

Presentation Abstract

No Chico-Brush Project: Engaging Farmers in Soil Health Research

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The farmer-led “NoChicoBrush” group in Montrose and Delta Counties believes farmers must have a seat at the table for every discussion dealing with agricultural water. The group is leading two major initiatives to address the ongoing need to firm the supply of agricultural water to producers while simultaneously contributing to conservation values such as endangered species, critical habitat protection and improving stream flows.

The first of the two initiatives involves local, West Slope, on-farm irrigation efficiency research, led by CSU researcher, Dr. Perry Cabot. The research intends to evaluate and compare the effects on water use and crop production via side by side on-farm irrigation practices, including traditional furrow irrigation, center pivot sprinklers, drip irrigation systems and big gun delivery systems with the integration of technological soil moisture monitoring sensors. Dr. Cabot, in his first year of a three year project, may be conducting the first in depth, on-farm research of this nature in Western Colorado. Farmer participatory involvement and farmer to farmer communication/outreach are critical components of this research.

The second initiative is to apply for funding under the Regional Conservation Partnership Project (RCPP), part of the 2014 Farm Bill. The proposal, known as the Lower Gunnison Basin Project, requests \$20 million dollars of direct funding from the RCPP application and, overall, will apply over \$68 million dollars in matching funding and in kind contributions. The goal of this project will be multifaceted: implement off-farm irrigation delivery improvements, encourage, demonstrate and implement more on-farm irrigation efficiencies and demonstrate the value and methods of improving soil health practices that ultimately impact water use. RCPP funding will be announced in mid-November 2014.

In addition to farmers, the No Chico Brush group includes Montrose and Delta County Commissioners, multiple Conservancy Districts, Domestic and Agricultural Water Users Associations, Municipal and Industrial Water Suppliers, Delta Montrose Electric Association, the Colorado River District, Colorado State University, the Gunnison Basin Roundtable, Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, the Colorado Water Conservation Board and numerous private business interests.