

Letters/Opinions

Drawdown of aquifer requires more attention from producers

If groundwater is to be the oil of tomorrow, it's time to start stocking up. For too long now agriculture has been threatened by water resource shortages, which stalk the Western states regularly. But although these surface stocks are dependent on weather, over which we have no control, the aquifers remain our greatest renewable backup.

But our aquifers are endangered, and recharging efforts have not been successful in most cases. As a result, this last refuge of moisture is quickly disappearing.

Agricultural interests must kindle a new effort to save the water beneath the soil, and work to expand research that will replenish aquifers for the future. Like money in the bank, restoration of



Our Say

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the groundwater is a savings that will yield rich dividends for our children.

This is an age when every crop must be measured for how we can use deficit irrigation in a way that continues to return economic yields, yet cuts the amount of water needed to do so. Extensive research addressing deficit watering is already under way at several Western universities, and it is time to

listen, take notes and change.

While the chance of precipitation is a factor in recharging these unseen streams, it is the abundance of drawdown by agriculture that must be addressed as the real factor impacting tomorrow's aquifer quantities.

Setting timers on the pivots and letting them run on a regular schedule, despite rainfall and without considering what the crops actually use, should be a practice of the past. Yet, too many let the water run without considering how much is wasted with each irrigation.

Resource synergies

It makes sense to measure your water in accord with plant quenching requirements because it also saves electrical energy and cuts power costs.

We want to hear from you!

You can "Sound Off" too.

E-mail your letters to tburnham@farmprogress.com.

Write to:

Letter to the Editor
The Western Farmer-Stockman
12309 N.E. 21st St.
Vancouver, WA 98684

All letters must include your name, address and telephone number for verification purposes, and should be 300 words or less.

Computerized irrigation systems are nice, but unless they are linked to soil measuring devices such as tensiometers, their real value is diluted. What we see running off the field and down the drain should be a sign that things can be done better.

New technology allows for water use and need coordination as never before, but a lot of growers aren't getting involved. Precision irrigation is needed now more than ever.

In these times of cutbacks and short-cuts to preserve our bottom line, we are looking hard at whether this application can be eliminated, or if that pass over the field is unnecessary in view of saving diesel. Just as vital is the need to see which watering may be shortened or even gone without. Every bucket left in the aquifer is bucket in the bank.

Agriculture has learned that spraying by the calendar isn't acceptable, and replaced it by making applications only when our crop scouts or advisers say they are needed. Treating water in the same manner is just as important.

With 14 million wells sucking water from underground in the U.S., it is obvious agriculture isn't the only straw in the glass. Working with other industries and our neighbors to resolve the increasing menace of aquifer drawdown must be part of the solution.

News Briefs

Ohno partners with Washington Potato State Commission

The Washington Potato Commission has announced a partnership with world champion short-track speed skater and Seattle native Apolo Anton Ohno. Ohno will work with the commission in its continued efforts to educate the public and youth, in particular, on the importance of Washington potatoes. As part of the partnership, Ohno will assist in communicating the nutritional value of potatoes and will take part in an outreach campaign that will involve sharing his favorite Washington potato recipes, as well as partaking in events.

Montana Ag Dept. completes Sustainable Systems payments

The Montana Department of Agriculture has successfully completed efforts

to pay farmers all of the money owed for delivery of 2008 safflower crops to Sustainable Systems LLC, an oilseed processing plant at Culbertson. Farmers in Montana received payments totaling \$654,507 from proceeds of a Montana commodity dealer bond, the sale of cooking oil and other commodities, and cash that customers owed to Sustainable Systems LLC. North Dakota growers received \$431,629 and are awaiting payment of \$130,000 from a surety bond being processed by the North Dakota Public Service Commission.

4 new regional centers to focus on Montana foods

The Montana Department of Agriculture has selected four regional centers to serve entrepreneurs seeking to develop Montana-produced food, farm-derived

renewable energy and other value-added agricultural products. Centers in Glendive, Havre, Joliet and Ronan will form a network and collaborate with existing nonprofit, state, federal and tribal entities on services ranging from product development to business and marketing assistance.

WSU director Fagerlie lauded

A Washington State University Extension educator has received the Award for Excellence in Extension from the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities. Daniel L. Fagerlie, Ferry County director for WSU Extension and the Colville Reservation Federally Recognized Extension Program, accepted the award at the APLU annual meeting in Washington, D.C.

Nature provides retreat to find peace of mind

LAST summer I walked along a public trail and looked out at my valley.

Water from mountain streams ran in canals to farms with grazing cattle, neat towns, golf courses, wetlands and nesting birds. Gardens were filled with bright flowers and tasty vegetables. The land produced food, fiber and beauty. It also provided a spiritual experience, a tonic for stresses of everyday living.

Only minutes from my house, I found peace as great as that of any church, mosque or synagogue.

I thought about a story my Indian friend, Taja Singh, told about his Sikh religion. One of the major Sikh Holy Men, Guru Nanak, often visited major shrines where other religions worshiped God. Near Mecca he spread his blanket and slept. He was awakened roughly and told he could not point his feet toward God.



THINKING OUT LOUD

By THAD BOX

He replied, "Kind sir, I do not want to offend God. Please point my feet where God isn't."

I turned a corner and found a brood of newly hatched pheasants. My eyes followed the hen as she fluttered off, dragging a wing. I knew her trick. She expected me to chase her. Her brood would be safe. I looked down. The chicks had vanished. I also knew their trick. They were sitting all around me, blending into the litter, gravel and grass. I moved forward very carefully, trying to put my feet where baby birds weren't. The mother pheasant had disappeared

on a brushy slope. I sat on a log and listened to see if she would give a rallying call. I could hear the sound of a farmer cutting alfalfa, children playing on a school ground a half mile away, and ducks on marshes down below. I sat in a place of beauty, not knowing, or caring, whether the legal title holder of the trail was a person, county, state or country.

Places of peace

I often sought such places of peace when I was a child. There were no pheasants or alfalfa where I was raised. There were no public paths, no public land. But times were simpler. No-trespassing signs had yet to sprout in my childhood Texas. Neighbors did not object to a small boy like me fishing in the creek or building a hideout in Mustang grapevines. Some years ago, on Bureau of Land Management land I came across a man

riding his four-wheeler up steep slopes. I asked him politely to stay on the marked trail. He cursed and muttered something about busy-body environmentalists. He told me the land was as much his as it was mine. He would ride his rig on his land, and I could walk on my land. Unfortunately, I did not have the presence of mind to respond, "Kind sir, please ride your vehicle where my land isn't." Some things like beauty and God and gifts from the land really do belong to everyone. The trouble comes when one person expresses his ownership in a way that harms others.

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