



Mexico Transfers Water to U.S.

New issues arise after partial water debt is paid

Mexico released 210,785 acre-feet of water to Texas into Amistad International Reservoir on Saturday, March 19, 2005, to alleviate its sizable water debt to the U.S. arising from international treaty requirements. This delivery is an addition to the 56,750 acre-feet of water Mexico transferred to Texas on March 12 in Falcon Reservoir. Mexico's recent water debt is now cut by more than 50 percent.

Mexico released the water soon after signing a settlement with the U.S. calling for the whole debt to be paid by September 2005. Now farmers and other water users in the Rio Grande Valley are effectively utilizing this extra water.

"Impacts on this year's crop mix would be hard to determine exactly because planting intentions were made before the water became U.S. property," said Allen Sturdivant, Extension Associate for Texas Cooperative Extension. "Annual crop mixes fluctuate for a number reasons including weather, comparative and market-window advantages, pricing expectations, and the expected profitability of alternative crop enterprises."

Mexico's water transfer allows for this year's planting patterns and crop estimates to go as planned and for future patterns or extra crop production to be possible.

"The current situation favors an increase in overall irrigated acreage since there is more available water, or a loosening of resource constraints," Sturdivant said. "Whether the water will be used to increase [the production of] vegetables, sugarcane, or other field crops is still unknown."

New regulations pertaining to the extra water, such as adopting water-saving technologies, have not yet been imposed.

Sturdivant said the water transfer does not pose much of a storage problem since some of the debt delivery was a paper transfer of water already in the reservoirs. Also, Falcon and Amistad Reservoirs still aren't completely full.

"The added water that will actually hit the farm gates will be less than the accumulated debt," Sturdivant said. Under the 1944 Water

Treaty, 41 percent of the water is for conveyance loss credits.

Since the Rio Grande is over-appropriated and its water shared between the U.S. and Mexico, water issues in this region have been and continue to be complex. Water availability issues in this region have been controversial, especially since Mexico acquired a total debt of 1.5 million acre-feet of water from 1992-2002. As of October 2004, Mexico owed 717,000 acre-feet of water.

In 1992, the effects of Mexico's water debt were not immediately felt in the Rio Grande Valley because reservoir water remained and was still being consumed. Water supply and irrigation deficiencies started in 1995 when water demands surpassed the amount of accessible water.

Over the past 12 years, South Texas communities have endured many economic losses during times of drought because of Mexico's delay in repaying their water debt. Without Mexico's water inflows, the Falcon and Amistad Reservoir's essential roles to provide resources for crops and growers, tourism, and jobs for South Texas' economy are diminished.

With Mexico's currently scheduled repayment plans, water resources and crops in the Rio Grande Valley can withstand the effects of drought conditions, and water levels maintained. The two lakes located at Falcon and Amistad Reservoirs are extremely vital to crop growth and the irrigation systems since these reservoirs are the primary sources of water for the valley.

The additional water will guarantee Valley farmers the water they need for the planting season. South Texas growers, ranchers, and stakeholders have a sense of assurance that they can depend on Mexico for future water transfers in the coming months. 💧

