

University of BC – Okanagan (\$17,857)

Project Title: Farm Drought Risk Management

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Project Start date: April 2007



There is very little water in the semi-arid Okanagan region that is not already allocated to use. Agriculture in the Okanagan Valley uses approximately 70% of the currently allocated water through the use of irrigation. Water availability, the capture and delivery of allocated water, depends largely on upland precipitation, thus making farmers prone to fluctuations in the water supply with the risk for drought. Farmers survive around the world by adapting their practices to the conditions and risks presented to them and Okanagan farmers are no exception, likely developing practices that provide some protection against drought risk.

This project will document these practices and the conditions that facilitate them, especially when farmers have cooperated with others in order to conserve water. The central component to this project is to conduct a survey of Okanagan irrigators, to determine what practices they undertake to manage the risk of water shortage. A report will be produced documenting the practices we have encountered, which will be of use to other irrigators in managing their operations. Findings will be analyzed in the context of how water is governed in the Okanagan, with an eye to suggesting policy innovations that would encourage the adoption of more sustainable practices.

The achievements to date include a preliminary draft of the farmer survey, and are in the final stages of approval by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board at UBC. BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands were previously contacted, to secure their cooperation in identifying a sample of irrigators to survey. A UBC-O graduate student will be completing the project, who is working on a literature review at this time.

The project has departed from the original timeline proposed in the grant application. As a graduate student has taken this on as a thesis project, it will progress over two years, with the second year's work being more intensive and directly related to the deliverables of the project.

The results of this research will form a basis for identifying areas of potential policy reforms that can improve efficiency and sustainability of water use in the Okanagan.