cereal grain crops, livestock forage, and high value crops such as potatoes, sugar beets, and onions. The French fry and potato processing plants at Grand Forks and Jamestown rely almost exclusively on irrigated production for their raw potato supply. The sugar beets raised in the western part of the state are also irrigated. U.S. Department of Agriculture Statistics Service data show that on a state-wide basis, three to four dryland acres are needed to equal the gross returns from one irrigated acre.

Corn is the number one irrigated crop. A significant part of the corn production goes to the ethanol plants at Casselton, Hankinson, Richardson, Spiritwood, and Underwood. The ethanol industry is a significant part of the state's economy and provides important jobs to the communities. Distiller grain, a byproduct of the plants, is a desirable feed supplement for the livestock industry.

Recent data shows 58,000 acres of irrigated soybeans. The high value crops produced under irrigation include 25,700 acres of potatoes, 10,600 acres of sugar beets and 1,100 acres of onions.

Irrigation provides the opportunity to grow the higher value crops where top yields and exceptional quality are necessary. High quality coupled with substantial yielding potatoes have made the French fry industry 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.

North Dakota has a substantial potential of increasing irrigation. Approximately 300,000 acres in the Missouri River corridor have the water and soils suitable for irrigation. The Missouri River would be the water source for much of the land. In other parts of the state an additional 200,000 acres have the soil and the water for successful irrigation.

We encouraged continued State supported irrigation research and projects, particularly involving high-value crops, which will help to grow North Dakota's economy and diversify agriculture production in the state. Thank you for your support for irrigation research and education.