

The ability of farmers and ranchers to irrigate Nebraska crops contributed \$11 billion to Nebraska's economy in 2012.

The finding comes through a new study chartered by Nebraska Farm Bureau to identify the importance of water for irrigation during one of the worst droughts in Nebraska's history.

"We knew irrigation was important to our farm and ranch members, but the study shows the benefits of water for irrigation stretch well beyond the farm gate," said Nebraska Farm Bureau President Steve Nelson.

The study, conducted by Decision Innovation Solutions, a research firm located in Des Moines, Iowa, provides an estimate of the total impact which irrigated agriculture had on the Nebraska economy in 2012.

Economic impact estimates were calculated comparing Nebraska's economic activity with and without farmers and ranchers ability to irrigate in 2012.

"To put this into perspective, \$11 billion dollars is the equivalent of every Nebraskan filling their vehicle with gasoline roughly 100 times at \$3.50 per gallon. We're talking about a significant contribution to the state," said Nelson.

The study also shows that irrigation was key in protecting Nebraska jobs in 2012. According to the study, Nebraska would have had 31,221 fewer jobs without irrigation, with more than one-third of those jobs coming outside of direct crop production.

Furthermore, the study shows irrigation's impact on employment opportunities outside of commodity production are tied closely to jobs in the real estate, food service, wholesale trade business, banking and lending sector and medical professions.

"The employment contributions of irrigation in agriculture are staggering," said Nelson. "If you put all of the jobs protected by irrigation into one county, it would make for the tenth largest county by population in the state. When you talk about jobs for Nebraska, irrigation plays a major role."

Other notable findings in the study point to Nebraska having the highest level of acreage under irrigation among all states at 8.4 million acres of cropland under irrigation. California ranks second behind Nebraska at 7.3 million irrigated acres.

The study also contributed to helping determine the value of irrigation water on a per application basis.

Using the most recent U.S. Geological Service data, the \$11 billion in total economic impact from irrigation helps us determine that every inch of water placed on an acre of cropland generates roughly \$100 of economic benefit to the state.

"The major take away from the study is that water used for irrigation in agriculture plays a critical role in the state's economy, whether it's direct financial benefit or helping protect Nebraska jobs," said Nelson. "Given that reality it's critical we as a state continue to recognize its importance as we talk about future management of our state's water resources and the role of irrigation in Nebraska agriculture."