Conserving Ogallala Communities Through Voluntary, Group Efforts to Manage Groundwater

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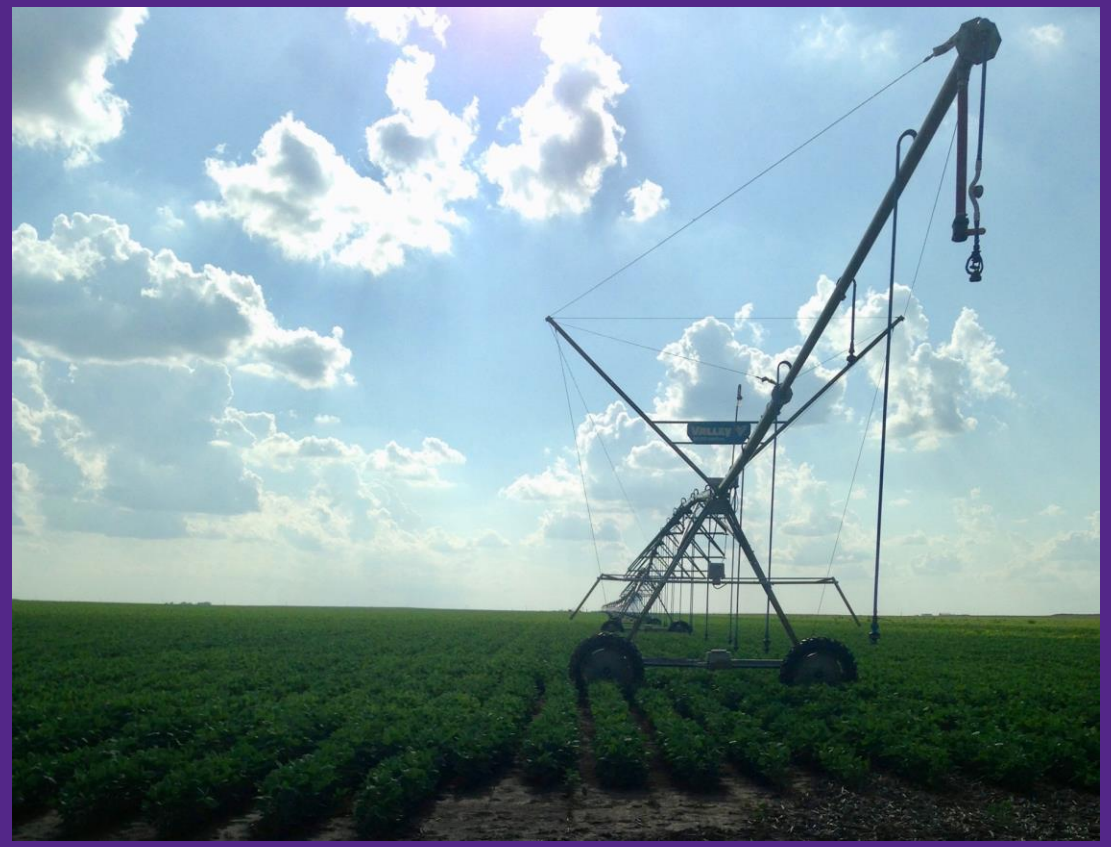
Overview

