

June 16, 2023

House Committee on Agriculture  
1300 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott:

On behalf of the Irrigation Association, I am pleased to provide our recommendations for the committee's work on the next farm bill. The IA represents over 1,300 member companies including irrigation equipment and system manufacturers, dealers, distributors, designers, consultants, contractors and end users. We are committed to transforming humanity's stewardship and use of water, enabling the long-term sustainability of the planet's water and natural resources, and improving the quality of life through a reliable global food supply and vital green spaces. We appreciated the opportunity to provide comments on our priorities during the committee's listening session at the World Ag Expo in Tulare, California, earlier this year, and the opportunity to provide additional detail to the committee.

Over half of U.S. crop sales come from irrigated farm operations — even though only 15% of the nation's total farmland is irrigated. Besides boosting farm productivity and profitability, irrigation is critical infrastructure that helps improve global food security, ensure national security, reduce producer risk, promote the economic vitality of rural America and generate value for many related industries.

Our farmers are doing more with less, but they must — and can— do even more to meet the needs of a growing global population and overcome pressures on limited freshwater resources, more frequent and prolonged severe weather events and droughts, and geopolitical instability.

#### **Invest in and improve EQIP and other USDA conservation programs**

- **All new irrigation system EQIP eligibility** to help farmers increase productivity while better managing risk. EQIP only allows operations that have irrigated two out of the last five years to be eligible for the program.
  - This requirement prevents producers from upgrading old or inefficient irrigation systems that are dormant and prevents them from utilizing saved water from an upgraded irrigation system to expand the land under irrigation to more efficiently utilize water and increase yield. This also incentivizes the use of outdated, inefficient equipment or practices which can exacerbate water quality concerns, soil compaction and other natural resource challenges.

- While surface water or groundwater quantity challenges in some areas may preclude additional acreage under irrigation, producers in significant areas of the country would benefit from this additional EQIP program flexibility. More importantly, this would help producers address natural resources challenges and increase productivity, all while better managing risk and reducing reliance on disaster assistance and crop insurance.
- **Prioritize irrigation efficiency and water resource management** across USDA programs and recognize that irrigation efficiency provides multiple conservation benefits such as energy efficiency, water quality improvements and soil health.
- **Increase EQIP funding** available to producers. Demand for EQIP resources far outstrips available funding. Additional funding will help producers make needed investments in addressing water-related conservation priorities.
- **Orient EQIP cost-share opportunities toward using water effectively and increasing productivity and profitably.** EQIP should encourage water savings as part of cropping systems and rotations that increase yield per volume of water applied, produce high-quality crops and improve profit potential as a result of input and labor savings. As farmers utilize water resources more efficiently, they should have the flexibility to determine how best to leverage those water savings.
- **Incentivize advanced irrigation management that leads to multiple environmental benefits.** EQIP contracts should be configured to encourage, support and recognize these multiple benefits such as improved water quality, soil carbon storage, water infiltration and nutrient uptake, as well as reductions in soil erosion and greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Increase focus on irrigation efficiency gains from new tools, technologies and systems.** In addition to normal equipment maintenance and upgrades, USDA conservation programs should encourage farmers to adopt new decision-support tools and technology such as irrigation system audits, water budgeting and results-oriented water management.
- **Enhance and improve the Regional Conservation Partnership Program** to leverage partnerships with universities, conservation organizations and private sector efforts.

#### **Prioritize technical assistance, education and research**

- **Invest further in private sector consulting services**, including funding for and improvement to the Technical Service Providers (TSP) program. These services are critical for providing the awareness, training and background needed to overcome adoption lag and to help producers use these tools effectively. In particular, we urge Congress to act to increase the availability of TSPs by facilitating streamlined processes by which those who hold industry-recognized professional credentials and certifications can become TSPs without unnecessary red tape.

- **Modernize the Natural Resources Conservation Service's workforce** by adding irrigation specialists, technologists and cybersecurity specialists in order to help producers adopt and utilize more efficient irrigation practices and technology.
- **Support much-needed high-tech career pathways** in rural communities by investing in these private sector consulting services and NRCS workforce modernization.
- **Recognize the need for producer support that continues beyond launch and initial installation.** To maximize conservation gains, training, troubleshooting and support needs for producers are ongoing, and NRCS programs and other technical assistance for producers must continue beyond initial installation.
- **Prioritize research related to irrigation and water use efficiency**, especially related to producer adoption, driving innovation and needs associated with severe weather events and a changing climate.

#### **Close the digital divide and protect critical infrastructure from 21st century threats**

- **Invest in closing the digital divide in rural America** as producers increasingly depend on precision agriculture technology. Expanded rural connectivity is critically important for producers to be able to leverage available and emerging technology to ensure food and water security and to effectively address water resource management and conservation challenges.
- **Ensure that cybersecurity risks to the food and agriculture system are addressed.** As producers and those supporting them increasingly rely on precision agriculture technology, we must ensure they have the tools they need to address these risks.

We appreciate your attention and welcome the opportunity to discuss our priorities in greater detail. Please do not hesitate to reach out to Irrigation Association Advocacy and Public Affairs Vice President Nathan Bowen ([nathanbowen@irrigation.org](mailto:nathanbowen@irrigation.org)) if you require any further information or if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Natasha L. Rankin".

Natasha L Rankin, MBA, CAE  
Chief Executive Officer

