



A WaterWise Nation
Act Today. Sustain Tomorrow.

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Tackling South Africa's Agricultural Water Challenge

South Africa's landscapes are as diverse as its people, from semi-arid plains to lush wetlands but one thing binds us all: a growing water crisis. As climate change intensifies and water sources shrink, it's clear that how we use water today will determine the health and prosperity of generations to come.

Agriculture: The heart of the water story



Agriculture remains the backbone of South Africa's economy and food security, but it's also our largest water user, accounting for roughly 60–62% of total water consumption.

There are two key systems driving South African agriculture:

- Irrigated farming : which uses about two-thirds of agricultural water, mostly in water-scarce western regions.
- Rainfed farming : which depends on natural rainfall and makes up the rest.

This imbalance between where the water is and where it's needed makes efficient water use in agriculture critical.

From policy to practice: Managing every drop

The National Water Act of 1998 laid the foundation for sustainable water management in South Africa. It introduced water licensing systems and prioritised equitable access, helping farmers use water more efficiently and responsibly.





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In recent years, government departments, including the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development have stepped up with initiatives like:

- Developing irrigation schemes that maximise yield with less water.
- Promoting water-wise farming techniques such as drip irrigation and soil moisture monitoring.
- Supporting drought-resistant crop research to future-proof food security.

But policies alone aren't enough. Real change starts with people, with farmers, consumers, and communities choosing to act differently.

New pressures, new possibilities

Climate change is rewriting the rules. Droughts are becoming more severe, and water availability is becoming unpredictable. Farmers are increasingly turning to alternative sources like treated wastewater and groundwater to sustain crops.

Meanwhile, small-scale farmers continue to face barriers to water access, limiting their productivity and livelihoods. Solving this requires collaboration across all sectors, government, civil society, and business to ensure fair and sustainable use for all.



Innovation on the rise: A Look at vertical farming

One exciting frontier in this journey is vertical farming, an innovation that can reduce water use by up to 95% compared to traditional methods. By growing crops indoors using controlled environments, vertical farming not only saves water but also cuts transport emissions and boosts urban food security.



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Here's how we can all contribute:

- Farmers: Adopt smart irrigation and soil conservation methods.
- Industries: Audit and reduce water waste in production processes.
- Communities: Report leaks, reuse greywater, and spread awareness.
- Educators & Media: Share stories and science that inspire change.

Together, we can ensure that South Africa not only survives its water crisis but thrives because of how we faced it. Every drop counts. Every action matters. What we do today shapes the water future we leave behind.