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Managing Water Scarcity In The Agricultural Sector: Evolving Issues In The Southeastern U.S.

Dealing with water scarcity in the agricultural sector raises unfamiliar issues in Southeastern States such as Georgia. Different conditions, water laws and attitudes limit somewhat the ability of Southeastern States to draw heavily on experiences in Western States. This paper will focus on three primary aspects of these issues as they are evolving in Georgia, as well as (in perhaps somewhat different forms) in other Southeastern States.

First, one must understand the manner in which state laws, adopted in the 1980s before water scarcity was fully recognized, related to the issuance of water use permits under a Riparian legal system can have the effect of increasingly worsening the competition for water in agricultural during periods of drought.

Second, Georgia is (to this writer's knowledge) the only state in the union with state laws requiring the metering of agricultural water use. Georgia's metering program is discussed. The use and potential mis-use of data from this program is discussed, along with policy implications.

Third, two policy options for dealing with water scarcity that are the subject of considerable debate in Georgia is discussed. The first is focused on means for enhancing water supplies available to rural, agricultural communities: reliance on Aquifer Storage and Recovery systems. The second centers on the use of markets as a means for allocating scarce resources during drought in the most efficient manner.

Author: Douglas Wilson, Executive Director
Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center