



ADVANCING THE LEGACY

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## Ag Water NetWORK

### Highlights of the 2019 Survey of Colorado Agricultural Producers on Watershed Management Planning

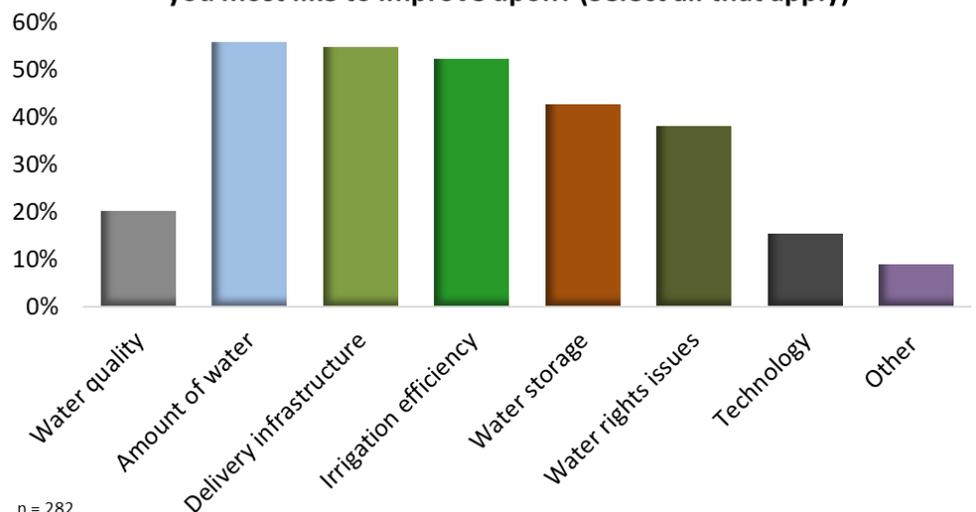
June 27, 2019

From January through April 2019, CCA's Ag Water NetWORK surveyed Colorado agricultural producers to assess their familiarity with the watershed and stream management planning process, and to better understand their needs and priorities related to water. The survey generated 288 responses from agricultural producers in 56 Colorado counties and represented operations of all sizes. About 84 percent of the respondents owned and/or managed irrigated land and about 16 percent had dryland (non-irrigated) operations.

#### Survey Results:

- Fifty-one (51) percent of respondents irrigated between 1 and 250 acres and 26 percent irrigated from 251 to 1,000 acres. Seven (7) percent irrigated more than 1,000 acres.
- About half of the respondents obtained irrigation water from a mutual ditch company. Sixteen percent sourced their water from a private irrigation group. Forty-five percent had decrees to divert surface water. Tributary and non-tributary groundwater was utilized by 18 percent and 9 percent of respondents respectively. Nine (9) percent obtained irrigation water from a water conservation district and / or a government agency.
- The most common water-related challenges cited by producers were the amount of water available for irrigation, delivery infrastructure, irrigation efficiency and water storage. Water rights challenges along with water quality and technology were also indicated.

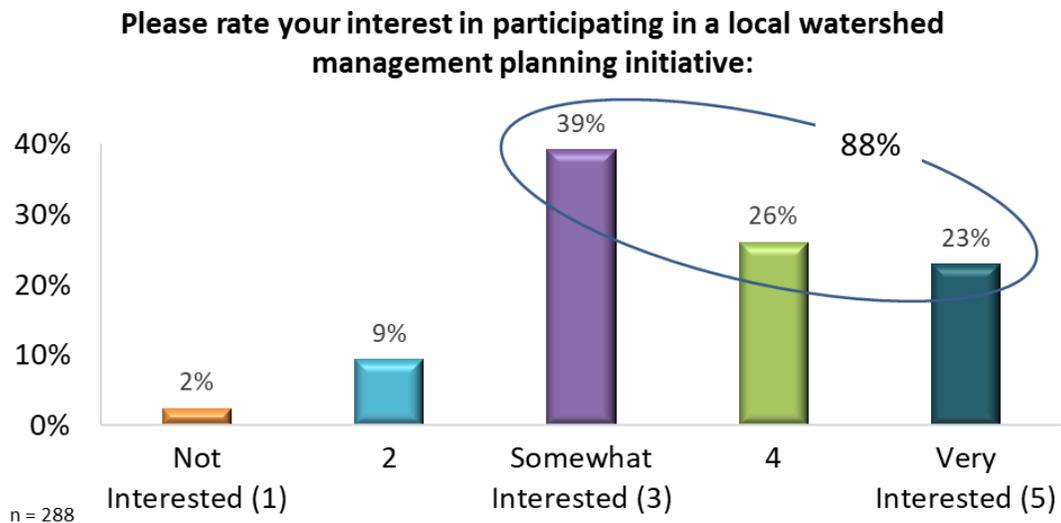
For your operation, what water-related challenge(s) would you most like to improve upon? (Select all that apply)



