



Nevada Farm Bureau Federation

2165 Green Vista Dr., Suite 205, Sparks, NV 89431

1-800- 992-1106 | www.nvfb.org

Nevada Drought Forum Sector Meeting
Wednesday, August 19, 2015

Mr. Chairman and members of the Nevada Drought Forum, my name is Darrell Pursel. I'm here this morning representing Nevada Farm Bureau Federation. Nevada Farm Bureau Federation is the largest general agriculture organization in Nevada, representing over 18,000 member families. I am the president of the Lyon County Farm Bureau and a 5th generation Nevada farmer. I farm 320 acres and have a small cow-calf operation in Yerington.

The total economic impact of Nevada's agriculture cluster is \$5.3 billion. Our industry is one of the largest and most valuable in Nevada, and it is one that is greatly affected by the drought. Lack of water for farmers and ranchers has resulted in cutbacks across our industry. To some Nevada farmers, the current drought is devastating, and to others, it is just another challenge. Each farmer has different problems due to their individual circumstances and location even though they may be next door to one another. Farmers have fallowed valuable farmland because there is not sufficient water to grow the crops they would normally grow. In counties like mine, farmers have been allocated 3 percent of their normal surface water rights and must rely on supplemental pumping rights to grow crops. Without a wet winter, farmers will not receive any surface water rights and may be forced to cut back their supplemental and primary pumping rights by as much as 75% or more by priority. Further, the lack of well water pumping for irrigation may fallow 75% or more of farms in the two valleys. That means only 25% of agriculture wells will be allowed to be pumped in the coming year in Mason and Smith Valley's. The total economic impact of food and agriculture is \$338 million in Lyon County. Drastic cutbacks to our water use due to drought will be detrimental not only to our farmers but also the local communities on which agriculture has a positive economic effect.

Some livestock producers have had to sell off some of their herds, buy or lease more pastureland or grazing allotments and feed more hay. Many have been forced to take their livestock out of state for pasture. In range operations, many producers have had to drill livestock wells, purchase water trucks and haul water for livestock to drink. Ranchers in counties like Lander have been forced off of their permitted land early because drought environmental assessment triggers have been met. They have been

forced to sell their animals because they are not permitted to graze all of the livestock they own. The drought directly affects Nevada agriculturists' livelihoods, and in some cases, it has forced farmers and ranchers out of business displacing generations old farming and ranching operations.

This is not the first drought affecting our industry. Agriculture in Nevada has always tried to become more efficient at using our water resources because we face drought often. There are many examples of what the agriculture industry has done to conserve water for irrigation. Starting in 1920 Topaz and in 1923 Bridgeport reservoirs were built by farmers on the East & West Walker River to help limit the effects caused by drought by being able to store water in the good years for use in drought years. In the 1960s and 70s, many of the farmers put in irrigation wells to help survive droughts when water was short. In the late 70s to today, they have put in concrete ditches, underground pipelines, sprinkler irrigation and laser leveling fields. In the recent years, drip tape, variable drives and GPS control and leveling systems have been employed all to help use water more efficiently. Each and every one of these pieces of technology increases efficiency and reduces water consumption especially in drought conditions and can be the difference between producing a crop and not. As better and more efficient technology becomes available, farmers will be the first to adopt their use.

Our ranchers also continue to use efficient methods to preserve the rangeland in years of drought. They practice holistic management of the land to graze large numbers of cattle while preserving and improving the vegetation for animals and wildlife in the future. They rely on sound grazing practices, ensuring that public lands are properly grazed to prevent wildfires, which are more common in years of drought.

Several big obstacles exist to overcoming additional levels of water efficiency. Often times, uninformed government officials and individuals make decisions regarding the agriculture industry and drought. While agriculturists in Nevada are dedicated to conserving water, they often face misplaced restrictions that will not conserve water or protect the rangeland that needs to be conserved and protected. In the last year, the BLM closed grazing allotments because of antiquated drought environmental assessments even though the area in question had lots of vegetation due to spring rains. The Nevada Division of Water Resources attempted to implement a well water pumping curtailment without doing sufficient research to identify which parts of the valley needed to be curtailed.

The other obstacle that our industry faces is one that cannot be eliminated. Agriculture needs water to operate. Forcing our agriculturists to cut their water use back more than they currently do will result in a reduction in the availability of local

fruits, vegetables, meat and animal by-products. It has been said that by the year 2050, the Earth's population will have doubled. Where do you think your food will come from? Agriculture will have to produce twice as much food and fiber than we do now and more than likely with less water and less land than we currently use. Today, each farmer produces enough food and fiber for 155 people. In 2050, each farmer will have to produce for 310 people or more.

In closing, I would like to end with a short personal story. Due to the drought this year and loss of production, I began raising pheasants and mallard ducks. I fed the wheat in a grain bin that I couldn't use for other purposes to my new birds and plan to start a pheasant hunting preserve to increase income in the future. I am sure you are wondering who in their right mind would raise ducks in a drought. I'll tell you who, agriculturists. In hard times like these, we will adapt to persevere because we have adapted since the beginning of civilization to feed a growing population. We are farmers and ranchers, and we will continue to feed the world even when we face challenging times like these.

Thank you.