INSTITUTE
for
AGRICULTURE
and
TRADE POLICY

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
2105 First Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55404 USA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 10, 2003

Contact: Ben Lilliston, 612-870-3416 billiston@iatp.org
Jim Kleinschmit, 612-870-3430 jkleinschmit@iatp.org

Agriculture May Have Major Impact on Great Lakes Water Quality, New Report Finds

Region-wide Changes Needed to Protect Basin's Water for Agriculture, Industry and Residential Users

Minneapolis - Water use for agriculture production will likely have a significant impact on water quantity in the Great Lakes region in the near future, according to a new report released today by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. The report called for region-wide coordination to ensure that farmers and other users have access to water in the future.

The report, "Impacts of Agriculture on Water Quantity in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin," by Jennifer Kramer Glynn, found that while there are many water users in the region, including thermoelectric power, municipal and industrial, the basin's largest consumptive water user is food production.

The report found that in the Great Lakes region, irrigation has been increasing steadily over the last 40 years, and is expected to continue to grow. Despite a significant decline in overall land in farms in the Great Lakes region from 1949-1997 (nearly a 30 percent drop), the amount of farmland that is irrigated has increased a staggering 25 times over the same time period.

The specific impact on increased irrigation to Great Lakes surface water levels is different to determine, the report found. But groundwater impacts are also a concern. Of the freshwater used for irrigation and livestock in the Great Lakes states, more than half comes form groundwater sources. Already there have been several instances of residential wells going dry during high withdrawal periods for municipal, industrial, and irrigation uses in Michigan, Ontario and other places.

Other major findings of the report:

- Climate change, increased population growth, and sprawling development will likely have a significant impact on water quantity levels in the Great Lakes region;

- Human activities and decreasing water levels have had many impacts to the Great Lakes ecosystem and habitat, including changes to the hydroperiod (the length of one wet and dry cycle), reductions to water flow variability and ecological niches, loss of wetlands, reduced biodiversity to coastal wetlands, introduction of non-native species, and potential disruptions in breeding of fish populations;

- Water resources are not protected under current international trade agreements. Great Lakes leaders and environmental groups are working on a standard that focuses on the environmental aspects of water conservation in hopes of preventing water removal from the Great Lakes that might be allowed under current trade rules.

The recently signed Annex 2001, an update to the Great Lakes Charter, set standards for water use and provides a framework for a separate binding agreement among states and provinces to protect Great Lakes waters. The report emphasized the need for the basin's governments to incorporate the conservation principles of Annex 2001 into state and provincial law.

"Farmers need such an agreement as much as residential or industrial users," says IATP's Jim Kleinschmit. "Only through such a regime can these necessary water resources – which agriculture depends on -- be protected against future shortfalls or threats of diversion."

Key recommendations of the report included:

- The development of an integrated basin-wide water quantity management strategy that accounts for the role of agriculture;
- Increased Basin stakeholder participation in water management discussions and policy development
- A targeted research agenda for understanding agriculture, trade, and water quantity management;
- Improved data quality, monitoring, and presentation;
- Improved public outreach and education on the state of the Great Lakes environment;
- Establishing water quantity issues as an agricultural policy priority.

An executive summary and the full report can be viewed at: www. www.environmentalobservatory.org

IATP will be conducting additional research, holding workshops, and communicating with farm organizations, citizen groups and water professionals as it attempts to foster additional dialogues between agricultural and other stakeholders of the Great Lakes Basin about water quantity and availability.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy promotes resilient family farms, rural communities and ecosystems around the world through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy.