



June 2022 national water poll

Drought, drinking water, farming and infrastructure

About the Water Hub

Communications support for the water movement

- Media and public opinion research
- Tools and training
- Press and digital strategy
- Messaging
- Hands on help with writing, design + pitching

Focused in the Western U.S., but we do some national work.



About us



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The rest of the team



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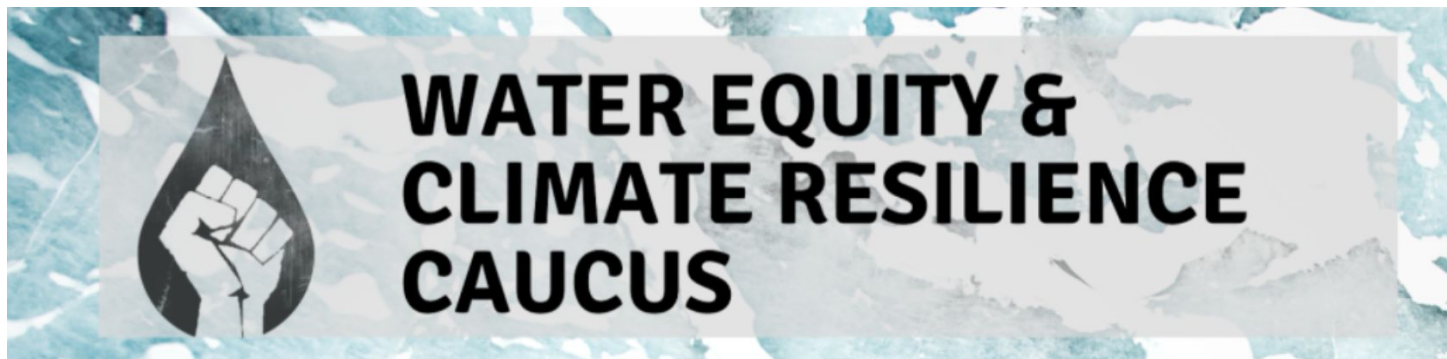
Sade Moore



Sarah Bucci

The partners

**CLEAN
WATER
FOR ALL**



Methodology

Climate Nexus Polling, in partnership with the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication, conducted a representative survey for the Water Hub June 16-20, 2022, of 2,184 registered U.S. voters.

The margin of error for this survey is +/- 2.1% at the 95% confidence level.



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How do we use polling



Focus areas

1. Infrastructure investment priorities
2. Drinking water safety and affordability
3. Clean Water Act
4. Agricultural policy
5. Drought concerns and solutions

Building off annual polls like Value Water, State of the Rockies, and our own past research.





Nearly 9 in 10 voters agree
access to safe, affordable
water is a human right.

#WaterIsAHumanRight #SafeAffordableWater



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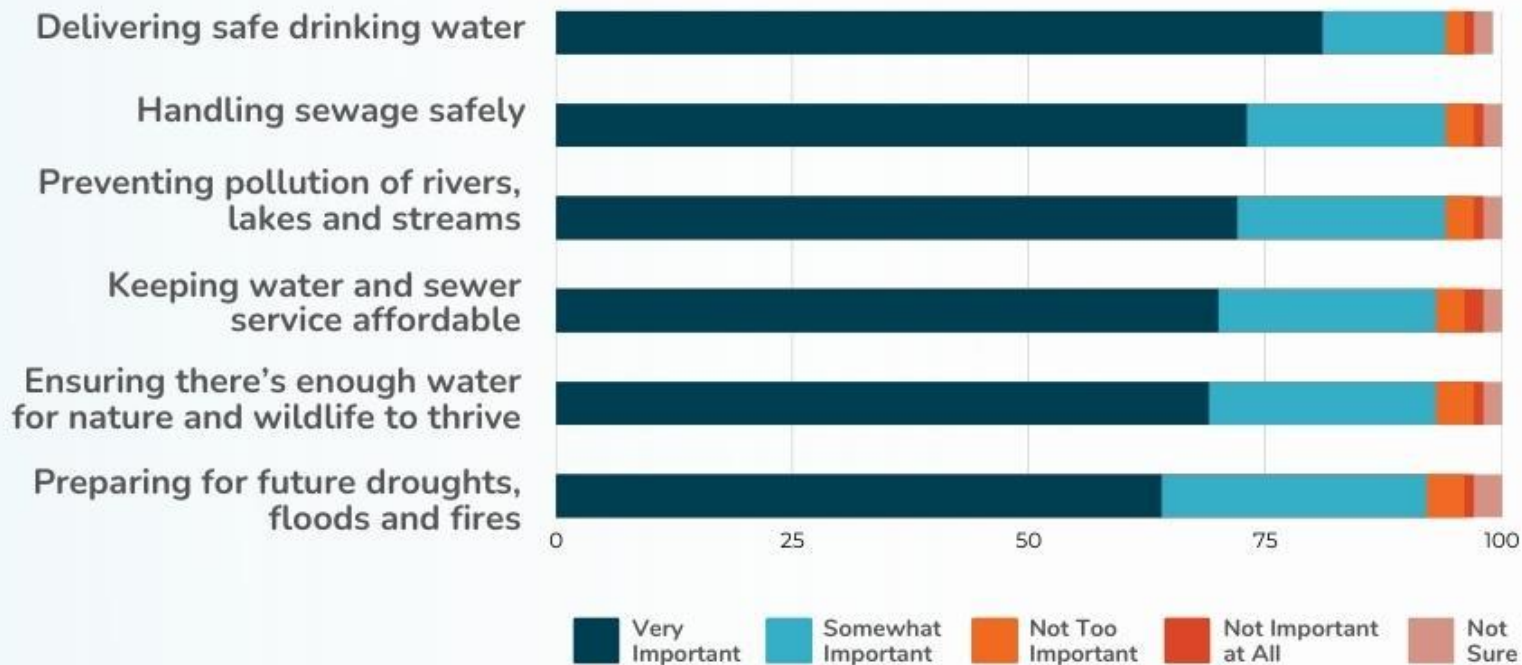
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A photograph showing three workers in safety vests and hard hats installing plants in a new concrete curb along a residential sidewalk. One worker in the foreground is carrying two large potted plants. In the background, a dump truck is parked on the street, and a red fence runs along the property line. Houses and trees with autumn foliage are visible under a clear blue sky.

Infrastructure investments



How important, if at all, are each of the following priorities for your state to invest in its water infrastructure?



Voters support targeted spending



- 59% of voters say the government **should prioritize communities with the greatest need** when considering how to allocate infrastructure funding.
 - 41% say the government should **distributing funding equally**.
- 58% say granting half of clean water and drinking water funds to **“disadvantaged communities”** (meaning communities that suffer most from environmental, economic, or health burdens) is “about the right amount.”
 - 22% say it’s “not enough.”

Describe the impact or need

- 76% say communities at **high risk of fires, floods + other disasters** should be prioritized
- 73% say communities **with high levels of air and water pollution** should be prioritized
- 71% say communities that **need federal help to pay for critical infrastructure updates** should be prioritized
- 71% say **vulnerable communities** should be prioritized
- 67% say **disadvantaged communities** should be prioritized
- 63% say communities **with high rates of asthma, heart disease and other health problems** should be prioritized
- 50% say **frontline communities** should be prioritized

Connecting the dots on race

When we asked the question a different way (focusing on Justice40):

- 80% say **communities that experience the most air and water pollution** should be prioritized
- 80% say communities **vulnerable to climate impacts like fires and flooding** should be prioritized
- 51% say **communities of color** should be prioritized



