

Monthly Briefing

A Summary of the Alliance's Recent and Upcoming Activities and Important Water News

Irrigated Ag Is At A Crossroads

Alliance Conference Views Crucial Issues

Major challenges face irrigated agriculture and will determine what sort of role it will play in the future of the West.

That message and identification of top and tough issues, including threats posed by climate change, were repeated in a variety of views expressed February 22-23 at the Family Farm Alliance's 19th Annual Meeting and Conference at the Monte Carlo Resort and Casino in Las Vegas.

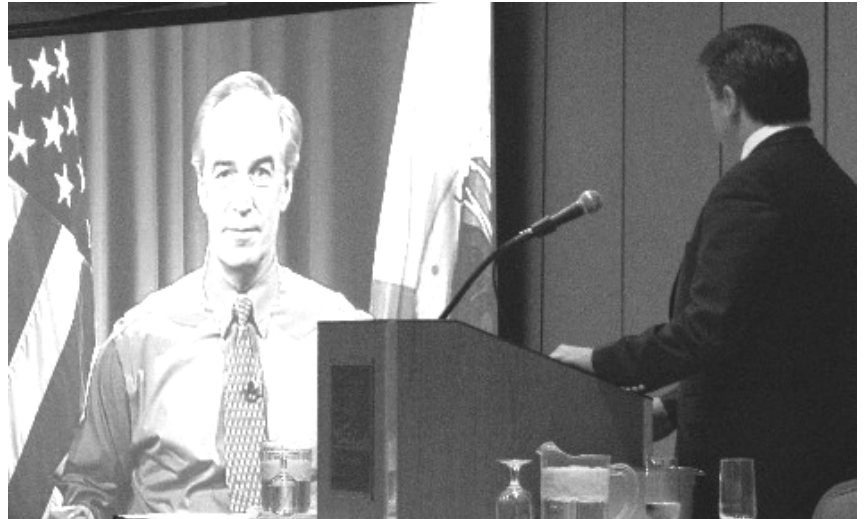
'THE NUMBER OF ISSUES is growing. The umbrella is getting bigger," Executive Director Dan Keppen (OREGON) told those attending the session from the 17 Western states served by federal Reclamation Projects as well as state and federal policy makers who were in attendance. Water is being shifted away from farming.

"By default, we're becoming the reservoir for the West."

"Farming is national security," Patrick O'Toole (WYOMING), President of the Alliance, said, voicing the Annual Meeting's theme.

"Urbanization and competition for water supplies are driving Western farmers off the land at a time when American food production in general is following other industries off-shore in search of lower

(Continued on Page 6)



Interior's New Secretary Addresses Alliance

Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne's speech, recorded for the Family Farm Alliance's 19th Annual Meeting and Conference, was a highlight of the February 22 session. Looking on at the podium (right) is Assistant Interior Secretary Mark Limbaugh, who spoke to the session and answered a wide variety of questions. The presentations were part of major Interior Department and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation participation in the conference. *(Please see Page 3)*

Ag Water Supply Limits

National Academy Of Sciences Study

Reinforces Alliance Meeting Discussions

It wasn't part of the Family Farm Alliance's Annual Meeting and Conference discussions on diminishing water supplies, decreasing farmland and other critical issues facing agriculture but the timing of a National Academy of Sciences (NAS) study on some of the same shortfalls could not have been better.

The NAS warned that availability of agricultural water is finite. As the report was being issued, many of the same concerns were being discussed in Las Vegas by those taking part in the Alliance's sessions.

THE FEBRUARY 21 REPORT by a National Research Council committee says agriculture is the likeliest target for shifting use to urban needs in the fast growing West. But it cautions that "the availability of agricultural water is finite." It adds that rising population and water demands "will

(Continued on Page 5)

Crucial Changes May Decide West's Fate, Speaker Says

A critical moment is rapidly being reached in the changing West and much is at stake as a result.

So said Dr. Richard L. Knight of the Department of Forest, Rangeland and Watershed Stewardship at Colorado State University in the first presentation to the Family Farm Alliance's 19th Annual Meeting and Conference.

"We live in very interesting times," Dr. Knight told his Las Vegas audience.



