

HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF WATER CONSERVATION: WHAT DRIVES RESIDENTS TO ELIMINATE IRRIGATION IN LANDSCAPES?

Laura A. Warner and John M. Diaz

University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

People working in water conservation have been encouraged to focus on specific behaviors that have high technical impact potential and high likelihood of adoption. Eliminating irrigated areas in residential landscapes is among the top behaviors in terms of technical potential (i.e., water conservation), but likelihood of engaging in this practice is relatively low compared to other conservation strategies. The purpose of this research project was to evaluate residents' motivations for eliminating irrigated portions of the landscape to inform more impactful behavior change strategies targeting likelihood of adopting this specific behavior.

A quantitative researcher-designed survey was distributed to Floridians 18 years of age and older who had irrigation systems they personally controlled, and 315 complete responses were secured. More than half of the sample ($f = 183$; 58.1%) indicated they had eliminated a portion of irrigated landscape area in the past, and less than half ($f = 144$; 45.7%) were likely or very likely to do so in the future. We used a series of ordinal models to determine the factors that predicted intent to reduce irrigated landscape. In the final model, personal norms, or internal feelings of obligation to reduce irrigated landscape area, was the most important predictor, followed by subjective norms, or perceptions of social pressure to reduce irrigated landscape area. These findings demonstrate the power of both internal and external motivation. Findings imply the need for water conservation professionals to work to develop internalized connections to water and personal obligations to conserve. Further, they should build social communities that support water conservation to improve behavioral outcomes. Interestingly, people who had reduced irrigated landscape areas in the past were more likely to do so again in the future, implying potential for previous program participants to play a role in the success of water conservation interventions.

PRESENTER BIO: Dr. Warner is an associate professor and extension specialist in the UF Department of Agricultural Education and Communication and Center for Land Use Efficiency. Dr. Diaz is an assistant professor and extension specialist in the UF Department of Agricultural Education and Communication and Gulf Coast Research and Education Center.