

For Immediate Release

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**Rice farmers urge state senators to address water needs of
Colorado River basin**

Downstream reservoirs backed as water security measure

EAST BERNARD, Texas (Jan. 4, 2013) – Rice farmers in the lower Colorado River basin today issued an appeal to state senators up and down the basin to take the lead in addressing water shortages resulting from the two-year drought.

In a letter to Senators Troy Fraser, Glenn Hegar and Kirk Watson, the farmers offered to work with them and stakeholders to ensure that downstream reservoirs proposed by the Lower Colorado River Authority are built. The reservoirs would “provide for more efficient delivery of stored water” and “relieve considerable pressure from the main storage reservoirs” of Lakes Travis and Buchanan, the letter said.

“We are calling on the senators to show leadership in developing water security for communities up and down the Colorado River,” said Ronald Gertson, chair of the Colorado Water Issues Committee. “We need to drought proof our water supplies.”

The appeal comes as rice farmers face a possible cut-off of irrigation water from LCRA for the second year in a row. On Jan. 8, the LCRA Board will consider whether to ask the state for more restrictive drought measures that would provide no water to farmers, depending on lake levels on March. 1.

The LCRA provides water to rice farmers through four irrigation systems in Colorado, Wharton and Matagorda counties.

The lower basin counties face “significant economic and social suffering” if LCRA decides to cut off irrigation water for rice farmers this spring, the letter explained. Leadership is needed to “halt the fatal momentum that would destroy irrigated agriculture in the state while offering no solution for sustainable growth.”

In fact, the suffering goes beyond the agricultural sector, Gertson said.

“Reservoirs located beside the river in downstream counties would benefit the economy, environment and way of life in a nearly a dozen counties upstream,” Gertson said.

Financing for the proposed reservoirs could be available if state lawmakers would fund the State Water Plan, a list of water projects to meet expected shortages, Gertson added. The 83rd Legislature convenes on Jan. 8.

In addition, the state senators could spearhead a public forum or stakeholder process to “aid our basin as a whole in responsible and shared development of vital water resources,” the letter said.

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The Colorado Water Issues Committee (<http://www.texasricefarming.org/CWIC/index.html>) aims to facilitate the availability of Colorado River water supplies for rice production in the four major irrigation operations on the Colorado River.