Drinking water

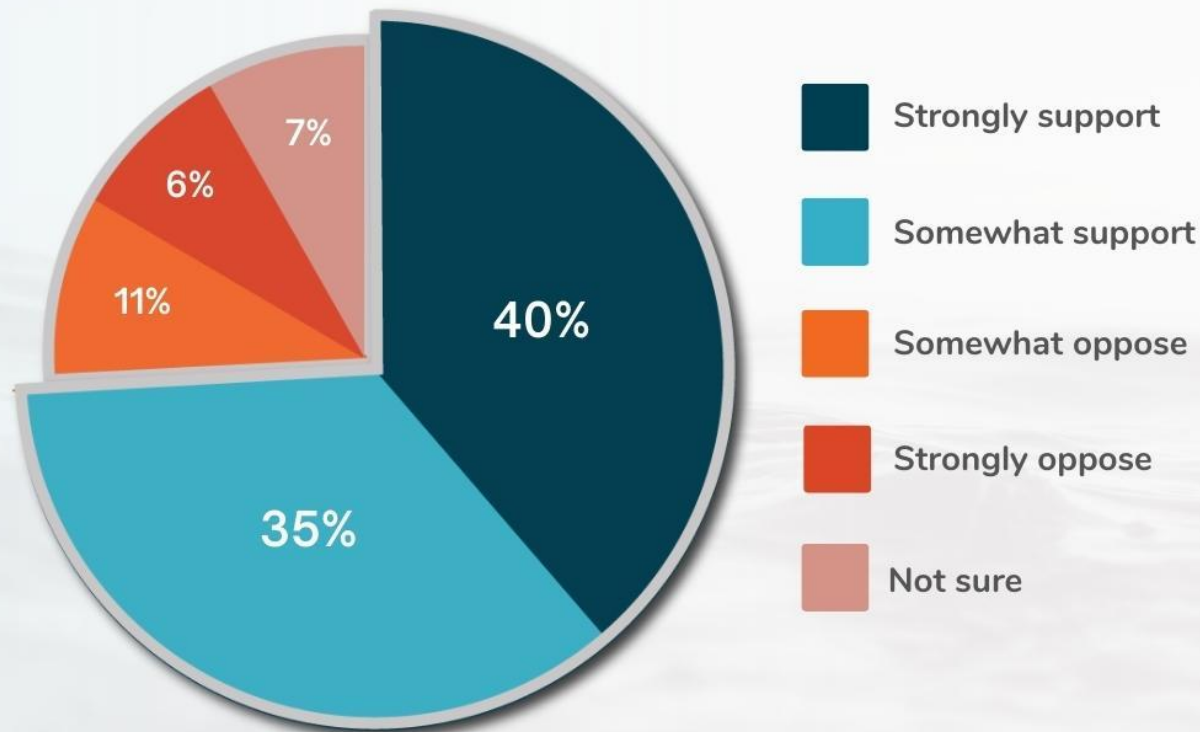
Voters support the right to water

Almost nine in 10 voters (89%) agree that access to **safe, affordable water is a human right**.

About two in three (65%) strongly agree.



75% of voters support creating a federal program to help low-income families pay their water bills.



Making water affordable for all

- **37% of voters have heard “nothing at all”** about programs to help families pay their water bills. Just 35% have heard “a lot” or “some.”
- **75% support creating a permanent, federal program** to help low-income families pay their water bills.
 - In March 2021, 81% of voters expressed support.

What's in a name?

When we tested different program descriptions, **voters indicated the strongest support for “water affordability.”**

- 43% of voters say they are most supportive of a “water affordability” program.
- 27% of voters say they are most supportive of a “low income water rate assistance” program.
- 12% of voters say they are most supportive of a “water bill assistance” program.
- 9% of voters say they are most supportive of a “water bill help” program.
- 8% of voters say they are most supportive of a “water debt relief” program.

Public utilities FTW

- By more than a four-to-one margin, **voters would prefer their drinking water system be owned by a public utility (58%)** rather than a private company (13%).
- Voters say a public utility would be more likely to deliver:
 - Cheaper bills (64%)
 - More reliable service (57%)
 - Safer water (55%)
 - Cleaner water (55%)

Contaminants of concern

We asked voters what contaminants most concern them in water from their faucets.

- 60% are very concerned about **lead**
- 56% are very concerned about **arsenic**
- 45% are very concerned about **PFAS**
- 42% are very concerned about **nitrates**



