

## How's Your Water IQ?

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Mark Twain supposedly once said, "Whiskey is for drinking, water is for fighting." While an exact attribute to that great phrase may never be found, there is great truth in those words! The most crucial item for human survival anywhere is access to an adequate supply of fresh, wholesome, water. And as Shakespeare said, "Ah, there's the rub!"

We take our water for granted. If you don't think so, spend a few weeks or longer in a lesser developed country. The ability to stop at a drinking fountain or sink anywhere and get a glass of water that you knew was safe to drink will take soon come with a whole new appreciation! We all saw in the old western movies about water wars. Well I'm hear to tell you they are going to happen again! Governor Brownback has started the process to develop a 50 year water plan for the state. I'm not going to get into the details of that or any of the ideas that have been proposed, but I do want to challenge you to start becoming more water aware!

Because of Kansas' location in the middle of the country we range from areas in western Kansas with less than, sometimes much less than, 18 inches of annual precipitation to the southeastern corner of the state where average annual precipitation is over 42 inches. Additionally, population increases dramatically from west to east. Western Kansas depends heavily on groundwater supplies, eastern Kansas on surface water supplies. Western Kansas' biggest water concern is quantity. Eastern Kansas' biggest water concern is quality. Maybe instead of asking how your water IQ is, I should ask how your water 2Q is.

This dichotomy of water in the state continues. In the west, the biggest water user is agriculture. In the east, the biggest user is municipalities, i.e., providing water to the people. In Kansas roughly 84% of all water is used by agricultural irrigation. BUT, keep in mind that agriculture is the biggest industry in Kansas producing nearly 8 billion dollars in crop production value (without multipliers) in 2013. Livestock easily doubles that value. Whether you agree with this usage or not, it will be a driving force in future water plans!

Of the remaining 16% of water used in the state, 9.4% is used by public water supplies, 3.7% by self supplied industrial, 2.6% for livestock and the remaining is self supplied domestic. Many people will look at these figures and decide that if 84% is being used by crop irrigation, what they do around their home doesn't matter. But you are completely wrong!

As an American population we do not have a good history of conservation of natural resources. When supplies run tight, we just find more supply at whatever cost. The problem is that we have ALL the water on this planet that we are ever going to have. The other challenge is that once water is contaminated (polluted) it is very hard to "fix" it. So we all have to protect the water supplies and we all have to figure out how to use less, that is to say, conserve it.

In the coming weeks and months I will periodically write about ways to conserve and protect our valuable water resources. Some of the methods are very easy, some of them will require a little bit more effort. Ultimately, though, everything that we can do voluntarily towards conserving and protecting our water will go a long ways towards reducing mandatory actions that communities in other areas have had to enact when water supplies became short or tainted.

Mark Twain may or may not have actually said, whiskey is for drinking, water is for fighting. But hopefully, with a strong effort towards conservation, we won't have to fight for our water!