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Water Quality and Human Health: Addressing the Connections

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Abstract Text:

Safe drinking water is just one of many avenues through which the quality of water affects human health. Keeping animal waste out of streams used for recreation, using composting practices to reduce survival of pathogens, and coordinating agricultural management practices for the benefit of both food safety and water quality are a few additional avenues recently addressed by the Southwest States and Pacific Islands Regional Water Program. While we continue to focus efforts on safe drinking water initiatives throughout the region, including rainwater catchment education and the enhancement of a water test interpreter web-tool, the Regional Program has also supported coordinated efforts to address water quality and human health connections related to dry litter animal waste management in the Pacific Islands, research determining whether or not composting is effective in reducing the survival rates of Leptospirosis, and bringing awareness to the current disconnect between food safety and water quality management goals. The ability to address water quality through a variety of avenues and thereby distribute impacts and benefits across communities is one of the strengths of the Regional Program.

Impact Statement:

The Regional Program continues to support several projects to understand and disseminate information on methods and actions to improve water quality and water resource management. Our efforts have led residents in several Pacific Islands to taking better care to properly maintain their rainwater catchment systems – often their primary source of drinking water; pig farmers across the Pacific Islands embracing dry litter management and reducing the waste directed into local streams – often used by children for recreation; and food safety and water quality experts coming together to identify ways in which conflicting management strategies can be coordinated to achieve common goals.