Clean Water Act

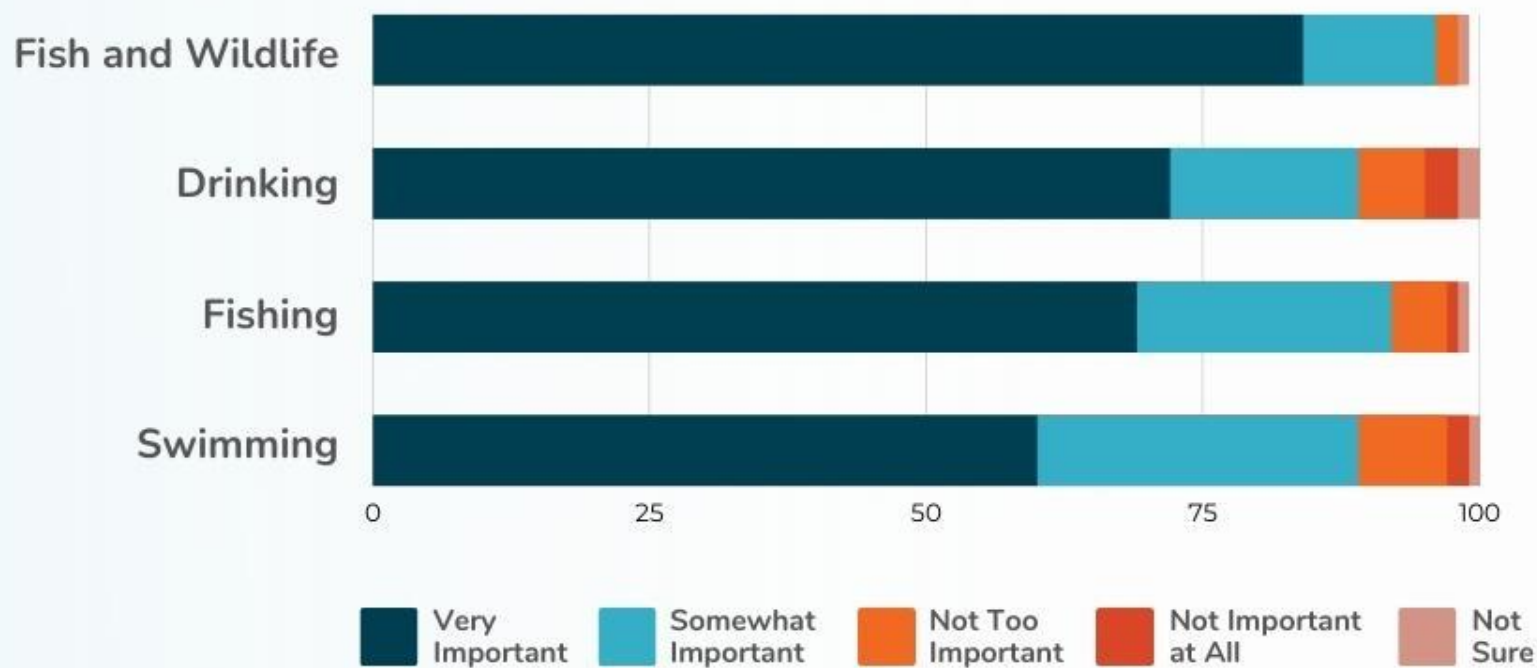
50 years later...

Despite the Act's 50th anniversary, EPA vs. Sackett, and all the news around Waters of the United States (WOTUS), just **37% of voters have heard “a lot” or “some” about the Clean Water Act.**

