



Ogallala Aquifer – Lifeblood of the High Plains

Part II: Efforts to Extend Its Life

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Key Points:

- *The Ogallala Aquifer underlies parts of eight states within the High Plains region, from South Dakota to Texas, and is a major source for agricultural, industrial and municipal water needs.*
- *Withdrawals from the Ogallala for agricultural irrigation far exceed natural replenishment in some farming and ranching regions.*
- *Drought and heavy irrigation have delivered a one-two punch to the Ogallala, with severe depletion resulting in certain parts of Texas and Kansas.*
- *Efforts to extend the life of the aquifer include pumping restrictions, technological innovations, and more efficient irrigation systems.*
- *Other efforts to extend the life of the aquifer involve changes in farming practices, such as developing different crop rotations or different tillage management, the use of no-till in some crop rotations, intermittent fallowing of land, and shifting to crops that are less water-intensive.*
- *Farmers in some places are cutting back on irrigation while others are participating in demonstration projects that combine new technologies with tried-and-true methods in an effort to save water.*
- *Policymakers and politicians are also addressing the problem. Kansas in 2012 amended its water laws to promote conservation. Texas voters last November approved \$2 billion to support water projects and conservation efforts statewide.*

Introduction

For farmers and ranchers, water is essential. It nourishes the crops and livestock that feed the world, generating billions of dollars in income for the people who work the land. So it’s no wonder that water managers, farmers, economists, scientists, politicians and others don’t hold much back in describing threats to the Ogallala Aquifer, the major source of water in America’s High Plains.

This report focuses on the legislative actions, technological innovations, water conservation efforts and other initiatives aimed at extending the life of this vital resource. A companion report provides an overview of the Ogallala’s decline and the potential impacts on farming and food production.