

JERRY A. NEWBY
PRESIDENT

October 24, 2012

Mr. Lance LeFleur, Chairman
Stakeholder Subcommittee
Alabama Water Agencies Working Group
PO Box 301463
Montgomery, AL 36130

Dear Mr. LeFleur:

On behalf of the Alabama Farmers Federation, we thank Governor Bentley and the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group (AWAWG) for the opportunity to provide feedback to your report. We also appreciate the opportunity afforded our Water Resource Planning Committee to ask questions and hear our concerns and ideas regarding the development of a potential water plan for the State of Alabama.

Water is a critical resource to the agricultural community in Alabama. Farmers depend on water to irrigate crops, keep fish ponds at full pool and hydrate livestock. Farmers want to be good stewards of our water resources. They want to use this resource in a way that sustains their farms and has a positive economic impact on rural areas, thereby benefitting all Alabama citizens with food, fiber, and environmental enhancements.

Data

- The Alabama Farmers Federation believes we must have an accurate inventory of our state's water resources before we move forward with statewide water policy to ensure that water is available for agriculture in times of stress.
- There must be adequate funding available for comprehensive, unbiased data collection.
- The Alabama Farmers Federation would not be inclined to support studies that, while they were being executed, would adversely affect agricultural production or related agribusiness enterprises in any way.

Irrigation

- Increasing the number of irrigated acres in Alabama is not only important to agriculture, but also to our state's rural economy. When you compare Alabama's irrigated acres with other southern states, Alabama ranks at the bottom, as shown by the following list:



Mr. Lance LeFleur

October 24, 2012

Page Two

- Arkansas - 4.46 million acres
 - Florida - 1.55 million acres
 - Mississippi - 1.37 million acres
 - Georgia - 1.02 million acres
 - Alabama - 112,819 acres
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- If Alabama reached 500,000 acres of irrigated land, it would mean approximately 13,000 new jobs, producing a positive economic impact in the rural areas of the state where we need it most.
 - Efforts have been made to increase Alabama's irrigated acres. The Alabama Universities Irrigation Initiative has completed extensive research and developed a blueprint for sustainable irrigation in Alabama; federal funds have been secured through USDA to assist farmers in building irrigation ponds; and legislation has been passed creating a tax credit incentive program to help more Alabama farmers manage the impacts of drought.
 - Any water management plan should include a comprehensive and long range plan for irrigation needs.

Best Management Practices

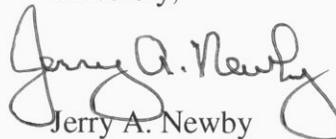
- The Alabama Farmers Federation strongly supports state programs to conserve soil and water.
- The Alabama Farmers Federation urges research and educational programs to develop and promote Best Management Practices to conserve and protect Alabama's water resources which are critical not only to Alabama's farmers, but to everyone in the state.

Property Rights

- The Alabama Farmers Federation believes in the protection of property rights.
- Water use rights for Alabama landowners are supported by the Alabama Farmers Federation.

The Alabama Farmers Federation will continue to review and evaluate the proposals that are presented to us by the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group. Because we remain unclear as to the short and long-term impacts of several items, we are not able to provide a definitive position on all of them, but do believe each item can have an impact on agriculture. Therefore, we see this letter of response as a beginning point. Again, thank you and we look forward to continued dialogue.

Sincerely,


Jerry A. Newby



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