

Reclaimed Water – A Sustainable Source for Florida’s Growing Water Demands

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Florida’s rapid population growth has put increasing pressure on water supplies. In spite of Florida’s normal annual rainfall of about 50 inches, droughts and water shortages frequently occur. Reclaimed water is a good sustainable and safe water source that has been successfully used for over 20 years. Reclaimed water is highly treated wastewater that is good for irrigation and other beneficial uses. This presentation will discuss the Water Conserv II project near Orlando, FL, and describe trends and changes in perception toward reclaimed water. In the 1980s, the Environmental Protection Agency required that treated wastewater disposal meet acceptable environmental practices. Some cities offered to give reclaimed water away for free as a cheap method for disposal, but potential customers such as agriculture initially refused to accept reclaimed water for irrigation because of fears of disease, heavy metals, possible flooding, and other unknown factors. At Water Conserv II, high standards for reclaimed water quality were established, and growers finally agreed to use it for irrigation of citrus trees. High application rates with reclaimed water were found not to damage trees and actually promoted greater growth and yield. In the past 20 years, production and use of reclaimed water has increased dramatically. In these years, other groups such as residential, golf course, and industrial customers have since surpassed agriculture, one of reclaimed water’s initial primary users. Because reclaimed water has become a desirable commodity in the face of water shortages, such groups are willing to pay more for reclaimed water than agriculture does. Once a disposal problem, reclaimed water has become a marketable commodity. Even though Florida has high rainfall, a growing population and its demand for water will continue to increase the demand for reclaimed water.