Dr. Richard L. Knight

"It's a very unusual time. The fate of the West and even the fate of our entire country are on the line. The fates of all of us are entwined with the fate of land. It is so important to keep the land private."

SPEAKING FROM the perspective of what he termed "value-driven science," Dr. Knight offered a view of issues that he said is not popular among his academic colleagues.

Academics most of the time "can't see the forest for the trees," he said.

Values are not in the results, said Dr. Knight. "They are in the introduction and the discussion."

HE LISTED four "truths":

The West is blended – half private, half public. Nationwide, two-third of the land is in private ownership. In Nevada, 83% is public land. "A guy can't get a break in this state," said Dr. Knight.

"The private lands are the most productive, the best watered, contain the richest soils and occur at the lower elevations," he said. Private grazing is tied heavily to public lands.

Economic transitions have also occurred. The "highest and best uses of these lands have changed," said Dr. Knight. "The highest and best use of water on private lands is residential and commercial but on private lands it is outdoor recreation.

PRIVATE LAND is changing. About one million acres in 11 Western states is being lost each year to agriculture. "It is the first time in more than 100 years more people are moving to rural areas than from rural areas."

On public lands, recreation is the second leading cause of decline of endangered species

On private lands, urbanization is the second and recreation is the fourth leading cause for decline of endangered species.

"We can't understand how recreation can alter biodiversity but we can understand how loggers and cattle ranchers can alter biodiversity," Dr. Knight said. Regulators, thus, place controls on logging and grazing.

"We are going to have a harder time managing recreationists," he said, asserting that the most heavily subsidized use of public lands is outdoor recreation.

THE CONSENSUS among ecologists, a finding that has been peer reviewed, is that urban development alters environmental processes and native biodiversity to a greater extent than do forestry and ranching, Dr. Knight said. More non-native plants that

are invasive in nature are found on urban development.

DR. KNIGHT'S FOURTH "truth" is that "demographic changes are not going to subside in the immediate future. The Northeast and Midwest are steadily losing population. The South is fairly steady.

The West is the only region that has captured more share of national growth than the year before, dating back to 1850.

He expressed concern that "2004 was the first year that the United States imported more food than it exported."

That creates huge homeland security risks for a population now reliant increasingly upon foreign food sources.

It is coming about largely because so much agricultural land is being taken out of production for urban growth.

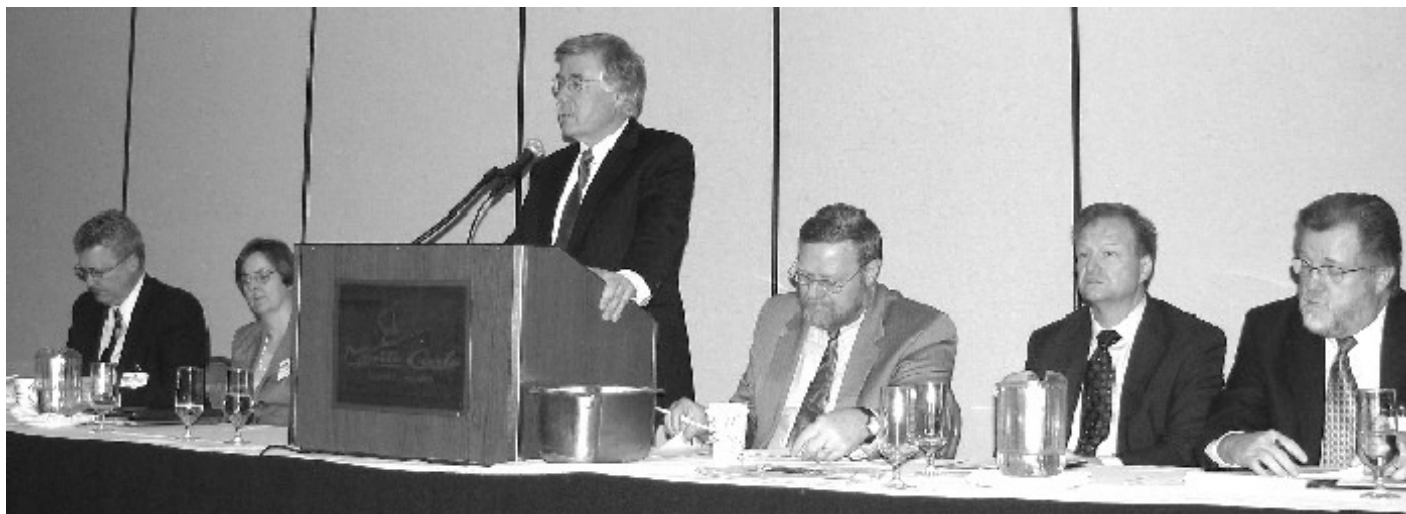
"Producing food on land is a sustainable economy while selling land for development is valuable only once," Dr. Knight said.

