

# OUR MOST PRECIOUS COMMODITY



NATURAL RESOURCES  
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“It’s every man for himself!” came the words through the megaphone as the small town mayor jumped back behind his barracks in city hall. Shots are ringing out everywhere. Explosions are heard in the distance. Blackhawk helicopters pass over constantly. This is not Baghdad or Kuwait. And the mission is not about oil. This battle is on Main Street and it’s about water, the most necessary ingredient in life. The time: 12 months into the most vicious, deadliest world war our planet has ever known and no country or citizen is immune. Everyone is fighting for their life! We are finding out that freedom truly isn’t free.

I remember my dad talking about waiting in long lines to get gasoline during the 1973 OPEC fuel crisis. But who could envision waiting in lines for hours to get water and bullets?

What had gone wrong? I remember back to my history class reading words of wisdom written by Mikhail Gorbachev, “We desperately need to realize that we are the guests, not the masters of nature.”

Picture this. It’s 2025 and it’s sheer pandemonium. The world’s consumable water supply is near depletion. It’s a bidding war for water and water rights. Farms are drying up. Entire cities are being vacated. The world has gone too far in the waste of this life sustaining element. Virtual blood baths are occurring as people are actually fighting for survival as they watch the water supply vanish in front of their eyes.

Sounds like a scene from a science fiction, doesn’t it?

But the truth is, this is not happening 25 or even 50 years in the future! It's happening right here right now worldwide and the facts might astonish you. 2.2 billion people spread out among 62 countries—one third of the world's population—lives below the minimum water level. The worst conditions are in Haiti and Gambia, where people subsist on an average of 3 liters of water per day. Imagine having less than 2 large Ozark Spring bottles as your entire water ration for the day.

The lack of usable water in a large portion of the world exacts an enormous toll. Upward of 10 million deaths per year mostly among the young and elderly are caused by water related diseases. Nearly 250 million new cases are reported annually. The leading cause of infant death is unsafe water.

At the root of our ignorance about water is the sheer amount that exists on planet Earth. We'd like to believe that our supply is infinite, and at first glance it seems to be. But the truth is even though our planet is made up of 70% water, we are running out of fresh water rapidly. Actually, there wasn't very much to begin with: Only 2.5 percent of the water on Earth is not salt water. And much of that is frozen in northern glaciers.

But even that amount is dwindling and not only because of thirsty people. Individual humans use less than 10% of our fresh water. Much more than 60-70% goes towards irrigation and the rest is taken up by industry. With population growth and expanding economies, demands for water are skyrocketing, even taking into account conservation measures. In fact, the 6 billion people living in

the world today—projected to grow to 8 billion by 2025—share the same amount of water that was available to less than 1/6 of the world's population at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Freshwater is renewable only by rainfall. The High Plains Ogallala Aquifer, which runs 1300 miles from Texas to South Dakota, is being used up 8 times faster than nature can refill it.

As we look ahead at the reality of what could really take place, are we viewing our wasted resources with care or with abandoning greed? Have we become a throw away society that continues to waste? Do we understand the stark reality that many say will face my generation? Much work and education have to take place and take place today!

Who is responsible for this stellar challenge? Ultimately, all of us. As agriculturalists, we have a direct effect on preserving and improving water quality and quantity.

Through the FFA, we have been equipped with two valuable empowerments that can make a radical difference. The agriculture education program exposes us to issues that affect all of us and gives us a better understanding of our world. Knowledge becomes power and knowledge with great communication develops influence. As young FFA members, being brought up in a society where most of our goods are disposable and waste is prevalent, a different mindset has to develop!

100 years ago my great great grandfather saw the importance of preserving water quality with his hand dug wells. He cross fenced and rotational grazed his livestock. In the 30's and 40's my great grandfather saw the value of working with the WPA and Soil Conservation Service in establishing terraces in cultivation areas and in pastures. The 70's and 80's made available the Great Plains program which afforded my dad and grandpa to obtain cost share assistance for grass seed and water systems.

Today my family works closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Garfield and Noble County. Through the EQIP and the Conservation Stewardship Program, we have obtained valuable assistance and direction in building and protecting our soil and our water systems. We have adopted a no-till program and practice crop rotation in an effort to conserve moisture, break weed and disease cycles, and maximize production.

We have begun to do our part on the farm. But in reality the rural population only makes up for 1% of the total population. What about the urban usage? Long showers, lawn sprinklers, and private pools are nice but will the price of pleasure become the pain of regret? You and I have to be the catalyst that helps people to become educated, conscious of the matter, and to change. We can make a decision that can literally change the world!

As the popular song goes, "Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got till it's gone."

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