

Researchers get grant to study Ogallala

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The Amarillo Globe-News

Area researchers could receive nearly \$1 million in 2004 to continue studying the Ogallala Aquifer and ways to reduce depletion of the water table.

The money will be utilized by a consortium of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agriculture Research Service, Texas A&M University, West Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University and Kansas State University.

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, in announcing the House's approval of the funds on Monday, said the amount of \$879,778 is an increase of more than \$100,000 over fiscal year 2003. She said the Senate is expected to approve the request in January.

"Water is the lifeblood of Texas farmers," Hutchison said in a news release. "These funds will help conserve the precious resource of the Ogallala Aquifer while maximizing the available reserve."

Dr. James Clark, WT's dean of College of Agriculture, Nursing, Science and Engineering, said the Texas and Kansas delegations initially asked for \$3.5 million in funding to address and solve the critical needs associated with the declining Ogallala Aquifer.

Clark said the money approved last year didn't actually get here until September. At that time it was put toward seven objectives outlined by scientists from the various entities.

Objectives were:

- To investigate management of water, both irrigation and precipitation, within existing cropping systems and to conceptualize new cropping systems.
- To develop and evaluate integrated crop and livestock systems that reduce dependence on underground water resources while optimizing productivity, product quality and profitability.
- To investigate designs, performance and management of equipment and systems used for irrigation.
- To provide estimates of economic impacts of various water management activities and strategies.
- To provide a common assessment of the groundwater resources in the Ogallala Aquifer and the relationships with climate.
- To enhance the knowledge base of producers, water professionals and policy makers about soil water, crop water use, precipitation management and irrigation principles; and to develop an information program for youth about the Ogallala Aquifer and its importance and use.
- To develop and evaluate water-saving technologies for the confined animal feeding operations and industries that process agricultural commodities.

If the budget gets passed by February, the new money could reach this area by June, Clark said. Of the seven objectives, he said they are currently working on the first six.

"We didn't have enough money to start number seven," Clark said. "As the money builds, we'll hopefully address all the problems."

The projects allocated in September were one- and two-year projects. A year from now, he said, the first part of the results should be available. He said the overall project is expected to take about five years.

