

Kentucky Water Management Working Group

OBJECTIVE

The Water Management Working Group (WMWG), a 20-member task force assembled by Kentucky Farm Bureau, is charged to develop recommendations that will enhance the quality and quantity of water resources accessible for agricultural production in the state and help alleviate demand pressure on municipal water supplies. Its mission is to research the emerging critical issue of inadequate water supplies available for agricultural production, examine potential actions to solve deficiencies and make recommendations for bringing new and reliable water sources to key areas in Kentucky that will benefit both agriculture and municipal water customers. Proactive steps taken today will build a strong foundation for the Commonwealth to better manage its water resources for all residents in the future.

LEADERSHIP

The 20-member WMWG is chaired by Mr. Steve Coleman and includes farm leaders from across the Commonwealth as well as representatives of the Kentucky Association of Conservation Districts, Kentucky Department of Agriculture, Kentucky Rural Water Association, UK College of Agriculture, Food and Environment, Kentucky League of Cities, Kentucky Division of Water, Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy, Kentucky Division of Conservation, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Farm Service Agency and USDA Rural Development Office.

SITUATION

Kentucky's nearly \$6 billion agriculture industry has 76,500 farms and roughly 13 million acres of farmland featuring 1.5 million acres of corn, 1.7 million acres of soybean, over 500,000 acres of wheat, nearly 92,000 acres of tobacco, 2.2 million acres of hay, \$1 billion in poultry production, over 1 million head of cattle, over 300,000 hogs, nearly 250,000 horses, over 65,000 goats, 48,000 sheep and 63,000 dairy cattle in production according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture.

The Kentucky Division of Water (KDOW) reported that in 2012 Kentucky had 73,573 irrigated acres of cropland. Roughly only 1.1 percent of soybean acreage and 2.1 percent of corn acreage is irrigated statewide. The most heavily irrigated crop in Kentucky is tobacco with 14.5 percent irrigated. However, only 2 percent (20 million gallons/day) of Kentucky's water resources are utilized for agricultural irrigation and 4.7 percent (46 million gallons/day) used for livestock watering. The largest water use in Kentucky is for public consumption at 56.3 percent (552 million gallons/day) of the water supply followed by industrial use at 24.6 percent (242 million gallons/day). Although Kentucky developed a drought mitigation plan in 2008, there is no specific plan for agriculture. Development of an effective plan addressing agriculture's projected needs, conducting an inventory of all water resources to identify drought vulnerabilities, pursuing opportunities to expand private and public water supplies and a public education initiative would be needed to address that shortfall.

Kentucky is also one of just a few states that do not have a groundwater monitoring system to track changes in the water table. Kentucky has only one well located in Graves

County that monitors groundwater. However, Kentucky does have a number of surface water monitoring sites on rivers and streams.

MOVING FORWARD

Developing, and protecting Kentucky's water resources will position our agricultural industry for continued growth and success and enhance rural municipal water availability for all users. With that goal in mind, the WMWG continues to identify areas of interest that will help achieve that goal. A few of those areas identified as future points of discussion include:

- Increase public awareness of the importance of our water resources to our agricultural production capacity and to Kentucky's economic development potential.
- Development of an effective statewide water resources network for comprehensive monitoring and tracking of Kentucky's water resources- surface water, aquifers, springs, ponds, and lakes.
- Encourages the use of local, state and national funding opportunities to improve Kentucky's water resources.
- Explore means for more comprehensive ways to track, monitor, and report early onset of low soil moisture conditions to augment the computerized models that provide the soil moisture conditions in specific regions across Kentucky.
- Create a better projection of future agricultural water needs or potential increases in water use for expanded production opportunities and general economic growth. This would include a review of the current Drought Mitigation Plan, water laws and policies and develop recommendations as needed.
- Develop and/or improve agricultural best management practices that improve water efficiency, promote soil health and create additional water resources while utilizing modern technologies to increase efficiencies.
- Review the capacity of rural and urban water supplies and their vulnerability during low water flow or drought conditions to meet demand.
- Support adequate funding for Kentucky Mesonet operational cost while expanding coverage of Mesonet sites into more Kentucky counties to provide a more complete weather database of conditions affecting the state's agriculture and water supplies.
- Expand beyond the five Mesonet stations that currently have soil moisture sensors.
- Coordinate efforts with the Kentucky Water Resources Board and the Kentucky Agriculture Water Quality Authority.

For more information on the work of the Kentucky Water Management Working Group, to review data and information collected and to see notices of future Working Group meetings, visit KYFB.com/Water, or contact Joe Cain, Director, Kentucky Farm Bureau Commodity Division at (502) 495-7738 or by emailing at joe.cain@kyfb.com.