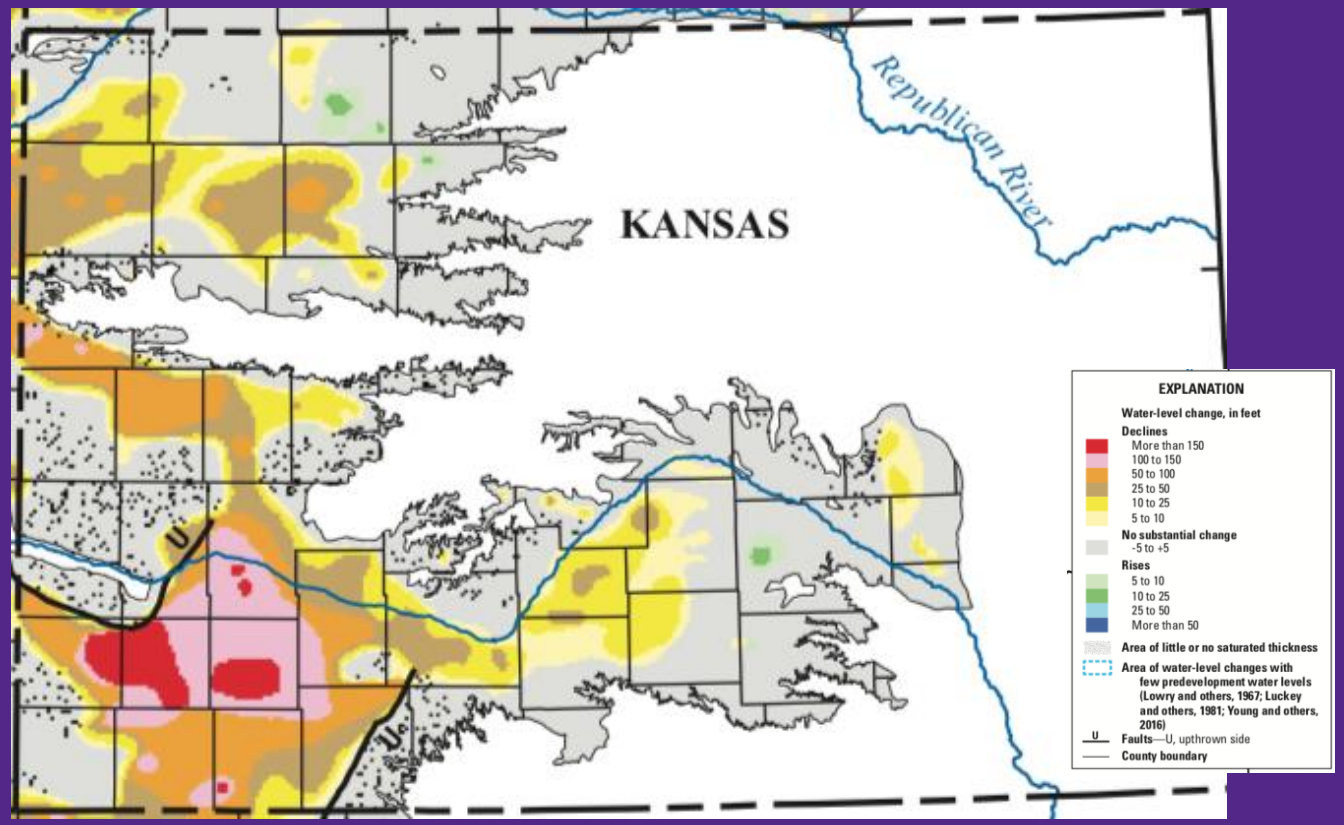
- Main Takeaway
- Context & Purpose
- Methods & Data
- Key Findings

