

Gov. Brownback Asks for Insurance Coverage for Limited Irrigated Crops

Kansas Governor Sam Brownback has sent a letter requesting U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack help push forward a limited irrigated crop insurance option to help Kansas agricultural producers.

“Conserving the Ogallala aquifer to extend its usable life is critical to sustaining farmers and communities in western Kansas, where the economy is based on agricultural production and related businesses,” Governor Brownback said. “Implementing tools to help stakeholders conserve the aquifer to assure current and future generations have a secure water supply is a key initiative of my administration.”

Federally backed crop insurance is a key tool for agricultural producers. Currently, farmers can insure their crop as either fully irrigated or dryland, which have significantly different costs and coverage rates. Producers who want to reduce their irrigation and conserve water for the future must now enroll at dryland irrigation rates, which provide much lower financial protection. A plan to address this limitation has been developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Risk Management Agency, the Kansas Department of Agriculture, Kansas Water Office, Kansas State University and the University of Nebraska. Implementing the plan that has been developed for limited irrigation crop insurance will allow producers to better manage their risk as they look for ways to conserve the Ogallala Aquifer.

“Crop insurance is an important component of an agricultural producer’s risk management plan. Without a flexible, workable crop insurance program, droughts like the one impacting all farmers and ranchers would be even more devastating,” Kansas Secretary of Agriculture Dale Rodman said. “We encourage Secretary Vilsack to make this commonsense change to improve federal crop insurance.”

Recent Kansas water policy legislation has been designed to help Ogallala Stakeholders conserve water. The new state law for Local Enhanced Management Areas (LEMAs) holds great promise for significant water conservation. It provides a process to adopt locally defined water conservation plans that, when approved by the Chief Engineer, can have mandatory water use restrictions and reductions.

“A group of forward thinking producers in Sheridan County who rely on the declining Ogallala water, has submitted a LEMA plan that requires a reduction of nearly 20 percent in the average irrigation levels over the next five years,” Kansas Water Office Director Tracy Streeter said. “They want to implement the plan in 2013 and having access to limited irrigation crop insurance is key to reducing their risk as they take this important step.”

The Sheridan County producers are targeting the 2013 crop year to implement their Local Enhanced Management Area. It is imperative that limited irrigation crop insurance is in place in 2013 to support this initiative.

Governor Brownback also sent a letter to Secretary Vilsack Monday requesting Marshall and Washington counties be declared as federal disaster areas. If approved, agricultural producers in all 105 Kansas counties will be eligible for USDA federal disaster assistance.