

Testimony of Brian P. Dunnigan, P.E., Acting Director
Nebraska Department of Natural Resources
Before the Nebraska State Legislature Natural Resources Committee
On August 20, 2008
Regarding LR 366

Senator Loudon and Committee Members, my name is Brian Dunnigan, spelled B-R-I-A-N D-U-N-N-I-G-A-N. I am the Acting Director of the Department of Natural Resources. I am here today to provide information to the Natural Resources Committee relevant to LR 366.

The Department agrees that improving irrigation efficiency can save water. However, there are many places in the state where what may appear to be "inefficient irrigation" is actually the only reason there is enough groundwater in an area to supply an irrigation well. If the use of surface water for irrigation is eliminated because it seems inefficient, there will be places in the state that have very little groundwater. Gravity irrigation systems provide more recharge and return flow than center pivot systems do. In fact, as more surface water irrigators convert from gravity systems to center pivots, the lack of return flow has caused water administration to occur earlier and earlier.

The different geologic, and hydrologic conditions that exist across the state make it difficult to apply a "one size fits all" standard to something as technical as irrigation efficiencies. Existing law (Sections 46-716 and 46-739) authorizes the Department and the natural resources districts to require farmers to use better conservation measures and attend educational programs if necessary as a part of the integrated water management process. The Department and the local natural resources districts can review local irrigation techniques and their efficiencies and include in the IMP whatever is necessary to improve irrigation efficiency without disrupting recharge and return flow regimes.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.