



FORTHCOMING REPORT:

# 10 STRATEGIES TO PROTECT IRRIGATED AGRICULTURE

THE COLORADO WATER PLAN – ACTION 2.6



**ROBUST  
AGRICULTURE**

*Assess the economic opportunities of avoided buy and dry to communities, ecosystems, and recreation.*

## CONTEXT

Agriculture is critical to the state's economy and supports many state values like food security, open space, and wildlife habitat. Agriculture is foundational to many economic sectors and the quality of life in rural areas, but these relationships are rarely understood fully before the irreversible impacts of buy and dry acquisitions of agricultural water supplies are set in motion. Where buy and dry water acquisitions occur and irrigated agriculture is diminished, the local economy, ecosystem services (e.g., wetland habitat or food sources for wildlife), and recreation opportunities may be negatively impacted.

The Colorado Water Plan identified Agency Action 2.6, with the goal of helping the CWCB, local governments, and stakeholders proactively understand and quantify the potential direct and indirect impacts of reducing irrigated acres or converting agricultural lands to urban or industrial uses. CWCB is finalizing the Action 2.6 report to assess the values that agriculture provides to Colorado and identify strategies to actively protect these values.

## THE COLORADO WATER PLAN RECOGNIZES THE VALUE OF IRRIGATED AGRICULTURE

Colorado's agriculture contributes \$47 billion to our state's economy each year and supports businesses directly and indirectly, especially in our rural communities. Preserving agricultural productivity and reducing the acreage coming out of production are critical to Colorado. Doing so will require a renewed commitment to recognizing the many benefits of agriculture, partnering with agriculture, and finding innovative, flexible, and collaborative strategies that maintain or increase economic output.

### *Agriculture supports...*

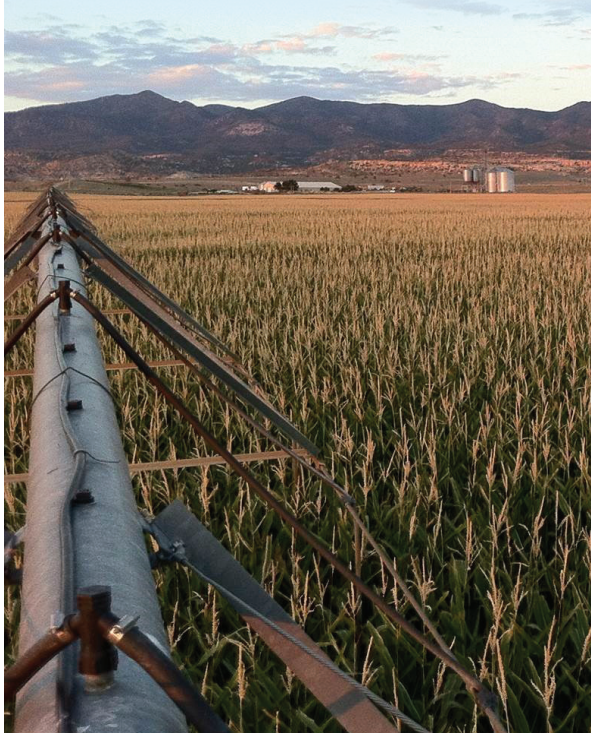
- ✓ **Communities** – agriculture is the socio-economic foundation of our rural communities
- ✓ **Ecosystems** – irrigation return flows maintain stream flow and support wetlands
- ✓ **Recreation** – water stored and later released for irrigation supports flat water and river recreation

What is  
**BUY AND DRY?**

*“Buy and dry” is a term used to describe the purchase of senior water rights used for agricultural irrigation and permanently transferring the water rights from the agricultural lands to serve another use.*

## WAYS TO REDUCE THE IMPACTS OF BUY AND DRY

The Colorado Water Plan concluded that the status-quo, buy-and-dry method of water supply acquisition puts at risk the important economic and community benefits to our state. Across the state, water stakeholders recognize the importance of agriculture in Colorado and want to support a sustainable agricultural industry—while respecting private property rights and identifying solutions to provide water for municipal needs. Some of the best solutions being implemented are highlighted in the report and summarized on the right.



### SOLUTIONS:

## 10 STRATEGIES TO PROTECT IRRIGATED AGRICULTURE

### MINIMIZE BUY AND DRY

- 1 Utilize tools and partnerships that keep agriculture in production, including Collaborative Water Sharing Agreements (CWSAs) as alternatives to permanent transfers

### ENHANCE THE ECOSYSTEM BENEFITS OF AGRICULTURE

- 2 Support multi-purpose projects, climate-resilient agriculture, and streamflow management programs

### IMPLEMENT CONSERVATION EASEMENTS TO PROTECT AGRICULTURAL LAND

- 3 Protect historical attributes, preserve open spaces and watersheds by using a strategic approach to conservation easements

### RECOGNIZE IRRIGATED AGRICULTURE AND ENERGY NEXUS

- 4 Utilize renewable energy production on agricultural lands for lower input costs or diversified income

### EXPAND MARKET PATHWAYS FOR PRODUCERS

- 5 Create more opportunities for economic success with investments in processing facilities, marketing campaigns, cooperatives and food hubs, and support agritourism

### ELEVATE AGRICULTURE IN URBAN PLANNING

- 6 Use tools like intergovernmental agreements, collaborative zoning and non-traditional models to guide development while preserving irrigated lands, local food production and agricultural heritage

### INVEST IN AGRICULTURE CAREER AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- 7 Support efforts to connect agricultural and urban communities, ag-focused youth development and leadership programs, and invest in farmer-to-farmer training opportunities

### PROMOTE WATER CONSERVATION

- 8 Remove barriers to implementing water conservation practices by providing increased funding in technology and partnerships

### INVEST IN INNOVATIVE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

- 9 Support innovative practices that make production more sustainable and profitable through funding for research and on-farm trials

### EXPLORE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- 10 Provide education and support of local, state and federal level funding programs for agriculture

## THE COLORADO WATER PLAN IS A BRIDGE TO ACTION

Everyone approaches the Water Plan from a different walk of life and perspective. For some people, solving water challenges is the focus of their career. For others, water simply supports their daily life. **Regardless of your perspective, water is essential for all of us, and we can all take some basic steps to support the call to action in the Water Plan:**

To learn more, visit [cwcb.colorado.gov](http://cwcb.colorado.gov)



**COLORADO**

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