

Lynnette Zelezny: Fresno State strives to be the ‘Water University’

By Lynnette
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California State University, Fresno is at the heart of the most important agricultural region in the nation, and is committed to positively addressing water and agricultural issues. The challenges that we’re facing in those areas are increasingly formidable, and it is more important than ever that we align our academic resources with the needs of the Central Valley.

We’re building a national reputation as a leader in applied research on water. In fact, award-winning reporter Charles Fishman, who will be speaking at a water forum at our campus Thursday, wrote in National Geographic that Fresno State is one of three major universities that have advanced “big leaps of progress in water.”

Our approach to dealing with water issues is straightforward: We encourage and nurture collaboration and engagement from our entire campus community — faculty, staff and students — to raise awareness and create solutions that make a difference.

Consider Fresno State’s short list of water research where we are at the leading edge of developing solutions to our most pressing concerns: the impact of the drought, water use efficiency in agriculture and urban settings, the water needs of disadvantaged communities, integrated regional water management planning, and monitoring groundwater resources. For a more comprehensive list of our programs and projects, please visit www.fresnostate.edu/water-research.

Our top-flight research centers — the International Center for Water Technology, the Center for Irrigation Technology, the California Water Institute, and the Water, Energy and Technology Center — have developed innovative solutions and technologies to help businesses and improve the quality of life in communities across our region and around the world.

Those centers have helped established and start-up companies accelerate product development or launch new technologies. They’ve provided important support for entrepreneurs and innovators. And they’ve worked with hundreds of companies in testing and evaluating irrigation equipment and developing national and international standards for irrigation equipment and testing procedures.

We’re also engaging students in understanding the complex nature of local and global water issues and challenges through a common read of Fishman’s latest book, “The Big Thirst.” More than 600 students in 20 courses in all eight colleges across a variety of academic disciplines are participating in important water discussions.

We’ve even raised awareness through a unique art exhibit, “Water in Crisis,” which presented the works of four major artists who offered unique visual strategies for engagement with water issues.

At Thursday’s forum, “Three Years into the Drought: Assessing California’s Agriculture,” we’ll announce the preliminary results of an important study that exemplifies the inter-disciplinary water research that we’re emphasizing. A team of faculty experts from a number of academic areas — earth and environmental sciences, water management, science education, civil engineering, public health, urban/regional planning, mass communication, videography and photography, and digital library resources — have been studying the human and economic impact of the drought on the San Joaquin Valley.

Their study, supported by a \$75,000 grant from the Wells Fargo Foundation, has identified the next steps that Fresno State can take to lead an effort to secure the resources and services needed to address the drought’s impact. The

team also is developing a repository of valuable information about the drought that will help inform ongoing efforts to address this challenge.

We're proud of what we have accomplished, and we're excited about what is ahead. President Joseph Castro has charged us with moving our water efforts to the next level. In the coming weeks, the President's Task Force on Water will present recommendations about how our water programs can be further coordinated and strengthened. In addition, the Jordan Research Center is expected to open this fall, maximizing opportunities for faculty and students to solve complex research problems in a world-class facility.

Our ultimate goal is bold: We want Fresno State to become known as the Water University. Our research efforts — and applying that research to benefit people, communities and businesses — has us well on the way to earning that standing.

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