

No. 777

A Science Service Feature

Nov. 6

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

By Dr. Charles F. Brooks
of Clark University.

DROUGHT AND POPULATION

Every once in a while we hear that Brownsboro has experienced the "worst drought" on record or that wells in Smithville that never failed before have gone dry. Such reports came, for example, from Tennessee and Carolina towns this summer and from New England two years ago. This does not necessarily mean that the climate is getting generally drier or even that the particular drought lasted longer than previous ones. Increasing population means an increasing drain on ground water, therefore droughts are likely to become progressively worse.

Deep in the ground lies a water-retaining floor, with perhaps a gravel stratum above, where much ground water is stored. Wells and springs are fed from this subterranean reservoir, which is replenished by rain seeping through from the surface. More people means more ground water pumped up and allowed to run off through sewers into rivers, also increased population means more water taken from the surface for crop production. In over-populated countries like China and India droughts and famines become national calamities. The pressure of population on water supply is seldom felt in the eastern United States, but in arid regions of the west the problem is an acute one.

(Tomorrow: Taking Care of Bananas)

All rights reserved by Science Service

SCIENCE SERVICE,
B and 21st Sts.,
Washington, D.C.