

Yuma Conservation District

REPUBLICAN RIVER BASIN PATHWAYS PROJECT & Pathways 2 Market

SUMMARY: Our Pathways Projects are helping producers either move to lower-water use crops or learn how to grow traditional crops on less water. We anticipate that future water allocations will limit irrigation wells to 15-18 inches of water annually. Therefore, in order **to save water and save farms and rural communities**, we need to shift our thinking; improve our planning and water management skills; try out new, lower-water use crops; and tap into consumers' need for safe, whole foods. Pathways does all of that at the same time.

PROBLEM STATEMENT: LOSS OF IRRIGATED ACRES AFFECTS US ALL.

While producers and their families live off the net income from farming, communities live off the gross expenses – which are all of the expenditures for crop inputs. The loss of an irrigation well means land must be reassessed for property tax purposes. Shutting down irrigation wells will result in less money for our school districts and other essential services.

SOLUTIONS:

Basically, producers have two choices: raise traditional crops on less water or switch to lower-water-use crops.

- If we raise traditional crops on less water, we have to follow the lead of the Pathways pilot farmers and dramatically improve water management – taking consumption down to 15-18 inches.
- If we switch to lower-water use crops, we need to search for ways to add value to the new crops to offset some of the loss to producers and communities that results from losing irrigated crops.

THE STEPS WE ARE TAKING IN PATHWAYS:

- **Pilot Farms** – raising traditional crops (corn and sugar beets) on half the water; multi-cropping; trying out non-traditional crops, such as grass-fed beef, onions, peas.
- **Whole Farm Planning** – making big picture decisions; mitigating losses.
- **Investigating** alternative crops, direct marketing, and value-added opportunities.
- Asking for **rule changes** that allow for grazing on CREP lands.
- Trying out **non-traditional crops** on corners and other marginal lands – tapping into consumers' desires for safe, whole foods.
- Looking for ways to **increase dryland income**, such as adding high-value crops into a traditional wheat rotation. Flax is one potential crop.
- **Providing** producers with crop menus, applied research, planning workshops, and direct marketing support.

We want to help **save water AND save farms and rural communities** in Yuma Conservation District and throughout the Republican River Basin.