Draft Legislative Recommendation:
Agriculture
WCAC Report 2026

Clarify and highlight that agricultural water conservation measures are eligible for financial assistance from the Texas Agricultural Finance Authority

Agricultural irrigation is the largest use of potable water in Texas, and in many regions, groundwater is the only reliable source for agricultural production. While proven water-saving technologies, such as drip irrigation and advanced irrigation controls, can significantly increase water use efficiency, the upfront costs are often prohibitive for individual farmers and ranchers.

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service provides federal cost sharing and technical assistance to Texas agricultural producers to implement water conservation plans. However, existing state funding mechanisms for agricultural water conservation, including the TWDB Agricultural Water Conservation programs, are limited to political subdivisions and are not directly accessible to individual producers to help finance on-farm improvements to increase irrigation efficiency.

The 89th Texas Legislature adopted House Bill 43 to expand the financial assistance programs provided by the Texas Agricultural Finance Authority as well as expanding eligibility for those programs. TAFA provides low interest loans, interest rate reduction and grants for the development and expansion of agricultural production in Texas. Section 58.021 of the Texas Agriculture Code describes in very general terms the kind of costs that are eligible for financial assistance. Costs related to water conservation measures, such irrigation efficiency improvements, and drought-resilience projects, are not specifically included in the statute but likely would fall under the general provision for "costs incurred in connection with the development, increase, improvement, or expansion of production, processing, marketing, or export of Texas agricultural products" in Sec. 58.021(b).

Texas is dealing with serious challenges with providing water to meet current and projected needs. While it may not be necessary to include language specifically identifying water conservation costs in the TAFA statute, the Council believes highlighting the availability of this potential financing source for agricultural water conservation costs is warranted due to the high priority the Legislature has placed on addressing the state's water issues and due to the lack of other state programs for direct financial assistance to agricultural producers for on-farm water conservation measures.

This does not place a higher priority on water conservation costs over other eligible costs; it simply draws attention to the availability of this funding source.

Draft Legislative Recommendation:
Agriculture
WCAC Report 2026

Recommendation: The Water Conservation Advisory Council recommends that Chapter 58 of the Texas Agriculture Code be amended to clarify that the Texas Agricultural Finance Authority is authorized to provide grants and low-interest loans for the purpose of implementing water conservation measures.

Proposed Legislative Recommendation
Municipal
WCAC Report 2026

Proposal to include single-family rental properties in Public Utility Commission of Texas Chapter 24, Subchapter I.

The Public Utility Commission of Texas, Chapter 24, governs water and sewer provider regulations. Subchapter I of Chapter 24 focuses on submetering rules for rental properties and on the allocation and billing of water consumption charges. Currently, a non-transient family renting a single-family residential property does not have the same renters' protections or tenants' rights related to water and sewer as a family renting a unit in an apartment complex, condominium, or manufactured home (trailer).

Additionally, there have been multiple instances in North Texas of landlords requiring tenants in single-family rental properties to irrigate their lawns during times when municipal watering restrictions are in effect. These mandatory irrigation runtimes result in fines, penalties, and increased water bills for the tenants. Leaving tenants facing a choice between being penalized by water providers or breaking their rental contract. Chapter 24, Subchapter I, §24.281 covers this exact situation for tenants in apartment complexes, condominiums, and manufactured homes, but not single-family residential rental properties.

By updating Chapter 24, Subchapter I to include single-family rental properties, it aligns all rental properties, grants families renting a home the same rights as other rental properties, provides a clear policy on the water utility billing for rentals across the board, and ensures the tenants are not being penalized for something they have no control over.

The Council recommends that the definition of Dwelling unit in Chapter 24, Subchapter I, §24.275 c.6, include single-family residential rental properties.

Proposal to provide staff resources to TWDB for annual review, monitoring, and posting of water conservation and reuse data

The Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) annually collects the State-required Water Conservation Annual Report regarding the progress and effectiveness of implemented water conservation and reuse best management practices from all water utilities that update their Water Conservation Plan on a five-year cycle (31 TAC 363.15(g)).

The Annual Report includes a variety of water use data and information regarding the utility's implementation of specific water conservation/reuse best management practices (BMPs): which BMPs are implemented and the estimated savings from the BMPs. While system data and the types of conservation/reuse BMPs are posted, the reported volumetric yield of these activities is not reviewed or posted. Without the review and posting of volumetric yields, the success and effectiveness of such activities are not evaluated, leaving no opportunity for improvement and no understanding if the activities meet the strategies set in the Regional and State Water Planning Process

By having an FTE to assist utilities, review submitted data, and post the conservation/reuse BMP volumes, Texas utilities and water planning regions will better understand the progress and effectiveness of implementing water conservation and reuse strategies.

The Council recommends that the Texas Legislature provide resources in the form of 1 FTE to the TWDB, to review, monitor, and post the volumetric water conservation and reuse BMP data from the Water Conservation Annual Report.

Draft Legislative Recommendation:
Statewide ET Network
WCAC Report 2026

Provide financial resources to support a statewide ET network into the TexMesonet program.

