News from
Red Hen Press

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Eat Less Water

NONFICTION BY

Florencia Ramirez

The solution to worldwide water shortages is in our kitchens.

Experts predict two-thirds of people living on this planet in 2025 will experience water scarcity, a situation expected to result in the deaths of millions and an unprecedented rise in military conflicts. Can we as individuals hope to have any effect on the global scale of water misuse?

Yes, we can make a significant difference—with our food choices—learned author and activist Florencia Ramirez as she traveled across the nation to interview farmers and food producers. Tracing Ramirez's tour of American water sustainable farms—from rice paddies in Cajun Louisiana to a Hawaiian coffee farm to a Boston chocolate factory and beyond—*Eat Less Water* tells the story of water served on our plates: an eye-opening account of the under-appreciated environmental threat of water scarcity, a useful cookbook with water-sustainable recipes accompanying each chapter, and a fascinating personal narrative that will teach the reader how they, too, can eat less water.

COMP TITLES

***Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation* – Michael Pollan**
***Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* – Barbara Kingsolver**

ADVANCE PRAISE

"Water is life; a fundamental human right. The movement to protect our water resources is here. We must all participate, if we are to save Mother Earth. *Eat Less Water* is an impassioned call to action. Read, learn, and act. Florencia Ramirez shows us how."

—**Dolores Huerta**, Co-Founder of the United Farm Workers

"*Eat Less Water* is as clever as its title. It's a thoughtful book complete with recipes that are as good for your taste buds as they are for the planet. Read it and learn. Read it and eat. Read it as a reminder that our world's most precious resource is in jeopardy—and yet we can do something about it. Read it to find out how."

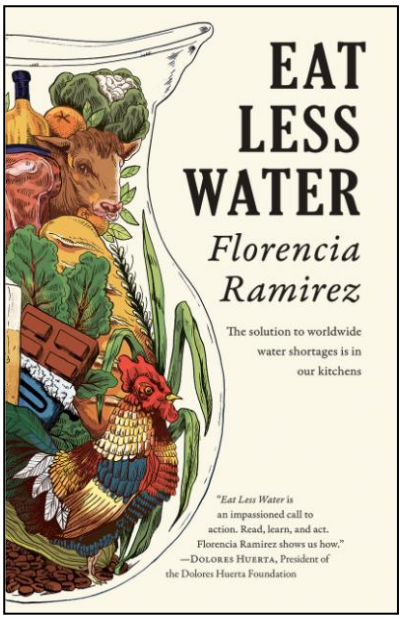
—**Thomas M. Kostigen**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Green Book*

"*Eat Less Water* is an informative, loving tribute to the source from which all life springs. Through explorations of foods ranging from pasta to wine, Florencia Ramirez reveals how cultivation and consumption impact global water usage, sharing insights on how we, the eaters, can support a less-resource intensive practices in food and agriculture that is not only sustainable but delicious."

—**Simran Sethi**, author of *Bread, Wine, Chocolate: The Slow Loss of Foods We Love*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Florencia Ramirez is a trained researcher from the University of Chicago's School of Public Policy. She won the sixth Gift of Freedom Creative Nonfiction Award from the AROHO Foundation. Her articles appear in *Edible Communities Magazine* and *San Jose Mercury News*, among others, and her popular blog. She lives in Oxnard, California, husband and three young children.



PUB DATE: November 1, 2017
ISBN: 978-1-59709-039-1
SIZE: 5.5 in x 8.5 in
FORMAT: Tradepaper
EXTENT: 264pp
PRICE: $17.95

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REDHEN PRESS
DISTRIBUTED BY
Ingram Publisher Services
an exclusive distribution entity

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FROM *EAT LESS WATER*

Introduction: Food and Water

The most far-reaching, effective strategy to save water is to eat less of it. Realizing this is what led me to start reading labels and replacing our family's favorite brands of conventionally raised food with organic alternatives. The transition went largely unnoticed by my kids until my changes in the menu reached the cereal shelf in the kitchen pantry.

"Where's my cornflakes?" my seven-year-old daughter Isabella demanded.

"I got us some new cereals to try." I showed her the choices.

"What's wrong with the kind we always eat?"

"These are better for water," I answered, pointing to the USDA organic seal.

"*Water*? It's not like cornflakes come soggy," she griped.

"Food grown without chemicals saves fresh water more than any other water-saving strategy."

Now I had her confused, an improvement over defiant. She'd heard the story about the drops of water saving my father's life, and she'd watched my growing passion to conserve water take over the house. It had led to my starting up a small business distributing shower timers.

Isabella, as the eldest of three, had joined me at Earth Day events and trade shows. She helped me cover portable tables with blue cloth and stack star and duck-shaped shower timers in neat displays. She had listened to me rattle off statistics. "You can save 2,500 gallons of water in one year," I told people. Together we sold 80,000 shower timers.

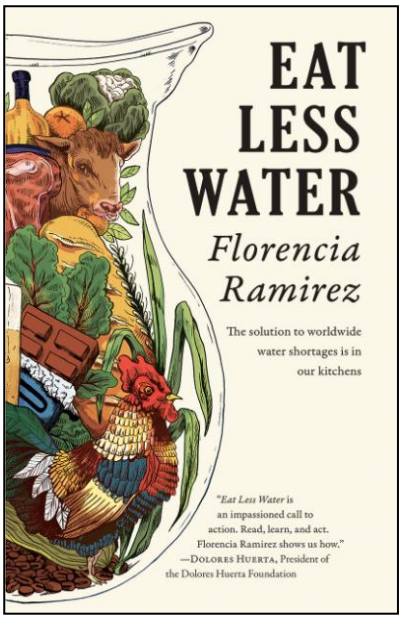
"Isn't taking shorter showers enough?" Isabella moaned, still yearning for her old cornflakes.

I explained that my focus on the shower had been misguided. The same amount of water saved over the course of a year in the bathroom can be saved in a *week* in the kitchen, because seven out of every ten gallons of water is used for food production. I'd been focusing on the wrong room of the house.

A pound of beef has a "virtual water footprint" of 1,851 gallons. Virtual water isn't directly visible in food products but the concept captures the total amount of water required to produce food. The virtual water footprint of beef represents not just the water a cow drinks, but also the water used to grow all the grain or grass consumed by the average cow over its lifetime. A loaf of bread has a virtual water footprint of 425 gallons, representing the water required to grow and harvest the grain.[1]

The United Nations reports each American eats between 530 and 1,300 gallons of virtual water every day. The water footprint of the United States is larger than any other country, more than twice that of the average country.

Of course, the water required to grow food doesn't disappear. Water's ability to change state from solid, liquid, and gas allows for its endless movement around our planet. When water is drawn from underground aquifers to irrigate crops, the water isn't gone, but through evaporation and runoff, as much as 50 percent of the water pumped to the surface moves on.[1] When the water moves away faster than it gets replaced, farmland eventually becomes parched and deserts spread. That's happening now, leaving more than one billion people and counting without sufficient water.



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