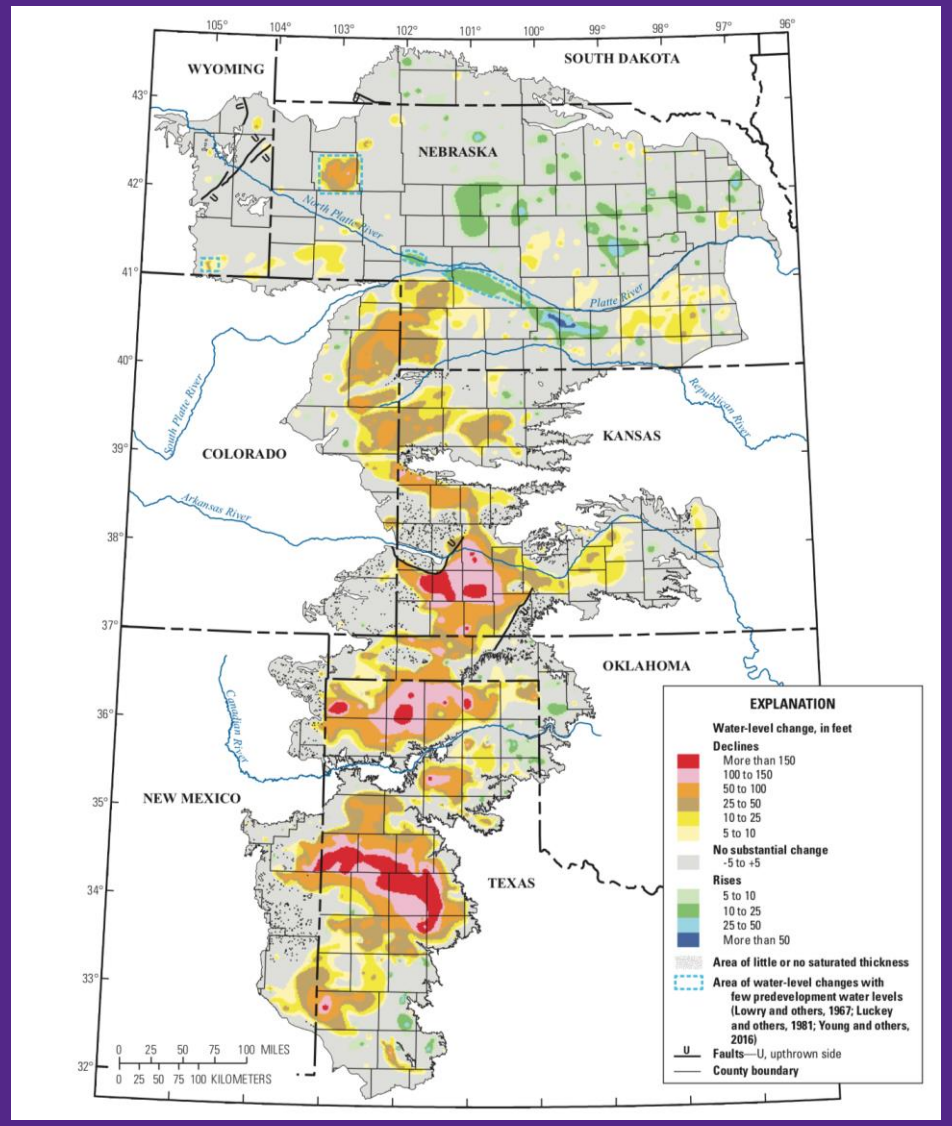


Main Takeaway

Voluntary group efforts are effective at conserving groundwater, and merit state support.

