



USDA-CSREES 2006 National Water Quality Conference

Symposium: What price water? Status of water availability for agriculture in changing economic times

Shifting demands for water result in the possibility for a call to reallocate water from lower to higher value uses. Agriculture controls the use of approximately 80% of the world's water (90% in the western U.S.), though its value at the margin is relatively low. Greater demands for both in-stream and out-of stream uses for water have caused potential users to cast about for additional water sources, and evaluate expansion of storage facilities and delivery systems. Greater costs in both energy and capital to build new infrastructure coupled with any foregone environmental benefits from water developments leads to the search for water supplies from activities where water could be obtained cheaper than developing new supplies—agriculture, for example. This symposium will highlight the relationships between irrigation efficiency and water conservation that might lead to available water for other uses. Speakers will examine the current issues and opportunities in water trading, marketing, allocation and distribution that might influence water availability for agriculture now and into the future. The concept of a suite of rate-based watershed indicators made up of crops, number of acres, census information that would be aggregated to produce an index to the demand for water will be examined. Speakers will provide insights into how economists attempt to value water for agriculturally-related, environmentally-related, human health and well-being being-related activities and suggest ways to value water leading to improved water supply, quality or reliability.

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