

Kansas Aquifer Policy Primer: Choices for the Future

By Mark A. Edelman, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus, Department of Economics and former Extension Public Policy Economist, Iowa State University.

Developed on behalf of *The Barry Flinchbaugh Center for Ag and Food Policy*

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Overview

Kansas groundwater policy continues to evolve through complex, interrelated decisions about use, conservation, and long-term sustainability. This Policy Primer is designed to help stakeholders examine those perspectives using Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh's Alternatives and Consequences framework—clarifying facts, outlining options, and guiding productive dialogue.

The goal is to help emerging students, leaders, and stakeholders analyze the facts, discuss implications, and make informed, values-based decisions. Like peeling an onion, each issue layer reveals related questions that shape the “big picture” of water use, rights, and sustainability.

This guide is designed for classroom, seminar, or panel discussion use. Participants explore multiple policy alternatives, assess consequences, and compare perspectives across stakeholder groups to build understanding and find common ground.

Contents and Framework for Discussion

The Alternatives and Consequences Approach to Public Policy Education

Evidence that an Aquifer Policy Problem Exists.

Policy Choice 1: What should be the Policy Goals for Aquifer Water Use?

1. Full Use of Groundwater Permit Allocation Amount.
2. Uniform Percentage Reduction in Area from a Previous Period.
3. Uniform Quantity of Water Pumped in Area Over a 5-year Period.
4. Water Pumped Equals Recharge for Sustaining Aquifer Level.
5. Water Use Conditions Exist Requiring Transition to Dryland in Optimal Manner.
6. Other Goals: Human & Animal Health, Optimum Economy, Conservation Practice Credit.
7. An Aquifer Water Use Policy that is “Fair and Equitable” for all Kansans.

Policy Choice 2: What Institutional Structures for Groundwater Use Decisions?

1. Evolving Prior Appropriation Water Rights
2. Uniform Caps on Groundwater Use
3. Voluntary Bidding and Market Transfers of Groundwater Use Rights
4. Water Banking for Saving and Leasing Groundwater Use
5. Current Approach and Combinations of Alternatives

Evidence that Barriers to Aquifer Conservation and Sustainability May Still Exist

Policy Choice 3: Should Market Incentives be Enhanced for Aquifer Sustainability?

1. A One Price Groundwater Cost Structure
2. Two-Price Cost Structure with Surcharges for Water Use Above Q-Stable Target
3. Cost-Share Incentives for Enhanced Conservation and Ag Income Stability
4. Enhanced Cost-Share for Collaborations and Systemic Innovations
5. Current Approach and Combinations of Alternatives

Policy Choice 4: Stakeholder Response Decisions for Policy Discussions

1. Some Response Options for Irrigation Producer Discussions
2. Value Added Ag Supply Chain Responses for Policy Discussion
3. Non-Ag Commercial and Industry Responses for Discussion
4. Residential and Community Responses for Discussion

Tradeoffs Among Values, Institutions, Market Incentives, and Policy Responses

Group Discussion Guide Survey Questions

About The Barry Flinchbaugh Center for Ag and Food Policy

ADVANCING FACT-BASED DIALOGUE FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

The Barry Flinchbaugh Center for Ag and Food Policy was established to carry forward the legacy of Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh, whose teaching and policy influence shaped agriculture for more than five decades. His hallmark Alternatives and Consequences model remains a cornerstone of agricultural policy education and analysis.

Launched in 2023, the Center ensures Dr. Flinchbaugh's voice and approach continue to guide future generations. It serves as a bridge between the classroom and Capitol Hill, rooted in his trademark candor, curiosity, and commitment to civic, fact-based policy dialogue.

Through nonpartisan and transparent conversations, the Center navigates pressing, complex challenges in U.S. agriculture and food systems to improve performance, competitiveness, and sustainability. The Center aims to:

- Improve understanding of policy alternatives and consequences.
- Enable informed decisions by policymakers, agricultural leaders, food system stakeholders, and the public.
- Ensure that agricultural policies and strategies are based on facts and rational consideration.

To bring this mission to life, the Flinchbaugh Center invests in programs that educate, connect, and inspire. From developing the next generation of agricultural leaders to hosting forums that drive national dialogue, each program advances Dr. Flinchbaugh's legacy and helps ensure agriculture's most pressing challenges are met with informed, practical solutions.

Dana Woodbury, Executive Director

(785) 347-8554 | info@flinchbaughcenter.com

111 Anderson Hall | 919 Mid-Campus Drive North | Manhattan, KS 66506

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