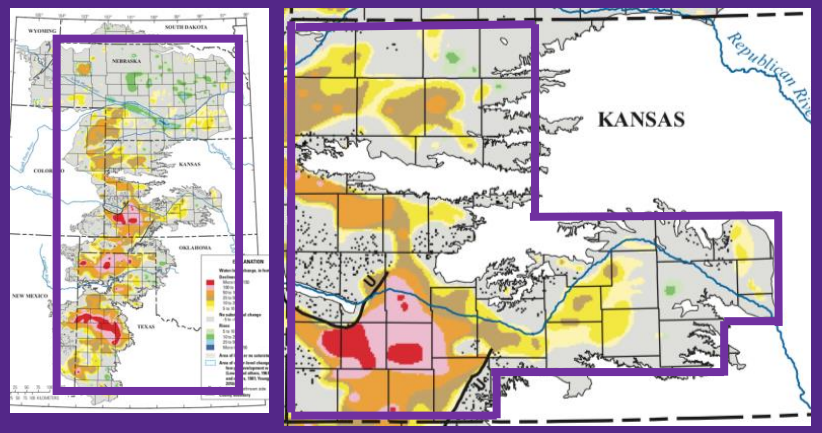
Context & Purpose





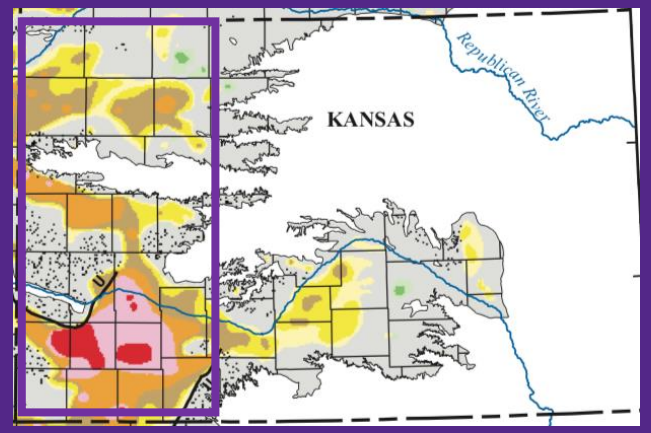
- We're running out of water
- Challenge for the Kansas Ag economy and rural communities

Methods & Data



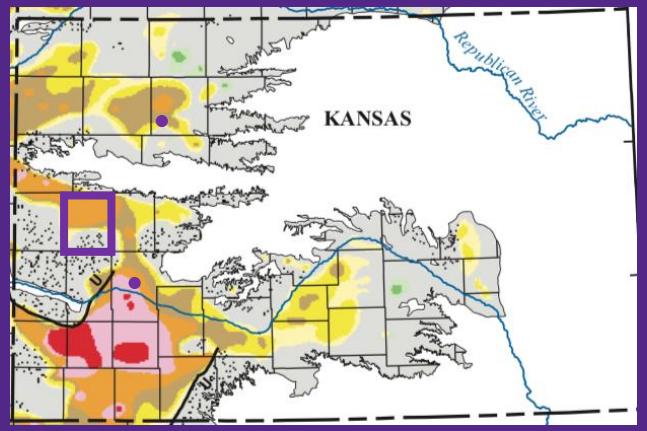
Survey of Producers

- Goal: Understand prevalence of various attitudes towards groundwater management
- Survey of 1226 producers
  - 279 producers in Kansas
- Sent January – June 2018
- A representative sample of producers in the region



Interviews With Producers

- Goal: Understand the full diversity of attitudes towards groundwater management.
- 41 Interviews with Kansas producers
- March 2017 - February 2019
- Focus on a diversity of farm sizes and types



Case Study of Wichita WCA

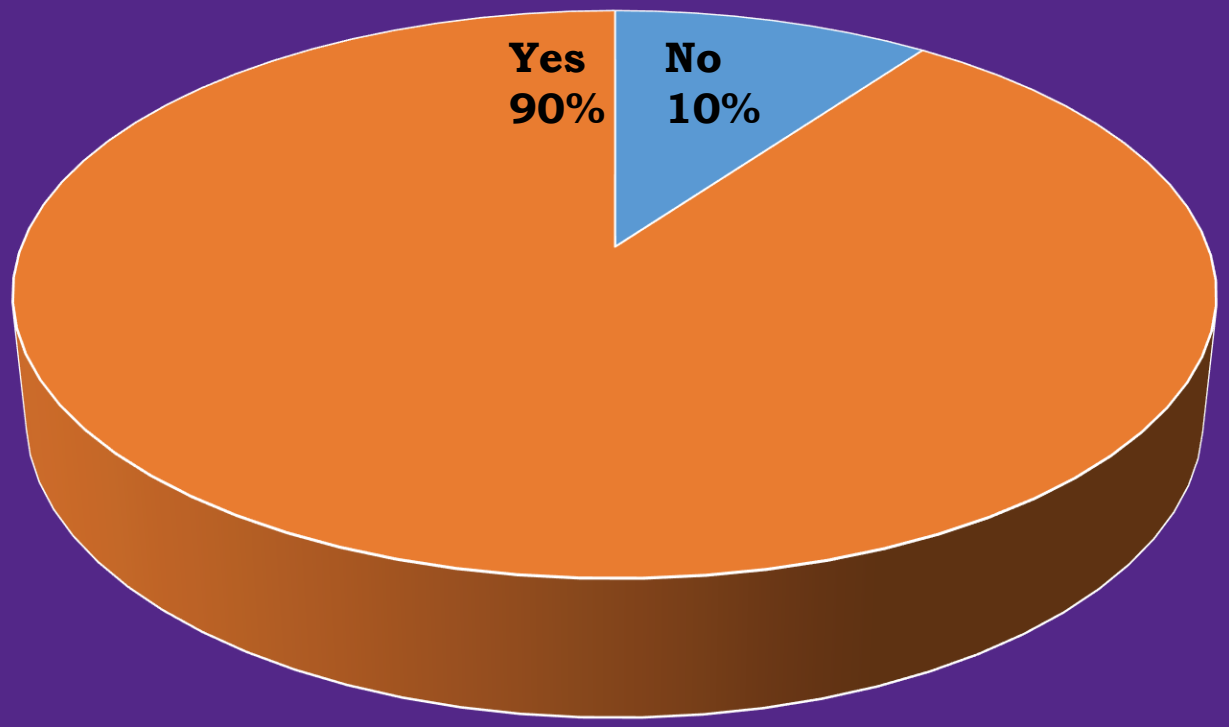
- Goal: Understand how voluntary group conservation works.
- Interviews, document analysis, watching meetings
- March 2018 - Present
- Focus on group dynamics, develop recommendations

