

TheTribune

Greeley Tribune: July 1, 2009

By *Bill Jackson*

NISP supporters: We can do without luxuries, but not food

EATON — Bob Sakata has been farming in Adams and Weld counties for 64 years.

He noted he's seen it all over those six-plus decades, from low prices, to hail, to wind, to drought to late spring freezes. But he had one important message Tuesday at the Farmers for NISP Rally on the Russ and John Leffler Farm west of here.

“My most important message is that society must recognize that we can do without all our luxuries, but we cannot survive without food,” Sakata told a standing-room-only crowd of about 350 who gathered in support of the Northern Integrated Supply Project, the largest water storage project in northern Colorado since the Colorado-Big Thompson Project, which came on line more than 50 years ago.

“Through all those lean years,” Sakata said, “we've had a few exceptional ones when we invested in our future. That is what NISP is all about. We are investing in our future.”

NISP is intended to capture excess water to which Colorado can lay claim. Detractors say it would do too much harm to the Poudre River; supporters say it would allow thirsty, growing cities another supply of water that could prevent drying up more agricultural land.

Sakata was among about a dozen speakers, including farmers, farm organization officials, and elected officials, who addressed the crowd, which also included eight state representatives and senators, and 15 or more elected county and city officials from the region.

Many of those, including State Rep. Jerry Sonnenberg, R-Sterling, took opponents of the project to task. NISP includes two reservoirs — the Glade northwest of Fort Collins and the Galeton Reservoir, east of Ault. There are 15 participating communities and water districts in the project designed to prevent the dry-up of agricultural land in northern Colorado by providing growing communities another source of water.

The most vocal of those opponents is the Save the Poudre Coalition, which said earlier this week the project would result in the dry-up of at least 100,000 acres of irrigated farmland and help put out of production an additional 30,000 acres of dryland farming.

“NISP/Glade would be a severe blow to a farm economy that is already reeling from low commodity prices and high fuel prices,” said Gary Wockner of the Save The Poudre Coalition in

a press release. “When you factor in the non-irrigated agland put out of production, the impacts are even higher.”

Sonnenberg, who farms and ranches east of Sterling, said the Save the Poudre Coalition claims a concern for agriculture.

“They don't care about farmers and ranchers. This is the most anti-agriculture group around. They want to change Colorado water law so water can't be diverted for agriculture. Without the Colorado-Big Thompson Project, a vision of our forefathers, we wouldn't be here today,” Sonnenberg said.

Barry Anderson farms near Eaton and is president of the board of Larimer & Weld Reservoir & Irrigation Co., one of two irrigation companies that would benefit from the project.

“It really does an old farmer's heart good to see so many of you here today,” Anderson said. If the project is not built, he said, “our water in northern Colorado will go to Denver. That's a guarantee.”

Mike Hungenberg is president of the board of the Cache la Poudre Irrigation & Reservoir Co., the other irrigation company involved in the project.

“Ever since the pilgrims came here our country has been built on progress, we've never taken a step back. If we don't build this, it will be taking a step back,” he told the crowd. “We've got to save for short years and this has to be the most environmentally friendly project ever.”

But it was Sakata who put things into focus for the crowd.

He said he visited Denmark and Spain a few years ago as president of the National Union Association and was amazed at the respect given to farmers in those countries. So he stopped people on the street and asked them the roots of that respect.

“They told me that we in the United States have never gone hungry,” Sakata said. “It is not possible to survive in an improvisational land and that can happen to us if we continue to stop these kinds of projects.”

SPEAKERS AT THE RALLY

“The opponents say they are supporters of agriculture, but in fact, they are anti-growth and say that if we don't build it, they won't come. But this is not a Hollywood movie. The future of the Front Range depends on NISP.”

Troy Bredenkamp, Executive vice president, Colorado Farm Bureau

“This project will address the needs of a growing population and protect agriculture.”

State Sen. Mary Hodge, D-Brighton

“Those who think this will stop growth are wrong. Those who think we in agriculture are stupid enough to give away our water are wrong. Those are the same people who have been in business for years and generations. We are planning for our children, grandchildren and all those in the future of our state.”

Don Ament, Former Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture and Iliff farmer

The Poudre and St. Vrain would dry in the summer if it weren't for the water projects already in place. You can't raft on rocks.”

Doug Rademacher, Weld County commissioner

“I live where I can see Carter Lake and Horsetooth Reservoir. No one is opposed to those projects today.”

Tom Donnelly, Larimer County commissioner



Former State Agricultural Commissioner Don Ament and Weld County Commissioner Sean Conway emceed at the Farmers for the Northern Integrated Supply Project Rally on Tuesday afternoon in the barn at the Leffler Farm near Eaton. Approximately 350 people filled the barn to listen to politicians and farmers speak about the water project.

ERIC BELLAMY/ebellamy@greeleytribune.com

<http://www.greeleytribune.com/article/20090701/NEWS/907019989&parentprofile=search>