

OBLIGATIONS OF AN IRRIGATION FARMER

By

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The success or failure of an irrigation district is closely linked with the character and ability of its management. I think a majority of irrigation farmers think of management incorrectly. They think only of the manager and his principal assistants. Too many have adopted the attitude of "let George do it".

Management includes both the supervising employees and the directors. In districts such as are represented here today, every landowner has obligations to his district. The very minute he assumes ownership of a parcel of land within the district he takes unto himself certain obligations, whether he recognizes them or not. One of these is the selection of directors. This obligation too often goes unfulfilled.

Since farmers within the district have a share in both ownership and control of the irrigation district, they have important obligations which give them the privilege of taking an active part in the management of the district. To be effective, these obligations must be fulfilled. Otherwise, the landowner has no voice in management and the control is taken over by the Board of Directors and the manager. The successful management of an irrigation district is based upon the intelligent and active cooperation of each and every landowner of the district with the board, and with the employees, each group doing its part to the best of its ability.

Now what are these obligations of a landowner?

1. Elect and remove directors of the district.
2. Adopt and amend by-laws.
3. Require officers, directors and other agents to comply with the law under which the district was set up, and with its articles of incorporation, by-laws, and contracts.
4. Hold directors and officers who fail so to comply liable for any losses caused by such failure.
5. Examine the district's books of record and its property, subject to reasonable restrictions.

Then, if landowners have these obligations, why is it they fail to exercise them? I do not know the answer but I sincerely hope that before many years have passed that someone will come up not only with the answer but with a workable solution as a correction for it.

There are some others who have additional obligations to the district and its management. These are the directors. Directors fill a vital place in the efficient operation of the district. No one should assume these obligations and responsibilities who does not intend to keep them.

In voting for directors, farmers are selecting men who will, or are supposed to, assume important obligations in conducting the district's affairs. Because of their background and training, it is natural to assume that some are better qualified than others to act as directors. Because of the obligations resting on the directors, the merits and qualifications of any nominee should be weighed carefully before he is elected to serve on the board. Although any landowners within the district meeting the requirements stated in the by-laws may be eligible for election to the board, this does not mean that every landowner is actually fitted to serve as a director.

In electing directors, landowners owe it to themselves to select those individuals who have the time to give to the job; those who are best fitted to perform the duties of the job, and those who will perform these duties without fear or favor. Occasionally it may be possible to select otherwise well-qualified individuals - those having special training in finance, irrigation, law or economics. Many times these may prove desirable.

Just what are the qualifications that a member should have to be a good director? In sizing up the qualifications of a possible director, there are some questions which each landowner should ask relative to his fitness for the position. Here are a few of them:

- What is his business record?
- Does he manage his own farm well?
- Does he possess sound business judgment?
- Is he willing to work at the job of being a director or is he more apt to be passive and inactive?
- Has he shown a capacity for working with others?
- Do his neighbors regard him as a leader?
- Does he enjoy his neighbors' confidence for honesty and integrity?
- Does he possess a high degree of loyalty to the district?
- Is it clear that he will help his fellow members to obtain a more complete understanding of the district, its activities, responsibilities and problems?

Seldom will an individual be found who will possess all of these traits in a high degree, but any member worthy of consideration for election as a director should possess all of them to a fair degree.

Perhaps the greatest obligation that a director has is the selection of the right person for manager. This obligation cannot be passed over lightly. This obligation is a must if the district is to be operated efficiently.

The detailed duties rest with the manager and his assistants. While you and your board of directors have important roles in the general management of a district, responsibility for the carrying out of the many details of management rest with the manager and his key employees.

The manager has obligations in two broad fields: Management of technical operations, and management of personnel. Both are important to your district and its measure of success depends upon the manager doing both parts of his job efficiently.

If your district is operated inefficiently, you stand to lose. Then what steps can be taken to guarantee that the district will be properly managed to your best interests? In my opinion, these are:

1. Every landowner taking an active part in selecting the most able and best qualified men to serve as directors.
2. Every landowner making a special effort to understand the business of the district.
3. Don't expect more than the district can deliver.
4. When in doubt, don't kick. Discuss the question with a director or responsible officer.
5. Get accurate information from the board on district matters.
6. Give complete loyalty and support based on adequate facts and information.
7. Attend meetings regularly.

Of course, you who have served on board of directors have never had any kicks or criticism from the water user! Well do you know that there are those who are cronic kickers, and there are others who are justified in calling faults to your attention. Cronics can soon be weeded out, but the member with an occasional kick may have a legitimate complaint. Better check up on it.

Teamwork is essential for the efficient operation of a district. Teamwork between landowners and water users, teamwork between this group and the directors, teamwork between these two mentioned groups and the manager. This teamwork is another obligation which must not be slighted for successful, efficient operation of an irrigation district.

I would encourage each of you in your district to expand activity among your water users, using every way possible to have them assume an active interest in the district. Have them understand the problems, contracts, and activities of the district and urge attendance at meetings.

In closing, I would like to leave this thought with you: "The horse that keeps a tight tug has little time to do much kicking".