Key Findings

- Kansas producers overwhelmingly support groundwater conservation
- Primary motivation is supporting the local community & future generations
- Most believe they are already doing all they can individually to conserve
- Producers in LEMA's and WCA's are finding additional ways to conserve
- With support, voluntary group efforts have opportunity to grow
- 5 recommendations for voluntary group conservation efforts

Producers support groundwater conservation

Should Ogallala groundwater be saved or conserved?



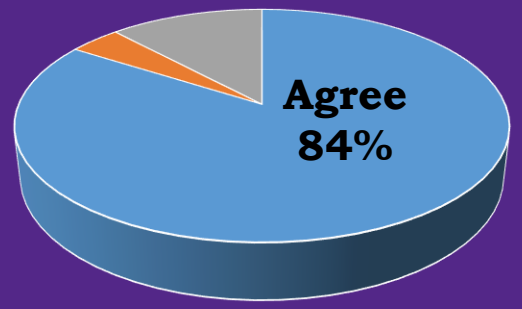
Producers support groundwater conservation

I think about water all the time … We're all doing our part to keep our families and traditions afloat, to maintain what we have and pass it on.

- Producer in Northwest Kansas

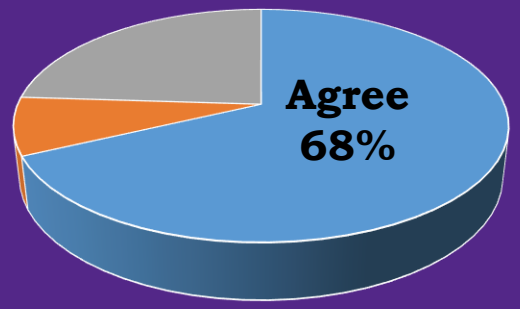
Motivations for conservation

Securing a way of life for future generations



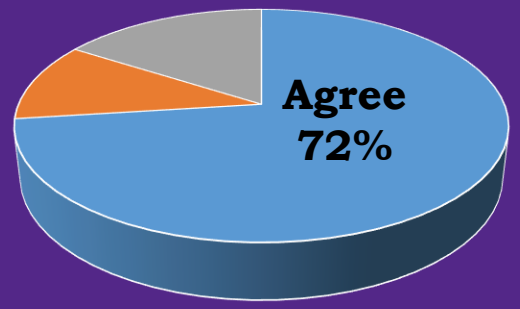
Agree: 84%
Neutral: 12%
Disagree: 4%

Supporting Local Communities



Agree: 68%
Neutral: 24%
Disagree: 8%

Preparing for Droughts



Agree: 72%
Neutral: 17%
Disagree: 11%

Motivations for conservation

"I used to think that water was mine and I could do with it as I pleased.