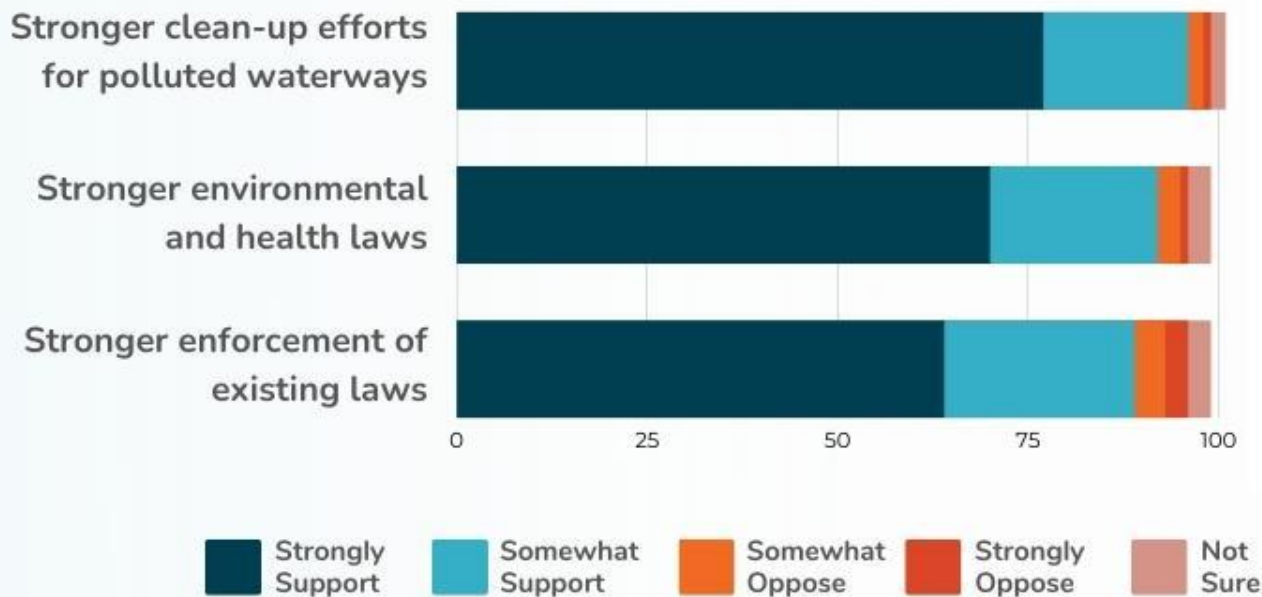
Nonetheless, **clean water** is a nearly universal concern.



Q • How important do you think it is that rivers, lakes and streams be safe for...



Voters overwhelmingly support strengthening and enforcing the Clean Water Act.



Out of sight, out of mind

When asked about pollution sources, voters tend to express the most concern about sources they can see.

- 89% are concerned about industrial waste
- 89% are concerned about plastic bags, bottles and microplastics
- 88% are concerned about agricultural runoff
- 86% are concerned about urban and suburban runoff
- 85% are concerned about sewage backups and overflows
- 81% are concerned about oil and gas leaks and fracking chemicals

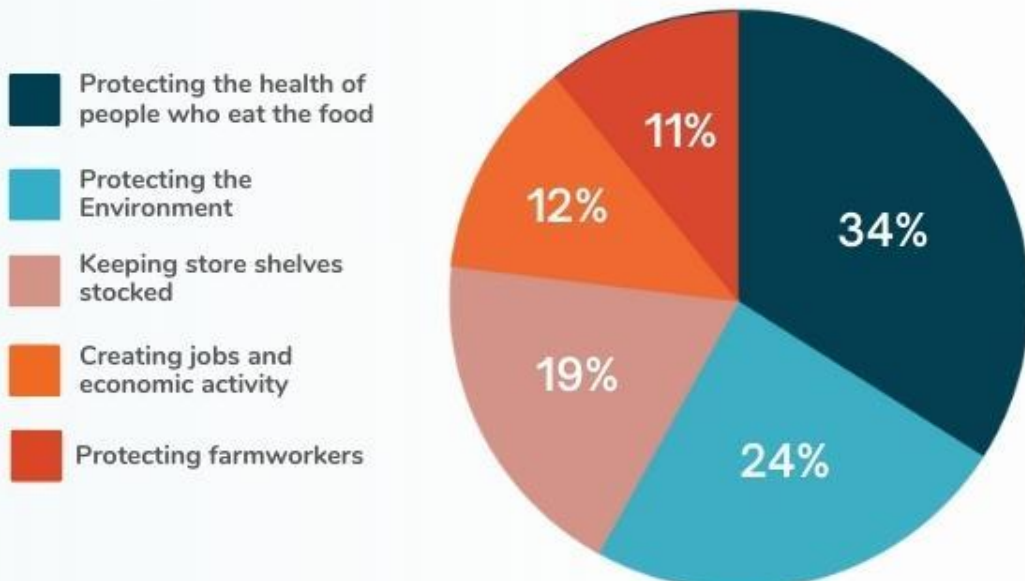


Farm policy



Voters rank **protecting health and the environment** as top priorities for U.S. farm policy.

Below are several possible goals for farming policies in the United States. Please rank these goals from the most important for the United States to the least important, with #1 being the most important and #5 being the least important.



