

Water Conflicts Loom on the Horizon

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Fact: We have all the water on the planet that we will ever have. New water isn't "made". The water may change form through freezing, thawing, evaporation and rain or snowfall. It may change in availability, or more correctly usability, because of pollution or conversion to sea water. But we aren't going to change the total amount that is available.

Fact: The population of the world continues to grow and some population estimates project world population will be at nine billion by 2050. Our current world population is seven billion. For reference we hit four billion in 1974, five billion in 1987 and six billion in 1999. As the world population grows their need for water increases simply because there are more of us. The need for food will also grow. Producing crops does require water.

In our home state of Kansas we have two developing water crises because when it comes to water we are two different states. In western Kansas we depend on underground water supplies (aquifers) to provide water for people, livestock and crops. Those water supplies are decreasing. In eastern Kansas we depend on surface water supplies. Many of those surface water sources are becoming less desirable due to increasing levels of nutrients, sediments and other contaminants.

Climate change is happening, the science is solid. If you want to argue about anything, we can argue about how much is naturally occurring cycles and how much is being caused by humans. But climates have always changed and we are in another cycle. We honestly don't know what the outcome will be, but currently, average annual temperatures are increasing, a trend that we are also seeing locally and across the state.

Dealing with the looming issues will not be easy. Many different groups will claim that they have the answer. But many of those solutions will require changes that the mass population won't want to make. Some groups will say that we need to stop eating meat. But at the same time per capita meat consumption continues to grow world wide. Other groups will call for mandatory world wide population control. But you've seen how the world wide population has continued to grow. Yet other people will choose to just bury their head in the sand and hum a happy tune.

Eventually there will have to be changes. The more little changes we make in the near time, the less likely it will be that we face major, mandated, changes in the long term. We aren't just talking about changes by governments or countries. We are talking about changes that we as individuals can make on a daily basis. We can choose to reduce water use, or be forced into it by economics or restrictions.

There are so many ways that we waste water, or cause threats to our water usability. There are many places to start decreasing water usage. Water lawns less; many homeowners severely over water their yard. Use drip irrigation in flower beds and vegetable gardens. Sweep sidewalks and driveways, don't hose them off. Use water conserving appliances in the home. These are all little things that can add up!

Protect water quality around your home and lawn. Reduce fertilization and then be careful when applying fertilizer so you aren't fertilizing the street. Keep lawn debris off the street, and thereby out of the storm water. Be cautious and conservative in pesticides applied to lawns and gardens and de-icers on hard surfaces in the winter. Remember, we are all on this planet together, and it's the only home we've got. We ALL have to work together to keep it livable for ALL of us.