

2017 IA Water Summit Report

The 2017 IA Water Summit was held on Nov. 10, 2017, in Orlando, Florida, and focused on the relationship between irrigation and water management. The goals of the summit were to 1) drive the discussion about irrigation's role in water management, and 2) discuss the role irrigation plays in providing solutions to water challenges.

The irrigation industry is generally considered part of the problem with water supply challenges, and it is important to change that narrative and work to be considered part of the solution, specifically through efficient new technologies, innovation and best practices.

Featured speaker

Adam Putnam

Commissioner, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Putnam believes that "Water is the defining debate of this century." In Florida, Putnam considers water to be the state's "golden goose." It is a major driver in the state with water features, amusement and entertainment areas, landscaping and agricultural uses. Between now and 2070, Florida will double the amount of water the state needs.

The bad news is that by 2030, the state of Florida will face a 1 billion gallon per day water shortfall. The good news is that per capita water consumption continues to fall because of new technologies, efficient practices, etc.

In Florida, Putnam believes water-related issues in public policy should focus on

- making reclaimed water play a bigger role in the state. Examples of how this is currently happening include reclaimed water use in The Villages (residential) and through best management practices by farmers that have decreased water consumption. Florida agriculture is no longer the #1 user of water in Florida.



Pictured left to right: Kris Nightengale, CID; Tyler Fields; Deborah Hamlin; Adam Putnam; Michael Pippen, PE; Warren Gorowitz, CLIA; and Kevin Shortel.

- changing the conversation about water policy to include infrastructure. An example includes improving the septic system in Key West. A dedicated funding stream to include addressing infrastructure issues is needed.

Water policy issues haven't always been "top of mind" in the past, but today they are gaining notice. Creating a long-term, comprehensive, specialized plan for water policy is necessary. According to Putnam, the important factor is that we have to find a way to feed 10 billion people by 2050, while maintaining the higher standard of living consumers are accustomed to. This will require a new green revolution — or possibly a "blue" revolution.

Technology helps accomplish this in both the ag and landscape arenas. Offering usable, affordable technology scalable for use at the residential level and in the field is important. Putnam says that through this, we can win the battle to feed world, achieve quality of life and conserve natural resources.

Sustainability in water use panel

The following panelists participated in the discussion:

- Warren Gorowitz, *Ewing Irrigation & Landscape Supply*
- Amy Graham, *Texas Nursery and Landscape Association*

Gorowitz defined sustainability as taking resources we have and preserving them for future generations. This consists of three parts: people, planet and profits.

Technology and how we irrigate have evolved and improved over the years, but there are still challenges facing the industry. Our society is currently experiencing a number of "disruptions" changing the way we do things. One example is how Uber is affecting (and disrupting) the transportation industry. An example closer to our industry is the lawn guru app that offers on-demand lawn work. Similar "disruptions" affecting how we do things will change our industry, and it is important to be prepared.

Irrigation is the original "green" industry. It's how we work with the outdoors and how we connect others with the outdoors. Although the various unique aspects of our industry work in different ways, collaborating will make us a stronger voice in advocating for the industry.

Gorowitz discussed the importance of an emphasis on investing in green infrastructure at the political level and collaboration from varying sectors of the industry to provide a stronger voice in advocating for the industry.

Instead of waiting for someone else to create our story for us, Gorowitz believes we need to lead the discussion about the value of irrigated landscapes.

Graham discussed the Texas Water Smart program, an initiative started when Texas experienced a drought in 2010 – 2011.

State officials combined with private companies to promote water conservation and efficient water use. The program was endorsed by numerous public officials and companies.

The program helped increase awareness through

- providing residential water tips.
- public service announcements.
- development of a website.
- a school curricula throughout Texas.
- a new Junior Master Gardener program.
- creation of a certification (TNLA).
- a tax-free holiday for plants and WaterSense products.

An important aspect of the initiative was to ensure that the people making decisions on water use or water restrictions understood the consequences related to those decisions. The message for those decision-makers was the importance of keeping the water on.

Throughout the process, surveys were conducted to gauge consumer understanding and attitudes. Consumers reported a main desire to protect the environment for future generations, as well



Warren Gorowitz, Ewing Irrigation & Landscape Supply



Amy Graham, Texas Nursery and Landscape Association



as conserving water and protecting natural resources. Legislation was passed in Texas allowing for \$1 million in funding for consumer education in case of drought.

Although the program helped push the state out of its drought, the coalition is still needed. Knowing that drought will happen again, Graham says the work through this initiative will continue.

Water challenge panel

The following panelists participated in the discussion:

- Ben Bolusky, *Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association*
- Chris Butts, *Georgia Green Industry Association*
- Dennis Carman, *White River Irrigation District*
- Katie Masucci, *City of Plano, Texas*

Ben Bolusky's organization represents nurseries, growers, landscape contractors, etc. In Florida, this is a \$21 billion industry. He sees the top water challenge in Florida to be landscape irrigation. The agriculture irrigation sector has been successful with water efficiency, and the water debate has shifted to using less water in landscape irrigation.



The challenge is determining how to protect consumers and the environment and use less water. The FNGLA created a Landscape Irrigation Committee with a mission to maximize irrigation efficiency and decreased water use through advocacy, education and public relations.

He understands that the landscape industry and irrigation industry share a symbiotic relationship. The landscape industry can't survive without the irrigation industry and vice versa.

Effects of Hurricane Irma on the state have been significant. All of agriculture took a large hit, as well as the nursery industry. Preliminary estimates are that there was \$2.5 billion in ag structural and crop damage. Citrus was hit the worst.

Chris Butts reported that the catalyst for the water challenges in Georgia were the droughts experienced in 2000 – 2002 and 2007 – 2009, as well as one they just came out of recently.

In 2007 – 2009, the drought cost the industry \$1.5 billion and 30,000 jobs. The water ban during that time shut down the industry and led to these losses. Action had to be taken to inform leaders of the economic and environmental impact of a water ban.

During this time, the industry in Georgia developed ways to save water and communicate how people and industries were already saving water. They focused on telling the story of how they were using water efficiently.

His primary message is that the time to start thinking about this and creating a drought management plan is now.

Dennis Carman provided an overview of the Grand Prairie Irrigation Project in Arkansas. The project is a public-private partnership and has been successful in converting over 300 farms to surface water irrigation.

Carman agrees that water is the critical resource for the future. It is important to determine a balance for how municipal, industrial, environment and agriculture water use can coexist.

Katie Masucci reported that the focus in Plano, Texas, has been to craft messages for water conservation. The challenge is related to outdoor residential water use, as opposed to indoor use.

Issues have been poor irrigation design and installation, lack of hydrozoning and aging systems.

“People” problems include “set it and forget it,” putting the wrong plant in the wrong place and an aging population.

In Plano, the city has initiated an educational approach created to empower residents to water at the right time and make simple repairs. The initiative includes seasonal watering guidelines, as well as other resources including the following:

- online learning modules
- infographics
- utility bill inserts to outline water usage
- Environmental Education Center (similar to a museum)
- in-person class series about controllers
- water-wise landscape tours
- residential rebate program (WaterSense)

Pilot studies have also been conducted, including the most recent where controllers were provided to a sampling and the study involved analyzing the water usage of participants before and after receiving the controllers.