Growing food for health

- 67% of voters strongly agree that **people deserve nutritious food grown without synthetic chemicals**
- 54% strongly agree that **food should be grown in harmony with nature**
- 50% strongly agree that **healthy soils are essential for reducing climate change**
- 37% strongly agree that **small local farms can better meet community needs**
- 37% strongly agree that **large farms can produce more food at lower prices**



8 in 10 voters support
doubling conservation
funding in the Farm Bill.



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Farm Bill provisions

Do you support funding the following in the 2023 Farm Bill?

- 94% of voters support **helping farmers grow food for people**
- 92% support **protecting clean water** by reducing runoff of fertilizer and pesticides
- 91% support **helping farmers grow more crop per gallon of water** during droughts
- 91% support **helping farmers grow food for livestock**
- 89% support **helping farmers create habitat** for fish and wildlife
- 86% support **protecting clean air** by reducing spraying of pesticides and manure
- 81% support **slowing climate change** by helping farmers reduce GHG emissions
- 66% support **eliminating subsidies for factory farms**

#HealthySoils

What do voters see as the best reason to enrich and stabilize soil?

- 38% say **growing more crops with less fertilizer**
- 24% say **filtering out pollution** before it reaches rivers and streams
- 19% say **retaining moisture** to reduce the need for irrigation
- 14% say **absorbing carbon** to slow climate change
- 4% say **reducing dust storms** and erosion.





Drought

Voters are worried about drought

- **84% of voters nationwide are somewhat or very concerned about drought** in the Western U.S.
- **50% say drought in the West is the result of human-caused climate change**, compared to a third (33%) who say it's normal weather variations.

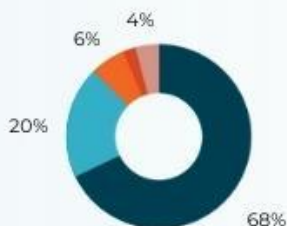
Mixed views on what's causing water challenges

- 53% say **growth of cities and suburbs** impacts western water challenges a lot
- 48% say **using more water than rain and snow replace**
- 39% say **outdated or inadequate dams, canals and reservoirs**
- 36% say **water wasted through leaks and inefficiencies**
- 29% say **overplanting of crops in dry areas**
- 23% say **overly strict environmental laws**

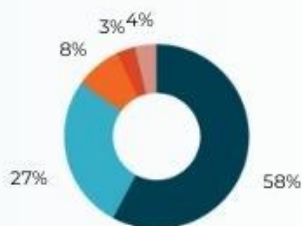
Q

Do you think drought in the Western United States is having a large effect, a moderate effect, a small effect, or no real effect on each of the following in the United States:

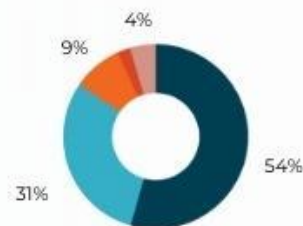
- States
- effect, a large effect, a moderate effect, a small effect, or no real effect on each of the following in the United States:



