



# THE SPIGOT

from the NORTH DAKOTA RURAL WATER SYSTEMS ASSOCIATION



## The Value of Water

By David Dick

A west Texas farmer—face creased, eyes moist, soft whistle riding on his dusty breath—once said: “Hardly ever rains durin’ a drought.”

A geologist proclaimed: “All the water that’s here now was here in the beginning, and all the water that’s here now is all the water there’ll ever be.”

Booker T. Washington said: “Put your bucket down where you are.”

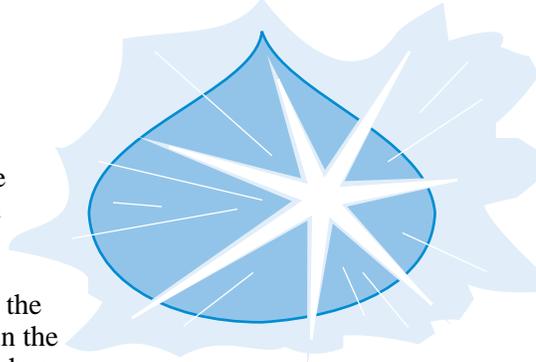
You say, “But I can’t put my bucket down in the subdivision where I live, the ground is caked and cracked. Can’t put my bucket down in the high-rise condominium where I reside, for me there is no ground.”

Put your bucket down inside yourself and consider a community’s need that conservation of water is a year-round business, drought or no drought.

Urban and rural survivors of the worst drought in many memories can put their collective buckets down. They can vote their support for improved water-development projects.

The water is there and it will always be there, but it may not be available exactly in the time frame or in the quality that human beings expect it.

The great hydrologic cycle begins with the outcropping of springs feeding headwaters of licks, branches, creeks, and rivers rolling to the sea. The surface water is only a



mirror of the hidden aquifers where groundwater percolates.

Human beings don’t live on or alongside this water cycle, they are a part of it. Adult body weight is 55-70 percent water (baby body weight is as much as 80 percent). We can get along without food a lot longer than we can without water; therefore it’s a serious irony that so many Americans take water, especially drinking water, for granted.

There’s a reminder in the *Complete Home Medical Guide*: “The body is often likened to a self-contained sea in which every body cell is constantly bathed in salty water.”

The drought of 1999 has reaffirmed the good fortune of having deep wells here on Plum Lick where we live and where we hope to die of some cause other than thirst.

But wells alone are not enough. Groundwater needs protection from surface pollutants. Chemicals and animal wastes can contaminate the beauty of the hydrologic cycle, a problem to be solved.

Kentucky water flows to the Ohio, to the Mississippi, and to the Gulf of Mexico, where we are blessed with

the miracle of evaporation. The sun draws the water up into the clouds, winds return the clouds to Kentucky, the rain falls, and the cycle is completed.

It is a natural phenomenon that competes with a cycle of misuse. In his book, *Nor Any Drop to Drink*, William Ashworth has written:

“Locked behind windows of glass that frame the world like a picture, breathing filtered air whose temperature has been determined by the flick of a dial, we can be forgiven for assuming that what the natural world does is no longer of any concern to us. But we make this assumption at our own peril.”

The drought of 1999 has been more than an inconvenience, a vexation that annoys. It is a reality and a stern reminder that the water cycle, what Ashworth calls “the great planetary water engine that drives all life on this green and rolling earth,” should not be taken for granted.

“It’s kind of drizzly outside,” my wife says to me on an early autumn morning. That is good news. Let me go forth today resolved to be a better steward of what the Great Creator has given me. Challenge me to remember to know the value of water, protect and conserve it to the best of my ability, and pass along this knowledge to those generations still to be born in this sea called life. ■

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