

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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WASTEFUL PLANTS

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

Mankind would not be harassed by droughts if it were not for the fact that we obtain nearly all our food and clothing from plants and from animals that, in turn, depend upon plants for their existence. Plants are enormously wasteful in their use of water. Of the rain that falls on fields and pastures only a moderate fraction is collected and used by vegetation. Moreover, plants use relatively vast amounts of water in the production of small amounts of material valuable to humanity.

It is estimated, for example, that an average corn plant uses about 368 pounds of water in making a pound of dry matter, not including its root; or, in other words, a pound of fodder for livestock and food for men. Alfalfa takes more than 800 pounds of water from the soil to produce a pound of dry material. Flax uses about 900 pounds of water per pound of dry product.

Probably some day all food and clothing will be made far more economically and dependably by the methods of synthetic chemistry, and then the scourge of drought will be a thing of the past.

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21st and Constitution Ave.
Washington, D.C.