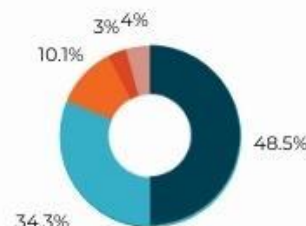
Wildfires



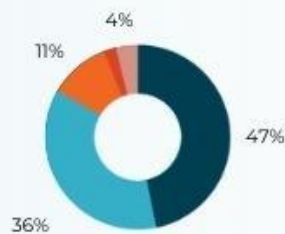
Food Prices



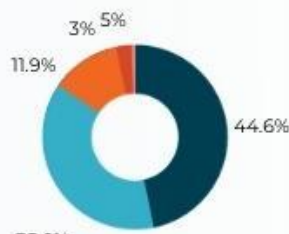
Fish and Wildlife



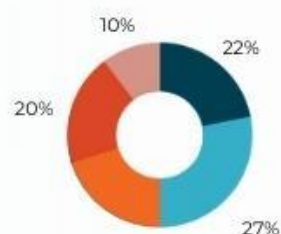
The Economy



Food Access



The Range of Foods Available



National Security



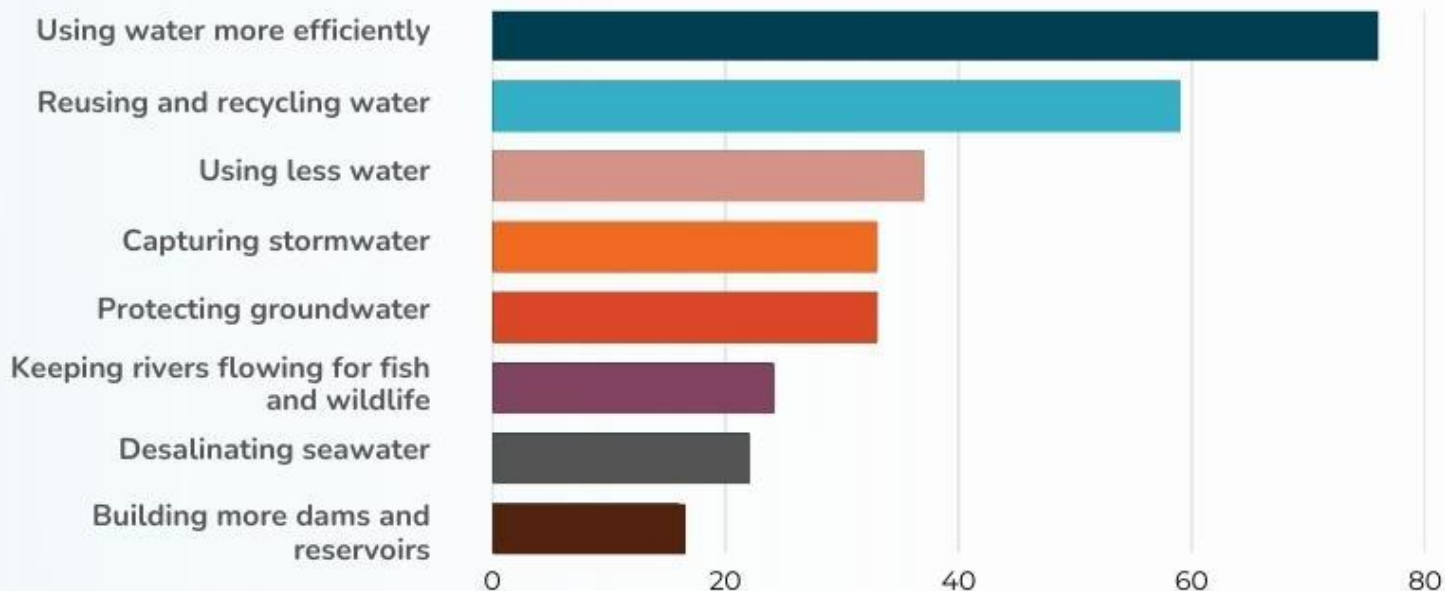
Drought impacts on food + farming

What concerns voters most about farmers and ranchers having less water for irrigation?

- 56% say **availability of fruits, vegetables, meat, and dairy** is their top concern
- 13% say **dust storms from unplanted fields**
- 11% say **loss of income for other local businesses**
- 10% say **loss of work for farmworkers**
- 10% say **decline of rural communities**

Voters selected the most important responses to drought in their opinion:

Q Below are several possible ways to address drought. Please select the top three most important responses to drought in your opinion.



Planning for less rainy days

54% of voters say **we should prioritize water sources that are “both cost effective and good for the climate.”**

46% say we should use an **“all-of-the-above” water strategy.**

Voters prefer voluntary conservation measures

- 91% support **voluntary water saving programs** (54% strongly support)
- 55% support **laws that limit water use** (23% strongly support)
- 55% support **water rates that encourage water savings** (23% strongly support)



Big picture
takeaways

Connect the dots!

- Safe and affordable drinking water, clean water for fish and wildlife, and water conservation and efficiency already poll as bipartisan priorities
- Voters are there on principle, but not always policy!
- Translating that into policy wins requires us to **bridge from current values/concerns to specific solutions**
 - Don't rely on shorthand/technical terms: use simple language and paint a picture

Questions?

Have input for our next poll?

Contact me at nlampe@climatenexus.org

