

# Kentucky Farm Bureau Efforts Lead to HB 529 Passage

While approximately three-quarters of the earth is covered in water, a very small percentage of that is considered to be consumable. Factoring in the growing world population, the threat of water shortages, especially in times of drought, becomes a real concern in many regions of the world.

The United States is not immune to that problem and a classic example can be found in California which is experiencing a fifth straight year without ample rainfall.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, over 99 percent of that state is suffering from some level of drought and nearly 40 percent is considered to be at the exceptional drought level, the most intense of the measuring categories.

Recognizing the issues taking place in the west and the problematic possibilities water shortages could cause anywhere in the country, Kentucky Farm Bureau's (KFB) Water Management Working Group (WMWG), a 20-member task force, came together in 2015 specially charged to develop recommendations that will enhance the quality and quantity of water resources accessible for agricultural production in the state.

Its mission is to research the emerging critical issue of inadequate water supplies available for agricultural production, examine potential actions to solve this deficiency and make recommendations for bringing new and reliable water sources to key areas of farm production in Kentucky.

Steve Coleman, who chairs the WMWG and is the retired Director of the Kentucky Division of Conservation, said taking a proactive stance on water issues is of the upmost importance not only to the agriculture community but to the state as a whole.

"To put it simply, none of us can survive without a safe, plentiful water supply. In looking forward at possible solutions to water issues that could arise, we stand a much better chance of handling situations such as



drought conditions than trying to react once they have occurred," he said.

Coleman also said there never needs to be a situation where agriculture is pitted against its urban neighbors over water.

"Working well together is the best possible situation we can be in if and when the need arises to take action over water issues," he said.

As a direct result of WMWG's proactive work and recommendations, HB 529, was introduced on a bipartisan basis during this year's General Assembly session to improve coordination among all interested parties involved in the Commonwealth's water resources planning, management, and development.

The legislation will promote economic development opportunities through the strategic and efficient use of water resources by ensuring a long-term adequate supply of on-farm water resources for agriculture, thus alleviating pressure on rural/urban water supplies.

Specifically, HB 529 creates the Kentucky Water Resources Board which would be administered by the Energy and Environment Cabinet and will assist the cabinet in conducting research and developing recommendations to enhance the quality of water resources accessible for agricultural production in the state.

Rep. Rick Rand (D- District 47) and Rep. Steven Rudy (R District 1) served as the main

sponsors of the bill which passed both the House and Senate by a unanimous vote.

During its discussion before the Senate Agriculture Committee, Chair Sen. Paul Hornback said the bill was very important to agriculture.

"For those of us that are in agriculture and those of us in rural areas, even though we have an abundance of water here in Kentucky, this is going to be, in the future, the most important resource that we have," he said. "With regulations that are coming down like Waters of the US and a lot of things are over burdensome, for Kentucky to be out in the forefront and to start looking and for Farm Bureau to start looking at issues that may arise in the future and being on the forefront of that, I appreciate that and want to thank you from a lot of my fellow farmers."

In their testimony to the committee, Rand and Rudy emphasized the importance of being pro-active in matters related to water use.

Rand told committee members, "We don't want to paint ourselves in the corner because, as we have more development in the country, more growth in our urban areas, it puts pressure on our farms."

Rudy said with water being "our most precious resource," this water resource board will allow agriculture to continue to have a seat at the table in matters related to quality and quantity of water.

Sen. David Givens, Senate President Pro

Tem, said in the legislative process, there are some things that are important and there are some things that are really important; he count this (HB 529) among those that are really important.

“For us to be able to regulate our own waters is so vitally important to the ag economy and the future of the Commonwealth and, not just from an agricultural standpoint,” he said. “People much wiser than me refer to water as the next oil. Being able to control that within the boundaries of our state is vital.”

KFB President Mark Haney said he appreciated the support from legislators, as well as KFB members in working to get passage of the bill.

“We are so thankful for the support the entire General Assembly has shown for HB 529 which reinforces how important it is to be proactive in water resource issues,” he said. “I also want to thank our members who worked tirelessly to get the word out

about the need for this legislation. This effort represents the true success of grassroots advocacy in stepping up to speak out for agriculture.”

David S. Beck, KFB Executive Vice-President said while a unique aspect of the proposed legislation is its connection directly to the agricultural industry, the creation of the Kentucky Water Resources Board will have positive impacts throughout all economic sectors of the state.

“At the end of the day, better water management would be a benefit to all businesses, all industries and, ultimately, all Kentuckians,” he said. “With passage of this bill, it will provide a unique opportunity for Kentucky to demonstrate its willingness to meet such an issue head-on, in a bi-partisan way. It sets the bar for other states to work in the same manner.”

Beck also noted KFB’s appreciation of the unanimous support shown by the General Assembly in moving this legislation forward.

*This article was provided by Kentucky Farm Bureau.*

