

## The unseen value of water

Jewel Tai, 23 October 2020

While growing up, you might have been repeatedly instructed by your mother to drink water though you were desperate for a Coke. 70% of the earth's surface is covered by water, yet only 2.5% of it is fresh water, and only 1% of it is easily accessible for human use. That is 0.0175% of ALL the earth's water. Yet sometimes the high accessibility to such a resource within our cities can make it easy to forget its value. Just the press of a single button, a sensor, or a tap lever can make the task feel so effortless.

Many daily items that are the most accessible and available to use could be physically dry. However, the massive volume of water that is used to produce the materials and construct them is not usually acknowledged.



### Food

The Farm-to-Fork trend has been buzzing for a while now, and the most attractive part to any diner is just how fresh, authentic and natural it feels in the mouth. The taste is enhanced and colours look more vibrant. Sometimes those colours may even appear less appealing, since it hasn't been aesthetically improved for commercialisation purposes...although its taste is incredible. More justice is given to farmers for their arduous efforts through direct sales.

Since we come from so many diverse backgrounds, presenting the same word related to food will bring a very different landscape in each one's imagination. Let's say, "APPLE!", one could think of the apples they were collecting in a bag in the air-conditioned supermarket, while others may think of the apple trees they were climbing to get that one apple for a treat.

Here's the highlight:

We must forget the volumes of water required in agriculture to reap that one apple. Water is considered as the most critical resource for sustainable agricultural development worldwide. Yet socio-economic pressures and climate change impose restrictions to water allocated to agriculture. The World Meteorological Organization has projected rising temperatures over the next five years, and increased evaporation could increase water-related extreme events like

floods and droughts. Higher pressure is placed on securing sufficient irrigation that our food supplies are maintained, and we must not neglect or take this for granted.



### Housing

We often find ourselves running from a thunderstorm or even complaining about how it has disrupted our plans. The rain may look abundant or free-flowing from afar, but it is in fact costly. There has been an increased awareness about how significant water management is as food consumption increases, along with other factors. So far, research has indicated the demand for water quality is expected to increase as populations expand with improved quality of life.

It is amazing to know that an energy-smart clothes washer is able to save more water in a year than one person drinks in an entire lifetime. Imagine the days when there was no such thing as a washing machine, but only hand-washing.. So much less water that humanity had used when more physical effort was invested. Technology has certainly increased our convenience in dealing with daily responsibilities, but let it not cause our care and love to diminish.



### Clothing

Having a cotton t-shirt today could be the most basic item for the wardrobe. Perhaps, consider that a privilege instead. Did you know it takes 2,700 litres of water just to produce the cotton to make a single cotton t-shirt? The amount of water used to care for it after has not even been counted in the equation yet.

While businesses and governments invest in implementing conscious consumerism and improving the quality of human life, we must play our parts individually. Being a conscious consumer, small actions like caring better for a t-shirt or the frequency of buying a new one could make a huge difference. FashionUnited UK has even suggested consumers could “*make an impact, by slowing down, buying less and buying better*”.

The fashion industry is notorious for its pollution, and it is known as the second most polluting industry after oil. Research is still trying to identify factors that drive the management transitions toward urban water sustainability. Have there been patterns of change you might have seen in your social circle too? Or perhaps what would trigger the way you decide as your next outfit purchase more responsibly? You could even be the pioneer for such a vital movement in your area!

Ultimately, there are many physical products or spaces that appear dry, but the volume of water invested to produce and maintain these can be dramatically high. Just right where you are, there is definitely something you can start to do to express your passion towards water sustainability. It could even be as simple as keeping fit with a longer-lasting t-shirt!

### Resources

1. <https://www.nbcnews.com/science/environment/new-climate-report-highlights-enormous-challenge-ahead-meeting-paris-agreement-n1233258>
2. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2210784315000741>
3. <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4441/11/2/388/htm>
4. <https://fashionunited.uk/news/fashion/wastewater-fashion-s-grotesk-sustainability-problem/2020050548770>
5. <https://dspace.sunyconnect.suny.edu/handle/1951/70314>
6. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378018306204>

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