

Water: The Lifeblood of Agriculture

By John Hart

As blood is for the body, water is for agriculture. People who raise livestock and grow crops can't live without it.

We tend to take our nation's blood supply for granted, until we need it. Thankfully, the United States has a great system of blood banks to meet the need when a crisis arises. In much the same way, we have a great system in place to protect the nation's ground water supply.

According to the National Ground Water Association, some 47 percent of the U.S. population depends on ground water, which fills cracks and other openings in beds of rock and sand, for drinking. In rural areas, the number is about 96 percent.

To stress the vital importance of ground water, National Ground Water Awareness Week is held every year. This year, the week will be observed March 7-13. Farm Bureau supports National Ground Water Awareness Week because water truly is the lifeblood of agriculture.

Irrigation accounts for the largest use of ground water in the United States. Some 58 billion gallons of ground water are used daily for agricultural irrigation from more than 374,082 wells. Irrigation is critical for our nation's agricultural bounty, and America's farmers and ranchers do all they can to protect and conserve this vital resource.

This year, NGWA is urging household well owners to check their well caps to make sure they are in good condition, which helps protect the water supply from contamination. As part of National Ground Water Awareness Week, the organization has proclaimed Tuesday, March 9 as "National Inspect-Your-Well-Cap Day" to encourage private well owners to make this simple but important inspection.

The well cap is the cover on top of the well casing that sticks out of the ground. It is the first line of protection for the water within. In addition to keeping out pollutants, well caps serve as barriers to insects that prefer dark, damp environments to nest. Insects can cause major problems in a well. Bacteria levels can rise from their droppings, and sometimes the bugs themselves can get trapped in the wells, die, and decompose in the well water.

An annual checkup by a qualified water well contractor is the best way to ensure problem-free service and quality water. Also, preventative maintenance usually is less costly than emergency maintenance, and good well maintenance—like good car maintenance—can prolong the life of your well and related equipment. NGWA further recommends you test your water whenever there is a change in taste, odor, or appearance or when the system is serviced.

To learn more about proper well location and construction, well maintenance, water testing and treatment, and groundwater protection, visit NGWA's Web site, www.wellowner.org.