

# OPINION

"A newspaper may be forgiven for lack of wisdom,  
but never for lack of courage." — Gene Howe

11A Monday, December 7, 2009

AMARILLO GLOBE NEWS

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## Editorial

# Save water, build economy

A report on the economic impact of irrigated farmland seems almost counter-intuitive to the goal of conserving a precious natural resource.

But it also gives a solid reason to ensure that the two notions work hand in hand.

The report comes from Darren Hudson, who led a study while teaching from the Larry Combest Chair in Agricultural Competitiveness at Texas Tech University. Hudson presented his report at the Farm and Ranch Show in Amarillo.

The report states that the economy benefits tremendously from irrigated farming as opposed to dryland farming.

Irrigated farming contributes a \$1.6 billion impact to the region's economy. Hudson said the Panhandle's 26 counties irrigated about 1.4 million acres of cropland in 2008.

"Dry land farming of those 1.4 million acres would produce only

about one-fourth of the economic activity that we currently see from irrigation and about 12,000 fewer jobs," he said.

Hudson also disputes the notion

that the region is anywhere close to running out of groundwater. He said it will get more expensive to "lift it out of the aquifer," but added that there remains plenty of water to sustain the region literally for hundreds of years.

But here lies an apparent quandary. The economic impact

of irrigated farming also compels the need to conserve this resource. "No one wants to conserve water more than producers," Hudson said in an interview this past week.

Agreed.

Thus, the economic benefit of irrigated agriculture — which accounts for about 90 percent of all water use in the Panhandle — should be sustained by wise use of the water we keep pulling out of the ground.

