



BACK TO SCHOOL

The Development of a Water College to Encourage Adoption of Irrigation Management Practices

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INTRODUCTION

- The Texas Alliance for Water Conservation (TAWC) is a non-profit organization with the purpose of educating West Texas farmers and ranchers about the most efficient water management techniques.
- TAWC uses a variety of communication and educational outlets to initiate a behavioral change in how these producers use water for agricultural purposes.
- The most popular and largest TAWC event of the year is the Water College.
- TAWC producers are able to connect aspects of technology, economics, and agriculture in order to educate other producers on best management practices.
- Transformative Learning Theory recognizes personal experience as an integral part of the learning process and that a learner's integration of the experience creates meaning, which leads to change in behavior, mindset, and beliefs (Mezirow, 1991).
- The goal of the TAWC Water College is to provide a positive learning experience conducive to facilitating a change in farmers' and ranchers' behavior toward water conservation practices in hopes of increasing conservation technology adoption rates.

HOW IT WORKS

- Water College is an instructional meeting for producers, agricultural businesses, and consultants on the most current irrigation management technologies and research available.
- Experts discuss a variety of topics including water management in corn, cotton and grain sorghum, research results from TAWC research sites, and implications for cattle ranchers.
- The event is approved for continuing education credits required to become a certified crop adviser through the American Society of Agronomy.
- Water College features a trade show of exhibits displayed by local supply companies, farm equipment dealers, farm credit businesses, commodity groups, and state and federal government agencies.
- Sponsorships from local, regional, and national agricultural organizations and businesses are used fund the event. This includes commodity groups, seed companies, irrigation technology companies, and farm equipment dealers.

RESULTS TO DATE

- For the 2017 Water College, the venue had to be moved to a larger facility to accommodate growth in attendance and the trade show.
- The number of attendees has risen from approximately 50 in 2015 to almost 200 in 2017.
- Attendee demographics have mainly been male, middle-aged producers, along with a variety of different agricultural industry members such as crop consultants, representatives from seed companies, and extension agents.

COSTS AND RESOURCES

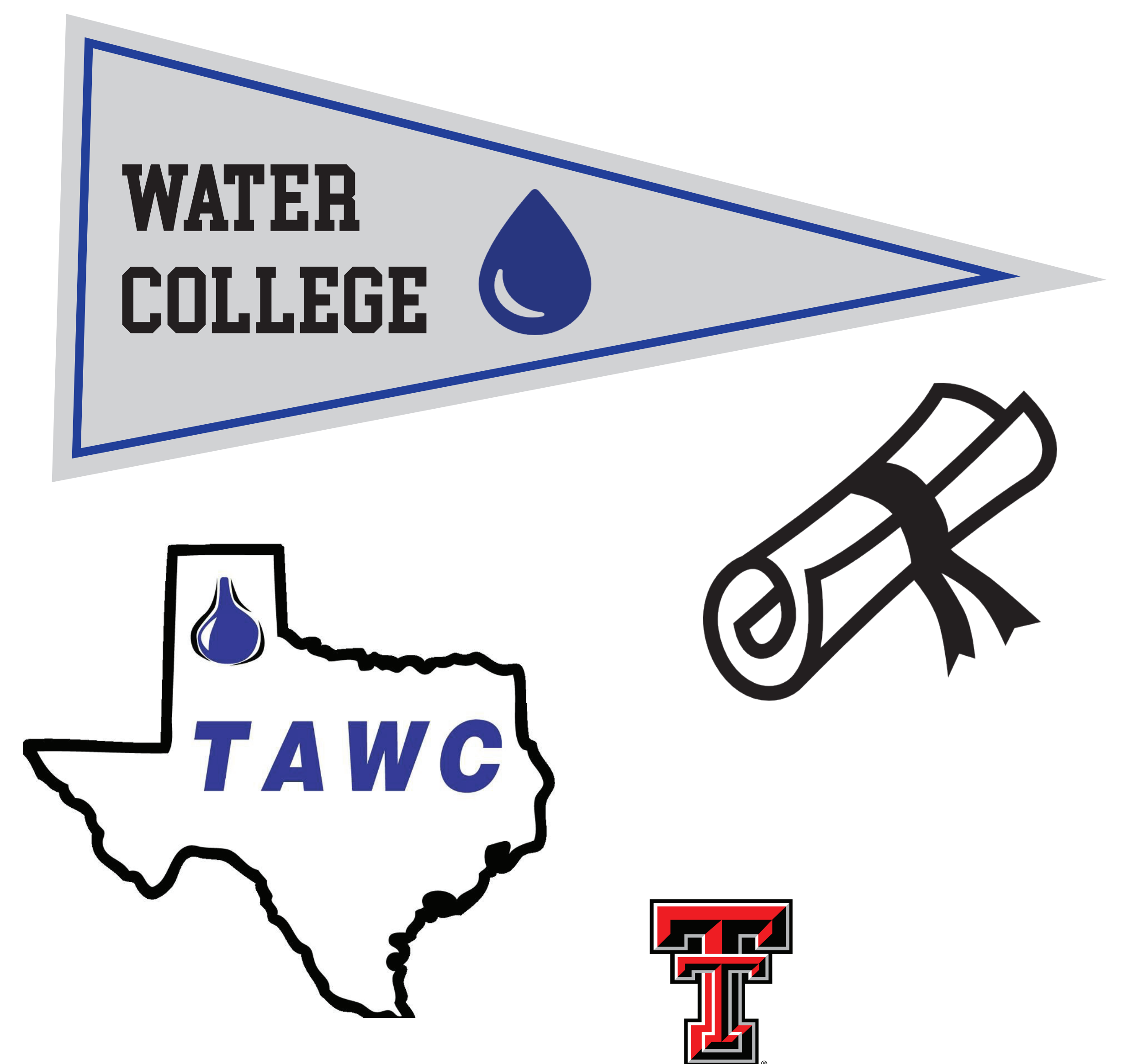
- The primary costs and resources needed for this event are the rental of a venue that will accommodate attendees, a stage for speakers, an area for trade show booths, and an area to serve food.
- Other costs include the meals, production and printing of event programs, notebooks, handouts, and certificates.
- Additional costs to consider are speaker fees and travel expenses.
- Currently, attendees do not pay to attend the event because all costs are paid for through sponsorships from agricultural organizations and businesses.

FUTURE PLANS AND ADVICE

- Future plans include incorporating presentations about sustainability, organic farming, soil biology, and more efficient practices for maintaining dryland crops.
- The TAWC is also beginning Texas Agricultural Water Manager certification program in partnership with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension in an effort to recognize and distinguish producers who are making resourceful decisions with their water application.
- Others who want to provide this type of event should feature speakers who will present the information in an engaging manner and to provide some incentive for participants to attend.
- The TAWC offers continuing education and water manager certification credits, lunch, and invites attendees to become TAWC-producers.

REFERENCES

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.



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