

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
United States Department of Agriculture

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The Nation's freshwater supply, shaped by rainfall, snowmelt, runoff and infiltration, is distributed unevenly across the landscape, throughout the seasons, and from year to year. In many areas, concerns are growing about the adequacy of the available ground and surface water supply and the quality of the water to support intended uses.

Agriculture is one of the largest users of the Nation's surface water and groundwater, with irrigation being the greatest use. In 2000, almost 34 percent of the water withdrawn from surface water and groundwater was used in irrigated agriculture. In arid and semi-arid areas, crop production depends almost entirely on irrigation. Competition for water in these areas is increasing as a result of increased human populations. In recent years, irrigation has been increasing in eastern States, resulting in water shortages in several States.

In addition, agricultural runoff can impact water quality, carrying potential pollutants into the Nation's streams, lakes, ground water supplies, and estuaries. States and Tribes have identified sediment and nutrients as the most extensive agricultural contaminants affecting surface water quality, while nutrients and agrochemicals are the major concerns for groundwater.

Nitrogen and phosphorus are the primary nutrients that contribute to agricultural nonpoint source pollution. Excessive nitrogen and phosphorus in waterways can cause algal blooms which can lead to the development of hypoxic conditions, or low dissolved oxygen concentrations, unable to sustain aquatic life.

The Water Cycle



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Soil Health

Unlock the Secrets in the Soil

Soil is a living and life-giving substance, without which we would perish. As world population and food production demands rise, keeping our soil healthy and productive is of paramount importance. So much so that we believe improving the health of our Nation's soil is one of the most important endeavors of our time. By focusing more attention on soil health and by educating our customers and the public about the positive impact healthy soils can have on productivity and conservation, we can help our Nation's farmers and ranchers feed the world more profitably and sustainably – now and for generations to come. The resources on this soil health section of our site are designed to help visitors understand the basics and benefits of soil health – and to learn about Soil Health Management Systems from farmers who are using those systems. So whether you're a farmer, a researcher, a conservationist or an interested citizen, the information on this site will help you "Unlock the Secrets in the Soil."

Voices of Soil Health



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