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California's Drought Is Being Felt By Everyone

California residents are no strangers to dry conditions- deserts make up over 25 percent of the state's surface area- but the drought that has seemingly stretched on for years is only getting worse. The last three years have been exceptionally bad with *Los Angeles Times* writing, "California's drought has become the state's driest three-year period on record, surpassing that of 2013-15" (1). The worsening drought in California affects everyone. This drought is causing Californians to be more strict with their water usage than ever before- it's even harming communities throughout the state by affecting their drinking water. The agriculture industry is taking hits from this dry spell as well; with over 13 percent of America's agriculture coming from California alone, the sunshine state's farmers need water more than ever. From unclean drinking water in low income communities to less food on the shelves at the grocery store, this drought is making itself known.

Within the past three years, California's residents have had to shift their way of life in dramatic fashions. According to *Public Policy Institute of California*, "Even before the latest drought, per capita water use had declined significantly- from 231 gallons per in 1990 to 180 gallons per day in 2010- reflecting substantial efforts to reduce water use through pricing incentives and mandatory installation of water-saving technologies like low-flow toilets and shower heads" (5). In 2015, the per capita use fell to 146 gallons per day, but because of today's

drought, water use has gone down to 105 gallons per person per day. Californians are having to be more mindful and more cautious about how they use their water. Whether it be watering your lawn less often, turning off the sink when you brush your teeth, or taking shorter showers, the mindset of residents of California has shifted from how much water they use to how much water is wasted. This is particularly frustrating as some communities find themselves rationing unclean drinking water.

The number of Californians living with contaminated drinking water is at nearly one million. Regarding the crisis of unclean water, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, “The majority of those people live in low income communities and communities of color, state data shows” (4). Because more than 370 drinking water systems didn’t meet water quality standards in December 2021, more than 920,000 people face an increased risk of cancer and liver and kidney problems, according to *Cal Matters*; “An additional 432 systems serving more than 1 million people are currently at risk of failing” (3). The drought is affecting people all across the Golden State, but it’s reach doesn’t stop there- the effects of the drought that is plaguing California is spreading to the rest of the country, too.

California is a huge contributor to America’s food production. According to Cal Poly’s College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences, the state provides 46 percent of the nation’s fruit and nut production, as well as 49 of the national vegetable production (11-12). California Department of Water Resources states, “In an average year, approximately 9.6 million acres are irrigated with roughly 34 million acre-feet of water” (2). California uses massive amounts of water every year to feed the nation, and the drought is reducing surface water to farms which in turn creates raising costs and reduced farm revenue. Droughts can stunt the

growth of crops which leads to a decline in quality and size of produce. This creates a domino effect that harms the consumer in grocery stores because lack of water means higher prices for the farmer to get the food to market and the buyer to get the food to the table.

The drought in California is stretching past its own farmers and reaching into the homes of people across America. With contaminated drinking water and strict water regulations resting on the shoulders of Californians, state-wide tension over the necessity of water has never been higher. Consumers in grocery stores feel it too- the lack of water in one state is leaking out and affecting every household in America. Californians are no strangers to dry conditions, but this drought is no longer just affecting residents of the Golden State, it's affecting everyone.

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