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Reclaimed Water in Florida: Trends and Changes in Attitudes

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Abstract Text:

Even though it normally receives about 50 inches of rain, Florida has become a large producer and user of reclaimed water. This is due to rapid population growth, poor sandy soils, and periodic droughts. This paper will discuss the Water Conserv II project near Orlando, FL, and describe trends and changes in attitudes toward reclaimed water, or highly treated wastewater. In the 1980s, urban areas had to dispose of wastewater and looked for the cheapest disposal methods available. Cities encouraged reclaimed water use by giving it away for free. Some groups, such as agriculture, initially refused to accept reclaimed water because of fears of disease, heavy metals, and other unknown factors. At Water Conserv II, standards for reclaimed water quality were established, and growers started using it for irrigation of citrus trees. High application rates with reclaimed water did not damage trees and actually promoted greater growth and yield. In the past 20 years, production and use of reclaimed water has increased dramatically. Several other groups including residential, golf course, and industrial users have now surpassed agriculture, which had been one of the larger users of reclaimed water. Instead of being concerned about disposal, reclaimed water generators have found that some groups are willing to pay more for this water than agriculture is. Periodic droughts have increased acceptance of reclaimed water. Even though Florida has high rainfall, increasing population and its demand for water will continue to increase use of reclaimed water.

Impact Statement:

Reclaimed water is highly treated wastewater or recycled water that can be used for irrigation and other beneficial purposes. Reclaimed water creates new clean water that offsets use of potable water supplies. Reclaimed water is a way to stretch water supplies in a state with rapidly increasing population.