

For Immediate Release

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**Rice farmers say LCRA vote to cut off irrigation water
underscores need for basin-wide water security**

EAST BERNARD, Texas (Jan. 8, 2013) – Rice farmers in the lower Colorado River basin said the LCRA's decision today to cut off irrigation water for a second straight year underscores the need for water security up and down the basin.

“We understand LCRA's decision though it will cause serious economic hardship to our industry and potential environmental damage to the Central Texas Gulf Coast,” said Ronald Gertson, chair of the Colorado Water Issues Committee. “The suffering will only be worthwhile if efforts are made to secure the survival of rice farming in the lower basin.”

Rice farmers from Colorado, Wharton and Matagorda counties told the LCRA board at its special meeting that they felt the brunt of the drought was falling on their shoulders. They would like to see the pain more equally shared by upstream and downstream users, the farmers said.

“It is imperative that the burden of securing reliable water supplies be shared up and down the basin,” Gertson said.

In his public comment to the LCRA board, Gertson reiterated the committee's appeal to state senators to take the lead in addressing water shortages resulting from the two-year drought.

In a Jan. 4 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.

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

"In the event that legislation is needed to expedite construction of the reservoirs, we hope the senators will provide the necessary leadership," Gertson said. "Storage reservoirs will benefit the economies, environment and rural culture in more than a dozen counties up and down the basin."

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 convened today.

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.