

Unified Agricultural Water Advocacy for the Lower Rio Grande

By

Lower Rio Grande Valley Water District Managers' Association

As the water supply shortage in the Lower Rio Grande (LRG) persists, major investment strategies should remain in areas where the Return on Investment, as it relates to cost and water savings, is greatest.

Agriculture holds about 90% of all the water rights in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, in which irrigation districts hold a vast majority of these water rights¹. The Lower Rio Grande Valley Water District Managers' Association (LRGVWDMA) represents twenty-three water districts spread across Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy Counties that control over 1.2 million acre-feet (AF*) of irrigation water rights.

For over a century, irrigation districts have served as the backbone of water deliveries not only to agricultural users but also industries and municipal water suppliers, throughout the LRG. This presents a great opportunity to strengthen water security for multiple water needs in one concentrated location - irrigation districts. As irrigation districts primary revenue source continues to be negligible due to the shortage of water, many funding opportunities are out of reach, at a time when they are needed most.

The 2021 Rio Grande Regional Water Plan listed several projects by both irrigation districts and municipal water suppliers. Once aggregated, the cost per acre-foot conserved for a project listed by an irrigation district is \$6,962.60 compared to \$10,628.70 per acre-foot for projects listed by municipal water suppliers that include "new water"². When water supply is ample, irrigation may use 1 million AF per year and municipal use is currently 280,000 AF per year. A 10% efficiency improvement in irrigation would yield 100,000 AF where a 10% efficiency improvement in municipal use would yield 28,000 AF - highlighting how improvements in irrigation districts are not only the lowest hanging fruit, but also the largest fruit.

The LRGVWDMA stands in solidarity, maintaining its firm commitment and support to advancing regional water strategies and water conservation projects with our regions "One Voice" initiative - Region M's Rio Grande Regional Water Plan.

* 1 acre-foot of water is equivalent to 325,851 gallons

¹ <https://gfipps.tamu.edu/files/2019/12/RGV-Irrigation-District-Efficiencies-and-Potential-Water-Savings.pdf>

² https://www.twdb.texas.gov/waterplanning/rwp/plans/2021/M/RegionM_2021RWP.pdf?d=3666