

FOCUS ON AGRICULTURE
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American Farm Bureau Federation

We Are All Groundwater Stewards
By John Hart

Americans have every confidence that clean, clear water will flow from the tap when they turn on the faucet in the morning, just as they have every confidence that the sun will come out tomorrow.

We Americans tend to take our water resources for granted. We often fail to appreciate the stewardship required to ensure a safe water supply. One group that never fails to understand the vital importance of water stewardship is America's farmers and ranchers. They take their roles as protectors of Earth's precious resources seriously. And they are responsible in knowing that their actions have the power to impact the water used by everyone.

In knowing what not to do, farmers and ranchers also are aware of what to do to protect and enhance water quality. When you consider that most farmers and ranchers themselves depend on a clean and safe water supply each and every day, for their families, crops and animals, it further explains their motivation to strive for water protection, each and every day. Water is the lifeblood of agriculture.

Farmers and ranchers rely on groundwater for much of their production needs, while 96 percent of rural Americans depend on groundwater for their water supply. Irrigation accounts for the largest use of groundwater in the United States. Some 58 billion gallons of groundwater are used daily for agricultural irrigation from more than 374,000 wells.

Farmers all across America rely on groundwater for their livelihoods. That's why Farm Bureau supports National Ground Water Awareness Week every year. This year's Ground Water Awareness Week is March 6-12. The core message of this year's observance is: Groundwater is important to every person, and there is something every person can do to be a good groundwater steward.

The National Ground Water Association uses National Ground Water Awareness Week to educate Americans about how issues such as water well flooding, abandoned water wells, naturally occurring contamination and poor well maintenance can affect water quality.

America's farm and ranch families know that their success depends on protecting the groundwater they and others rely on every day. That's why they take steps to properly manage crop protection products and nutrients at the farm level. It's why they regularly maintain their water wells and septic systems and properly decommission abandoned wells that can impact the groundwater that serves as other's water supplies.

Urban and suburban residents must also take steps to protect groundwater because heavily populated areas consume huge amounts of groundwater through public water systems. Just as

farmers and ranchers work hard to protect America's water supply, those who live and work in towns and cities must be dedicated groundwater protectors.

The National Ground Water Association has the resources to help people protect groundwater. NGWA's [Ground Water Awareness Week Web page](#) provides action steps to take in two categories: groundwater protection and groundwater conservation. Well owners can learn more about groundwater stewardship at NGWA's other Web site, www.wellowner.org. This site contains more useful information about groundwater protection as well as water testing and treatment.

Water that is "colorless, odorless and tasteless" doesn't happen by accident. It requires good stewardship, and that's a responsibility we all share before it reaches the faucet.