Consistent with the previous reports, the WCAC again recommends the Texas Legislature provide TWDB with the financial resources and direction necessary to sufficiently incorporate a statewide evapotranspiration (ET) network into the existing TexMesonet program, subject to available state revenue for the 2028–2029 biennium. A key aspect of this program's expansion should include:

- Increase appropriations by $1,200,000 for the biennium to the TWDB to specifically develop and support a statewide ET network within TexMesonet. Funding will be used for:
    - Additional full-time equivalent staff positions
    - Resources to update existing weather stations to accommodate ET measurements
    - Contracting a study on existing TexMesonet weather stations regarding siting requirements to accurately calculate ET (study of fetch)
    - Grants and/or contracts with agencies to provide technical assistance

In 2016, TWDB started the TexMesonet earth observation network to provide high quality data to support flood monitoring and flood forecasting efforts. The goal was to create a "network of networks" from existing weather station networks and fill in areas throughout the state lacking coverage. TexMesonet.org incorporates and displays data from TWDB stations and partner networks across the state. TexMesonet stations collect data to support weather awareness, flood preparedness, and water resources planning, among other applications.

The 88th Texas Legislature (2023), by passing House Bill 2759, added Section 16.028 to the Texas Water Code, thus codifying the establishment of the TexMesonet Hydrometeorology Network to provide a statewide resource for hydrometeorological data and summary information benefiting weather forecasting, flood preparedness, drought monitoring, wildfire management, water resources planning, water conservation, agricultural readiness and productivity, industrial readiness, and related business readiness and productivity across this state. The network is required to (1) establish a series of stations throughout this state to monitor hydrometeorological conditions; (2) coordinate mesoscale, evapotranspiration, and soil moisture monitoring efforts in this state; (3) serve as the centralized repository for hydrometeorological data in this state; and (4) provide appropriate technical assistance. This codification furthered WCAC's 2022 legislative recommendations to the 88th Texas Legislature.

However, the 88th Legislature did not appropriate funds that had been requested by the TWDB to support an expedited build-out of TexMesonet or the incorporation of ET data in the network.

Draft Legislative Recommendation:
Statewide ET Network
WCAC Report 2026

The 89th Texas Legislature (2025), appropriated half of the TWDB's exceptional item request for the TexMesonet program, which sought to fund the addition of TexMesonet weather stations and cooperative agreements between partner networks in the state. Additional funding and emphasis to support a statewide ET network is still needed.

With the direction of TexMesonet established, expanding the program could create products benefiting additional economic sectors, such as irrigation scheduling recommendations to support the agricultural sector. However, agency resources are currently limited to incorporating a statewide ET network into TexMesonet. Based on current budget and staff levels, a limited number of TWDB-supported TexMesonet stations are scheduled to be installed each year. Incorporating ET data collection involves adjusting the siting and installation parameters of new stations and, where feasible, modifying existing stations. Collaborating and contracting with other local, state and/or federal agencies and other entities, at TWDB's discretion, can also provide essential technical assistance to maximize the impact of TexMesonet.

Outdoor water use for growing agricultural crops and maintaining landscapes is significant. Efficient irrigation best management practices and technology improvements have proven to be effective tools, with quantifiable water saving results. The use of ET data through dedicated weather stations and connected networks is critical to maintaining current best management practices and advancing future conservation success. A full expansion of an ET network within TexMesonet, available to all water users, is vital in supporting water conservation efforts and meeting the future water needs of Texas. With dedicated funding, a sustainable statewide ET network is within reach for the people of Texas, with the benefits positively impacting water conservation throughout the state.

Proposed Legislative Recommendation:
Landscape, Horticulture, and Irrigation
WCAC Report 2026

Proposal to require the installation of master valves on all new landscape irrigation systems

The Water Conservation Advisory Council recommends that 'Texas Administrative Code Title 30, Chapter 344, F, section 32 be revised to require the installation of master valves on all new landscape irrigation systems.

A master valve is a normally closed valve installed at the point where an irrigation system connects to the main water supply, immediately downstream of the backflow prevention device. The purpose of the master valve is to open only when the system is actively running and shutting off when it is not. This simple but critical component provides an added layer of protection against leaks, line breaks, and valve failures by preventing continuous water flow when the system is idle.

On new irrigation system installs, incorporating a master valve significantly reduces the risk of water loss.

Across the irrigation and water management industry, there is an agreement that requiring master valves represents a practical and cost-effective step toward improved system efficiency. There have been positive results in Texas requiring master valves. The San Antonio Water Systems (SAWS) found that hourly water use data showed that 10% of dedicated irrigation meters were in continuous use, which accumulated to approximately 1.5 million gallons per day. After outreach to irrigation meter customers, continuous flow dropped by 33%, close to one million gallons per day.

Water conservation is an ongoing priority in the State of Texas, and this measure supports efforts toward long-term resource sustainability by minimizing water waste and promoting responsible outdoor water use at both residential and commercial levels.