## Survey Results (continued)

- More than half – 54 percent - of the producers that took the survey indicated they had been or were currently involved in a watershed management planning effort.
- Most producers (63 percent) felt that ‘preserving and enhancing existing uses (agriculture, etc.)’ should be a priority of any watershed management plan. This was followed by irrigation infrastructure improvement and creating a drought contingency plan. Adding more water storage was indicated by almost half of the responders. Other producer recommended priorities included groundwater management planning, stream or river channel and riparian area restoration, forest health / fire mitigation and water quality.
- When asked “who should lead or co-lead watershed planning efforts in your area?”, a majority of producers (60 percent) indicated their local conservation district was the most suitable entity. A ‘coalition of local water interests’ and the ‘local or regional water conservation / conservancy district’ were choices selected by almost half of producers.
- Seventy (70) percent of producers indicated it would be helpful to have a better understanding of watershed management plans if they were to participate in the planning process. Fifty-six (56) percent said not holding meetings during harvest or irrigation season would also be helpful. About one-third indicated that attending meetings via conference call would better enable them to participate. Producers also indicated that evening meetings work best (46 percent) followed by mid- to late afternoon time-frames.
- Producers strongly supported the idea of having a local ag-oriented person serve as a "liaison" to help represent agriculture's interests at local watershed management planning and implementation meetings. The Ag Water NetWORK has developed a training program to help prepare interested ag producers and other ag-familiar individuals to represent agricultural interests on watershed and stream management planning efforts. Training is being conducted in cooperation with local ag-connected organizations and the Colorado Ag Water Alliance (CAWA).
- What specific role might producers prefer if they were to participate in watershed management planning activities? Forty-two (42) percent indicated they would be occasional attendees with no formal role. Forty (40) percent preferred a subcommittee member role and 13 percent would be willing to lead or co-lead a local planning effort. More than one in ten were willing to host other water stakeholders at their farm or ranch to showcase water-related improvements.
- Most producers said they were at least ‘somewhat familiar’ with what a watershed management plan is and what it is intended to accomplish. About 30 percent indicated minimal or no familiarity.
- Producers that indicated a willingness to serve as a leader or co-leader on watershed management planning activities gave themselves an average watershed planning familiarity score of 3.9 out of a maximum possible score of five (5). Conversely, producers that were unsure how they would engage on watershed planning gave themselves an average familiarity score of 1.2. This dichotomy suggests greater producer familiarity with watershed management planning leads to greater involvement in the planning process.

- Agricultural producers are interested in being involved in watershed management planning. Eighty-eight (88) percent of producers indicated they were at least “somewhat interested” in participating in a local watershed management planning initiative. Almost 1 in 4 indicated that they were “very interested” in participating.



### Recommendations:

The following recommendations are based on the survey responses and comments and are intended to help watershed and stream management planning groups and organizations better engage agricultural producers in the planning and implementation process.

- Provide concise, timely information to producers to help them gain a better understanding of watershed and stream management planning and implementation processes and outcomes.
- Keep meetings short, with well-defined goals and specific timelines for achieving objectives.
- Avoid acronyms and jargon in informational literature, presentations and in discussions.
- Improve communications so producers can easily stay informed.
- Avoid meeting during local hunting, calving, irrigation and harvest seasons.
- Hold meetings in the evening and enable phone conferencing.
- Improve coordination between groups to reduce confusion and improve efficiency.
- Reach the project implementation phase sooner to help sustain stakeholder enthusiasm and engagement.
- Watershed and/or stream management planning efforts need to have a specific purpose and clear, tangible benefits for agricultural producers to get involved.
- Funding is needed for ag water projects, especially projects that improve infrastructure, storage, and efficiency.