

Utah Legislature Looks to USU for Water Conservation

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The Utah State Legislature made a powerful statement that water conservation is a high priority and a critical part of future water management and planning. By approving ongoing funding for the Utah State University Extension Water Conservation Initiative, legislators cleared the way for increased applied research and outreach education for water conservation at the recent session.

The funding will enable the university to better collaborate with the Utah Division of Water Resources, water conservancy districts and agricultural and urban water users throughout the state to more efficiently use precious water resources.

The threefold goals of the initiative include reducing the amount of water used by consumers; helping Utahns enjoy quality of life by providing tools and information to help them become better stewards of natural resources; and supporting agriculture in Utah by promoting efficient agricultural water use.

“We are very pleased about the funding of this initiative,” said USU Extension Vice President Ken White. “Our hats go off to members of the Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment Committee whose vision is far reaching. We also appreciate the significant contributions made by local legislators in getting this appropriation. This funding will be of tremendous long-term benefit to the state.”

White said water conservation offers the least expensive source for additional water.

“While new infrastructure must be considered in the long run, if we develop better conservation programs there will be more available water without building a single new pipeline or dam,” he said.

Eagle Mountain City Mayor Christopher Pengra said the city is looking to take a leadership role in expanding what is possible in community-driven water conservation.

“We have found that there is no other organization better suited as a partner than USU Extension and the Center for Water Efficient Landscaping,” he said. “The knowledge and technology USU Extension brings to water conservation efforts are second to none. I appreciate the investment our state legislators have made to extend the reach of USU Extension programs.

White said part of the funding will be used by the university to strengthen applied research programs for conservation in both agricultural and urban water use. A steering committee of water stakeholders will help guide the university in selecting and funding the most appropriate conservation research.

A long-term benefit of the funding will be the support of graduate students studying water conservation in landscaping and production agriculture.

“Funding for graduate students will help USU expand its internationally recognized water research to include more conservation,” said Larry Rupp, director of USU’s Center for Water Efficient Landscaping. “With this funding, we can attract highly qualified students to perform research. It will also provide crucial matching funds to increase our ability to compete for federal research funding.”

In addition to research, the funding will support USU Extension in carrying the latest information to water agencies, communities and water users throughout the state.

As a land-grant university, USU collaborates with every county in the state through its Extension programs. The county Extension offices and outreach programs such as the USU Botanical Center, Water Check and WaterMAPS programs will help translate and share research data so the public can stay informed on how to use water as wisely as possible.

For further information about the initiative, contact White at 435-797-2201 or ken.white@usu.edu, or Rupp at 435-232-1158 or larry.rupp@usu.edu.

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