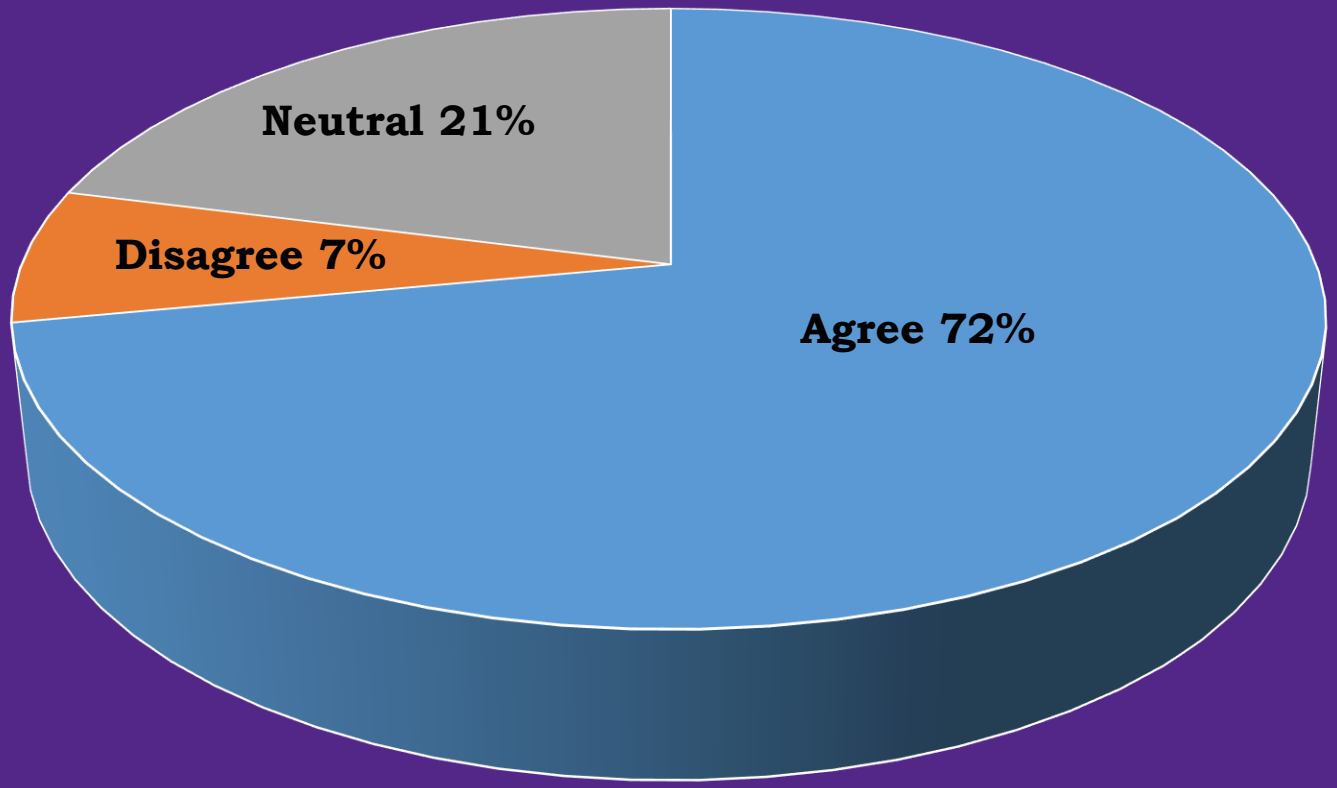
And I still think the water under my land is mine, but I also believe in a greater sense that it's ours and we need to conserve it …

And **I think it would be extremely selfish for us to use that water up and not save it for future generations.**"

– Producer in West Central Kansas

Limited capacity for more individual conservation

I already limit my groundwater use as much as possible



Limited capacity for more individual conservation

The things we hear today in this public meeting says that **these guys just don't know what they don't know yet.** They don't have all the data we have.