"A secure homeland to me is where urban people realize sustainable farming and ranching are possible," he said. There has to be recognition that rural cultures matter and that the public must be ready to compensate farm producers "for a healthy food product, and for the open space, water and wildlife habitat they protect."

THERE HAVE been encouraging developments, he said. Rangeland trusts have been created to protect more than one million acres. Much more remains to be done to control the tide of change.

"We're living in this temporary bubble that is going to burst one day and we're going to realize what we've lost," Dr. Knight said.

Society, he said, must decide whether ranchers, farmers and loggers are an anachronism or whether or not they are fundamental.



Speaking to the Family Farm Alliance for the first time as Commissioner of Reclamation, Robert Johnson is flanked during the February 23 session by a panel of U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Regional Directors. They are (from left) Kirk Rodgers, Mid-Pacific Region; Jane Harkins, Assistant Director, Lower Colorado River Region; Bill McDonald, Pacific Northwest Region; Mike Ryan, Great Plains Region; and Rick Gold, Upper Colorado River Region. Each discussed regional events and activities, a forum that has been a Family Farm Alliance Annual Meeting tradition for many years. Gold plans to retire soon.

New Commissioner Says Bureau's Role Is Delivering Water, Power

There is no question in the mind of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's new Commissioner about what the agency's role is to be.

Speaking February 23 in Las Vegas to the Family Farm Alliance, Commissioner Robert Johnson said the Bureau is all about being partners, maintaining a special partnership with its water and power users.

"If we don't maintain our roots, Reclamation won't be successful without our partners," Johnson said. "This what we're all about — delivering water and power. We're not in the environmental business." However, he said to not be involved in environmental projects would mean "that our deliveries of water and power would be at risk."

Johnson, who has headed the Bureau for four months, agreed with a suggestion made earlier in the program by Bennett Raley, a Colorado water attorney and former Assistant Interior Secretary, that area managers ought to be held more accountable although he pointed out, "The devil is in the details."

The Commissioner also spoke of challengers caused by aging infrastructure and other demands. "We could have three times the budget we have and couldn't meet all the demands," he said. He pointed out that Reclamation is operating under a continuing resolution due to Congress' inability to pass an appropriations bill last year. Like other federal agencies, the Bureau is subject to the federal government's balanced budget policy.

Limbaugh Leads Interior Delegation

Assistant Interior Secretary Mark Limbaugh headed a delegation of top Interior Department and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation policy makers who were at the side of water agencies and users gathered at the Family Farm Alliance's 19th Annual Meeting and Conference.

The new Interior Secretary, Dirk Kempthorne, could not be present but delivered a brief recorded address in which he said Interior values the relationship between the Bureau and the Alliance.

"Your work is a great value in reminding government that there are real people on the end of decisions we make," the Secretary said, pointing out that the Alliance had played a key role in helping frame what evolved into the Bureau's current self-examination program, "Managing for Excellence."

Limbaugh, a former Family
(Continued on Page 5)



Mark Limbaugh



Alliance Honors Raley For Service

Family Farm Alliance President Pat O'Toole joins in congratulating former Assistant Interior Secretary Bennett Raley, now a Colorado water attorney, with an Alliance award recognizing Raley's "longtime service and steadfast commitment to Western irrigated agriculture." During a water users' perspective session, Raley offered a number of ideas for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to consider in its current "Managing for Excellence" self-evaluation. All would be aimed at increasing the agency's accountability and responsiveness. Ideas range from holding area managers responsible to meet budget goals to increasing USBR engineering competition.

