

TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FROM: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**SUBJECT: TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM IRRIGATION TECHNOLOGY
CENTER IN SAN ANTONIO**

STATUS: ADOPTED

DATE: 01/30/03

RECOMMENDATION: That the Board of Directors of The Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce adopt the following statement as policy:

STATEMENT: The Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce supports the creation of the Texas A&M University System Irrigation Technology Center in San Antonio (Edwards Aquifer area) to establish a world-class, state-of-the-art facility for education, testing, and applied research, to promote efficient irrigation, water conservation, profitable agricultural production, and quality urban landscapes.

BACKGROUND: In November, the Water Committee received a presentation from Dr. Guy Fipps, ITC Programs Director, and Dr. Allan Jones, Texas Water Resources Institute Director, on the benefits of the ITC's creation.

The ITC has four primary missions: 1) Develop design and performance standards for agricultural and landscape irrigation systems; 2) Establish an equipment testing and certification program; 3) Provide training and educational services for irrigators, agency and industry personnel; and 4) Develop new and improved irrigation technologies, methods, and management practices.

It will also support regional programs and services including PET (potential evapotranspiration) networks, pumping plant efficiency testing, and specialized training and educational programs.

In Texas, agricultural irrigation uses about 65% of the total freshwater consumed annually, while landscape irrigation accounts for 20-40% of total municipal water use. Texas' rapidly growing population and industries are putting an increased demand on existing water supplies and conveyance systems; and regional water shortages are expected to become prevalent in the next century. To ensure adequate water supplies, we must realize the full benefits of existing technologies, develop more efficient irrigation products, methods and management strategies, and educate both agricultural and landscape irrigators on their use.

The agricultural and urban irrigation industries are largely unregulated. Equipment manufacturers and retailers often make claims regarding the efficiency and performance of their equipment without adequate testing. No independent design standards exist for irrigation systems, and most consumers do not have the expertise to determine if the system they are purchasing will perform as claimed.

Currently, one small, independent sprinkler irrigation testing facility exists in the United States

which conducts laboratory and bench-scale testing only. The Irrigation Technology Center would test and certify whole irrigation systems and, thus, be able to develop design and performance standards under actual operating conditions.

The Irrigation Technology Center will be set up in four major divisions:

- Urban Programs Division
- Agricultural Programs Division
- Testing and Certification Division
- Water Reuse Division
- International Division

The Irrigation Technology Center will be associated with the Texas A&M University System. Organizational structure will include an oversight committee made up of major stakeholders and a technology advisory committee composed of irrigation experts from the public and private sectors.

Public Funding and private donations will be sought to construct and operate the Irrigation Technology Center. A financing plan will be developed in consultation with the oversight committee and major stakeholders. A proposed endowment will provide the long-term support for the Irrigation Technology Center. Funding of the endowment will be through donations and revenues generated by the Irrigation Technology Center.

The current design concept, includes site selection criteria, a budget and plan to develop the center in six phases. The total capital budget of the center is estimated to be between \$26 million and \$30 million, with annual operating costs of about \$3.2 million. Seed money for the center is being provided from a portion of a \$3.1 million U.S. Congressional appropriation to the Texas A&M University System and New Mexico for irrigation water conservation. The ITC is requesting additional funding to begin construction from the Texas Legislature during the 78th Legislative Session. If approved, construction on the center could begin as early as the fall of 2003.

Reasons to Support –

1. The ITC would help bring significant water savings in irrigation, the single largest user of freshwater in Texas.
2. The ITC will develop design standards for agricultural and landscape irrigation industries for water conservation purposes.

IMPLEMENTATION: The Chamber will communicate this position to members of the State Legislature, the media, and The Chamber membership through publication in *The Advocate* and *The Chamber Today* and media releases.

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