Water Watch

COALITION FOR A SUSTAINABLE DELTA
SOLVING THE SACRAMENTO-SAN JOAQUIN DELTA CRISIS

Save Water—Stop Eating!

The silver bullet drought solution

There's a simple solution that could bring relief to California's current drought, not to mention, all future droughts in the Golden State. It's a modest sacrifice that all Californians can take part in. The concept is not new. A number of activists have already alluded to it, in part, but no one has had the fortitude to blatantly come out and say it. But the time has come to discuss it out in the open:

STOP EATING!

Sound ridiculous? Sure, but that hasn't stopped a number of activists and even some members of the media from suggesting this lunacy by pointing out the water footprint of certain farm crops without providing the full picture.

The latest villain and favorite target has been almonds. A Mother Jones report, which has been heavily cited over the past year, pointed out that every serving of almonds takes about 24 gallons of water to produce. This may sound like a lot of water, but not when put into the proper context. Bottom-line: growing the food we eat is water intensive. Consider the following:

One eight ounce serving of beef requires 900 gallons of water

One six ounce serving of pork requires 216 gallons of water

One 10 ounce glass of milk requires 69 gallons of water

One seven ounce glass of wine requires 55 gallons of water

One pint of beer requires 86 gallons of water

One venti coffee requires 138 gallons of water

One four ounce serving of rice requires 112 gallons of water

(Source: National Geographic)

Topping the list is chocolate, which requires more than 3,100 gallons to produce a single pound; that's more than 300 gallons of water for a single 1.55 ounce chocolate bar!

Remove food from the equation and there's enough water for everybody, drought or no drought!

Truth be told, it takes water to grow food, plain and simple. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, agriculture uses about 40 percent of the state's water supply, while 50 percent of the supply is devoted to the environment and the remaining 10 percent goes to urban water users. Vilifying farmers by attacking farm water use does little to help the debate or to provide real drought solutions.

California farmers have invested heavily in technology to improve water-use efficiency. Overall, statewide agricultural water use efficiency has improved markedly, increasing crop production by **43 percent** per acre-foot of water used since 1967. Drip and micro-irrigation systems are more prevalent than ever, especially in the almond industry, where **72 percent of the state's almond trees are using efficient irrigation technologies.**

There is always room for improvement, and California's farmers benefit from continuing to invest in more efficient irrigation practices, especially as the worst drought in state history lingers on. Knowing the facts helps the conversation. Pointing fingers at hardworking farm families and farm workers who are clearly suffering the most from the drought does nothing to help the debate or work toward solutions.

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