Speakers Examine Security, Other Issues

A provocative lineup of panelists and other speakers addressed the Family Farm Alliance's Annual Meeting theme, "Farming is National Security," and many other activities and concerns during the Las Vegas conference.

Diane DiPietro, a USDA Homeland Security Office Policy Analyst, deals with food safety security constantly.

"People want to feel their food supply is safe," she said. Illness and deaths from terrorist actions could lead to hysteria and farmers could lose their livelihoods, she said. "There's so much to look at."

ANOTHER ASPECT of security discussed by Alliance Washington representative Joe Raeder and a panel of professional legislative staff members is how the Bureau of Reclamation will handle site security costs, and whether water users will foot the bill.

Climate change proved to be a popular topic. One speaker after another said they had never seen an issue emerge as a major policy question so quickly. A subcommittee of the Alliance's Advisory Committee was formed to begin to determine what positions the Alliance might take.

A subject not much spoken about at past Alliance sessions – the Farm Bill – is on the list of Alliance legislative issues to watch because its many programs include funding that could benefit irrigation districts.

AMONG THE MANY other topics was the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's "Managing for Excellence" program, an internal review.

Brenda Burman, Deputy Commissioner of Reclamation, and other Reclamation officials said the process has been as transparent as possible, with

a great deal of stakeholder involvement. "Communication is the most important thing we have learned," Burman said. The process is examining such issues as streamlining project title transfers, and improving engineering and safety of dams administration.

Another panel explained securing advantages for agriculture through science, by studying and utilizing weather modification (cloud seeding) as well as undertaking biotechnology along with breeding to improve plant production.

The Power Of Hoover Dam

Family Farm Alliance Annual Meeting attendees look at the massive power plant on the Nevada side just below Hoover Dam during a tour arranged with the cooperation of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation





Jason Peltier, an Interior Department Deputy Secretary and former California water users leader, joined Assistant Secretary Mark Limbaugh during an impromptu question and answer session.

USBR Wants To Be 'More Businesslike,' Limbaugh Says

(Continued from Page 3)

Farm Alliance President and Idaho water manager, said, "We're ushering in a new era with Managing for Excellence. We're developing a culture of accountability, one of management excellence."

He said the program is "not about stripping away the expertise of the Bureau of Reclamation" but rather to have a plan for the future when retirements will claim a great deal of institutional knowledge.

"What we're trying to do now is be more businesslike," Limbaugh said. "We want to provide the services that are valuable and help meet the challenges for the future."

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY stated a new rural water bill "would not have passed without the Family Farm Alliance." It will provide a federal loan guarantee program to help deal with aging infrastructure.

He acknowledged that the Bureau's Water 2025 program has been "kind of hit and miss. We've had trouble getting Congress to buy on." However, Limbaugh noted, "with \$16 million over the last two years we have been able to create \$78 million in new projects across the West."

The Interior Department, he said, is dedicated to national security and farming, and "anything we can do to assure the certainty of water supplies for agriculture to ensure that the work of our forebearers is not just going to go away."

Newest Study Focuses On Longer-Term Drought Prospects

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inevitably result in increasingly costly, controversial and unavoidable trade-off choices" in managing a shrinking resource.

The latest report focused on the controversial Colorado River.

The NRC Colorado River report recommended that another study be undertaken of water use patterns and demands, population projections and possible effects of transferring water from agriculture to urban areas. The latter recommendation is one the Family Farm Alliance in 2006 asked a U.S. Department of Agriculture advisory committee to implement.

"We need a realistic assessment of the collective impacts of agricultural land and water changes in western states over the last 10 years, as well as predicted trends," said Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen (OREGON). "A study of this sort may provide the type of hard findings that can help wake up policy makers to the big picture importance of this issue."

Alliance President Pat O'Toole (WYOMING) echoed similar sentiments during the conference held in Las Vegas February 22-23.

IN THE NEW STUDY, tree-ring based reconstructions of the Colorado River's flow over hundreds of years show that average annual flows vary more than previously assumed and that extended droughts are not uncommon. Future droughts may be longer and more severe because of a regional warming trend that shows no signs of dissipating, the report adds. It also states that a preponderance of evidence suggests that rising temperatures will reduce the river's flow and water supplies.

