

Good Morning. I am Steve Singletary, a Southwest Georgia farmer, local businessman, supervisor with the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District and the vice chairman of the Georgia Soil & Water Conservation Commission.

I am pleased to be here today representing not only the Georgia Soil & Water Conservation Commission but the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District, a District that may be directly impacted by the results of this hearing. For over 60 years, this conservation district has played an important role making sure local leaders help make decisions regarding the use of natural resources. The forty Districts across the state are active partners in the delivery of federal, state and local conservation policies and programs.

Mr. Chairman, I want to personally thank you for holding this hearing today in Columbus, and for including conservation issues on the agenda. I fully understand much of today has been and should be focused on the Corps of Engineers' operation of local river basins. However, I am pleased you and the Committee understand the value and importance of the impact of ag water conservation.

Conservation programs have grown over the last decade to now represent significant funding and meaningful technical assistance to farmers and irrigators. This commitment allows farmers to not only protect their soil and water but also be a better neighbor and citizen.

Row crop producers in Southwest Georgia have benefited from the irrigation management cost share and incentives promoted by current conservation programs, resulting in better management of land and water. While we get other support from the commodity programs, the conservation tools, both technical and financial, have helped avoid regulation and promote more profitability in an ever changing farming environment.

I know my time is limited here today but, I do want to leave you with several thoughts regarding some of the water conservation programs that the Georgia Soil & Water Conservation Commission offers to assist producers.

The first program I would like to mention is the Ag Water Conservation Initiative Irrigation Reservoir Incentive Program, better known as the Pond Program. This program provides cost share assistance to land owners to help offset the cost of either renovating an existing pond or constructing a new impoundment. These containment structures catch off-season water that would be lost and provide a source to augment both surface and groundwater supplies. A key partner in this program is the Natural Resources Conservation Service who provides technical assistance to ensure that construction is completed in a sound manner.

The Commission's Mobile Irrigation Lab provides a service of evaluating the uniformity of water distribution under center pivot irrigation systems. As systems age, water distribution patterns may change. In many cases, irrigation is scheduled when a portion of the field is stressed by hot, dry conditions. If water is not applied uniformly, this portion of the field may need to be irrigated before the rest of the field requires water. A Mobile Irrigation Lab audit quantifies how uniform water is applied. Results of this field test include a graph showing the uniformity of the pivot starting at the pivot point and proceeding down the system toward the endgun, an accurate application chart from a field verified speed and water flow test and a

detailed report showing leaks and needed repairs. If uniformity results are poor, cost share assistance is offered to the producer to retrofit the nozzle package to improve water application uniformity. Through the use of GPS technology and aerial imagery, this program also helps identify offsite water application from an endgun and will provide cost share assistance to equip the systems with an endgun shutoff device when water is thrown on a public roadway or irrigation is applied to more than one half acre of nonproductive land.

The Commission is also implementing the first statewide effort to measure ag water use. HB579, passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Perdue, mandates that the Commission oversee the purchase, installation, maintenance and collection of data from meters on all Environmental Protection Division permitted ag withdrawals. This program inventories pumping sites, uses GPS technology to record their location and causes a meter to be installed at these sites. Annual water use data is obtained, along with the area that irrigation water is applied to and cropping history from these sites. The Commission works with the irrigator to help improve their understanding of how this state sponsored "on the farm" management tool can assist in improving irrigation efficiency and help identify pumping deficiencies. A state sponsored interactive web site will provide producers an opportunity to review personal water use data and/or provide comments on changes in the irrigation system or to their cropping history.

The last program I would like to highlight is the Irrigator Pro Ag Water Conservation Incentive Pilot Program. Through this cooperative effort with the National Peanut Research Lab, producers are given an incentive to use a computerized irrigation scheduling tool. For the crops of cotton, corn, and peanuts, irrigators can track crop water use needs and target irrigation events to match these needs.

The Commission's goal of these conservation programs is simple. It is to supply producers with the tools and knowledge they need to use water wisely and efficiently. The Pond Program provides additional water sources; the Mobile Irrigation Lab ensures that irrigation water is applied uniformly; the metering programs measure the amount of water pumped; and the Irrigator Pro matches what is being applied to crop water needs.

We have a great opportunity to build on the effective programs and policies that were established through years of commitment from federal, state and local leaders. These leaders want to continue to be constructive and active players to meet future conservation program needs. We want to work with you to make sure that programs like these continue to provide meaningful assistance to producers and results the taxpayers can also appreciate and enjoy. Producers realize that if water is used efficiently and effectively, their production costs are lower and they are being wise stewards of a resource that we all benefit from.

Thank you.