



STATE ISSUE: WATER CONSERVATION & IRRIGATION EFFICIENCY

POSITION: FNGLA supports the development and implementation of science-based water conservation Best Management Practices, encourages cost-share assistance for conversion to more efficient irrigation systems, and supports research to increase reclaimed water use.

BACKGROUND: Florida's nursery growers have made significant progress in water conservation. Low-volume, drip-irrigation, water collection and recycling systems are being utilized by an increasing number of nursery growers. According to the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (FDACS), the total irrigated nursery acreage in the state increased from 49,900 acres in 1995 to 61,160 acres in 2000. Despite this increase in total irrigated acreage, FDACS estimates the daily amount of water used per acre actually decreased three percent during this same period due in large part to the nursery industry's considerable effort to increase irrigation efficiencies.

Advancements in irrigation system technology have fueled much of this progress. Yet, the cost of installing or retrofitting more efficient irrigation systems is a major impediment to speedier conversions. FNGLA encourages federal, state and regional government agencies to provide more meaningful cost-share assistance to make such technology more readily available to nursery growers.

FNGLA works with FDACS in the development and implementation of science and incentive-based best management practices (BMPs) to encourage water conservation, storage, recycling, and other improved irrigation systems. FNGLA urges coordination of water conservation-related BMP programs among FDACS, Florida's water management districts, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to minimize regulatory burdens and maximize incentives.

FNGLA encourages nursery growers' use of reclaimed water when such is economically and environmentally feasible. However, several reclaimed water issues must still be addressed by government agencies, including its cost, inconsistent quality and supply, need for indemnification and liability protection, and research into reclaimed water's effects on different nursery crops.