Coping with water shortages is becoming more difficult because of rapid population growth. Technology and conservation will not solve the limited water supply problem in the long run, the report warns.

For many years, understanding of the river's flow was based primarily on records from stream gages. But the tree-ring data demonstrates that the river occasionally shifts into decades-long periods in which average flows are lower, or higher, than the 15 million acre-feet average of the gauged record. In particular, tree-ring reconstructions show that the years 1905-1920 were exceptionally wet, which is significant because the Colorado River Compact governing allocation of water between upper and lower basin states was signed in 1922 when it was assumed that annual average river flow was closer to 16.4 million acre-feet. Tree-ring data also indicate that extended droughts are a recurrent feature of the basin's climate.

THE COMMITTEE ALSO LOOKED at how a steadily rising population and related increases in water demand will affect Colorado River water management. The population across the western United States has grown rapidly. Despite some successful water conservation efforts, urban water use in the region has increased significantly along with the expanding population.

Increasing urban water demands are often met through sales, leases, or transfers of water rights from farm users. Although 80% of available water in the West is devoted to agriculture, this allocation is finite, the committee warned. Water transfer agreements will be limited in their ability to satisfy growing, long-term demand. Such agreements may also cause problems for third parties, such as downstream farmers or ecosystems. Technology and conservation measures are useful and necessary for stretching existing water supplies, the committee acknowledged, but any gains in water supply will be eventually absorbed by the growing population.

Alliance Meeting Focuses On Crucial Crossroads

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costs," he said. "This existing problem will only be compounded if future Western water supplies are diminished by a changing climate."

What are expected to be the major issues in the coming year are expanding upon the key questions dealt with by the Alliance and its grassroots membership over the past year. Those include the:

- Future of irrigated agriculture.
- Role of surface storage to meet growing water demands in the West.
- Need for improved customer relations between water users and agencies, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

EFFECTS OF CLIMATE change (more popularly known as "global warming"), aging water infrastructure and site security needs and costs, concerns over farm production costs and a trend in which younger family members are leaving the farm are all looming

"When I go to meetings in the West I don't see a lot of younger people," Keppen said during an Annual Meeting report to the conference on Alliance issues. "We're in an era right now in which urbanization is forcing farmers off the land. Farmland is simply disappearing."

"WE'RE LOSING AG LAND all over the place," said Keppen. "Colorado from 1987-2002 has been losing 462 acres a day. In Arizona, the Salt River Project was built largely for agriculture but by 2015 there will be no ag water delivered from the project. Las Vegas is adding 70,000 people per year but I don't see anyone building dams."

In California, the population has soared to 36 million. "If you want to see irrigated land vanishing, just drive down the Central Valley," said Keppen. Oregon, which prides itself on land-use management, by 2010 will have lost 500,000 acres of farmland

"THE END RESULT is a downsizing of agriculture at a time when our country needs a stable and reliant water supply," said Keppen.



Family Farm Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen (left) and President Pat O'Toole during a post-Annual Meeting Hoover Dam tour.

O'Toole said in an address to the Conference that to meet the West's burgeoning water demands being created by urban growth while having a shot at maintaining irrigated agriculture, "Storage is going to be part of everyone's scenario."

Water storage development would benefit urban interests as well as traditional on-farm users while providing enhanced supplies for the environment.

"The main motivator is there just isn't enough water to go around, to do everything everyone wants to do in the West," O'Toole said.

THERE COULD be even less water available in the future. Dr. Robert

Balling Jr., a professor in the climatology program at Arizona State University, said climate change is occurring and will likely have impacts.

"Every model says warming will occur," he said. "There is no doubt the world has warmed up."

"The overall results from our work suggest that the runoff from the Salt and Verde (rivers in Arizona) will have approximately an 85% chance of being less in the future due largely to warming in the study area," said Dr. Balling.

The Family Farm Alliance's role in these issues is simple and basic.

"If we're not speaking, I don't know who is speaking," said O'Toole.

FAMILY FARM ALLIANCE

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