Also, just the communication part of: **"I'm not sayin' you're not conserving water. I'm saying that we can do better."**

And once we get past that … then people begin to open their minds to: "Okay, this might have some merit to it."

- Wichita WCA Team Member

Producers in LEMA's & WCA's find more ways to conserve

"**Since the LEMA, we've become better managers of water**, more focused on return.

We're better off in the LEMA even with lower commodity prices because we're managing to get a higher return.

- Producer in Northwest Kansas

Producers in LEMA's & WCA's find more ways to conserve

"**I think more water has been conserved… after the LEMA talks have started than was ever conserved before**.

And I don't think it has to do so much with soil probes and some of this technology. I think it's more a state of mind.

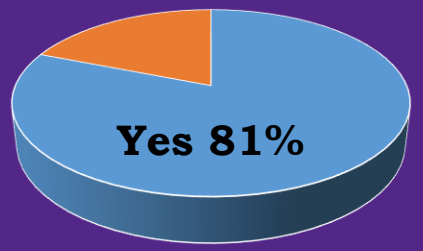
I shut my wells off when it rains and then I go back and probe and check and see.

And it just seems like more people are more aware of the situation…"

– Producer in Southwest Kansas

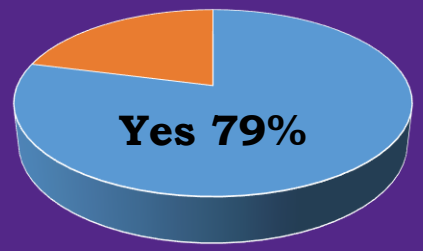
Voluntary group efforts have opportunity to grow

Open to possibility that voluntary group efforts can solve problems



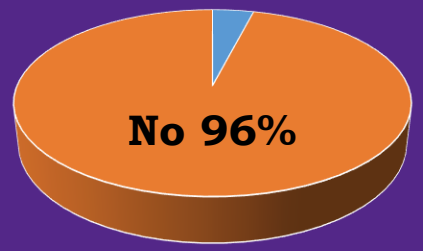
Yes: 81%
No: 19%

Personally might have something worthwhile to contribute



Yes: 79%
No: 21%

Currently involved in organizing voluntary group efforts



Yes: 4%
No: 96%

Producers seem open to voluntary group efforts. Why aren't more involved?

- Lots of time and effort is required to organize
- There are no easy answers

Lots of time & effort is required

Everybody on that committee that tried to start this - **we've put in hundreds of hours.** I mean it was incredible to see the motivation that they had too!

- Wichita WCA Team Member

Lots of time & effort is required

Over the years I've come to realize that in every issue there's content and there's process. **You gotta have a credible process that engages all stakeholders** who are gonna be affected by that change.

- Wichita WCA Team Member

There are no easy answers

We're trying to make it so that everybody takes an equal cut without being unfair to one side or the other.

But on the other hand everybody knows that the reason we're in this position is because people have pumped more water than is available.

So it's an impossible situation. That's why we're moving forward slowly, because we don't know the right answer. And I don't think anybody can really tell us what is the right answer.

- Producer in Southwest Kansas

5 recommendations for voluntary group efforts

1. Diverse Stakeholder Representation
2. An Early Focus on Teambuilding
3. Hire an Outside Facilitator
4. Frequent & Respectful Community Outreach
5. Partner with State and Local Government

Main Takeaway

Voluntary group efforts are effective at conserving groundwater, and merit state support.

The Last Word

My faith keeps me going. I am hopeful, no matter what. I do believe that when you get rid of the old, and you're willing to go through the grief of letting go, it's amazing what may be resurrected out of that grave.

- Wichita WCA Team Member

I want to be able to say to my kids "Yep. We worked hard to save the water here so that we know we have a way of life that we can sustain for years to come."

- Wichita WCA Team Member

Acknowledgements

Partners

Producers in Kansas & the Ogallala Region

Funders

USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

OgallalaWater.org

OPTIMIZING WATER USE TO SUSTAIN FOOD SYSTEMS

RSS

RURAL SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY

http://Bit.Ly/KSgroundwater