



# *Eat Less Water*

NONFICTION BY

Florencia Ramirez

The solution to worldwide water shortages is in our kitchens.

By 2030, experts predict two-thirds of people living on this planet will not have enough water, a situation expected to result in the deaths of millions and an unprecedented rise in military conflicts. Can we as individuals hope to reverse these dire predictions? Award-winning author and water activist, Florencia Ramirez, believes we can if our conservation efforts focus on the 70 percent of freshwater flowing to the fields and ranches that grow our food.

*Eat Less Water* takes the reader on a journey to meet America's food producers growing food with less water. Florencia exposes the seldom-seen connection between dwindling water resources and the choices we make when shopping for groceries for our families and offers us the solution that begins in the kitchen.

## ADVANCE PRAISE

"*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."

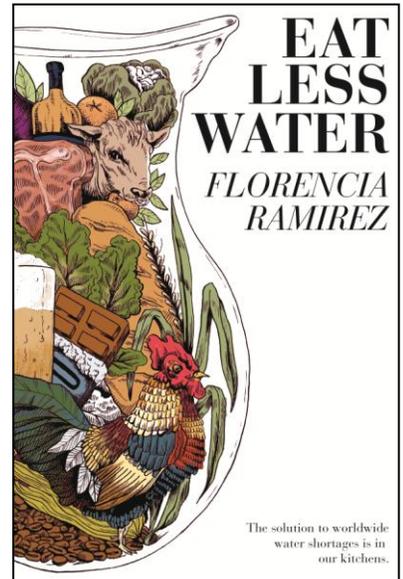
—Thomas M. Kostigen, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Green Book*

"*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

As a researcher trained at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy, Florencia sets out to understand problems afflicting vulnerable communities and looks for solutions. Her articles appear in the San Jose Mercury News; the James Beard awarded Edible Communities Magazines and her blog. *Eat Less Water* received the prestigious Gift of Freedom Creative Nonfiction genre prize from A Room of Her Own Foundation (AROH). She lives in the coastal town of Oxnard, California with her husband and three children.



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**FROM EAT LESS WATER**

“You don’t irrigate your crops even in the dry months or during droughts?” I ask John. Dust covers his faded hat and jacket, giving the impression he is older than his years. The brightness in his light blue eyes gives his youth away.

“I don’t need to. You can come out onto my field in the summer and see dry, cracked topsoil, but just underneath the soil is moist. My soil retains hundreds of thousands of gallons of water when it rains.”

“Why don’t you need groundwater to grow your grain?” John has told me his well maintains the same level as when it was drilled six decades earlier: 300 feet. Surrounding vineyards are drilling 1,000 feet beneath the surface to find water. These wells act like big straws, slurping up water from the aquifers for irrigation. When they dry up, deeper wells replace them.<sup>1</sup>

“Your answer starts with cover crop.” He leads me down the slope to his “dirt laboratory,” slender strips of land used to experiment with new grain varieties.

“This is where the elegance of the farm begins,” he smiles. We stand next to a patch of clumpy grass mixed with legumes and peas abloom with periwinkle-blue flowers.

“This is cover crop?” I point down at the grass.

“Yes, grass is the most important thing we got going on, on our planet.” He yanks out a chunk of grass, exposing its dangling strings of thin roots.

“Before the rain, I turn the cover crop, incorporating these root systems combined with the tap root of the legumes into the soil. The rainwater infiltrates into the soil and is held in the pores and roots.”

“Why don’t more farms grow cover crops?” I ask.

“Cover cropping requires more time and double the land. For example, my 200 acres are carved into plots. Half the plots are planted with grain and the other with a cover crop. Each plot is on a two-year cycle alternating between both.”

“You produce grain on only half of your acreage at any given time?”

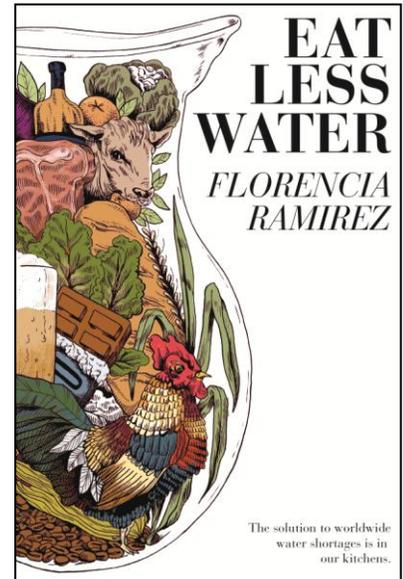
“Correct, but remember I can grow on land other farmers consider unsuitable for farming because there’s no water source.”

We move to a large field. It looks like a giant plate of chocolate cake. John squats close to the ground and scoops the soil with his hand. It is sprinkled with flecks of ground cover.

“This plot here is breaking down the cover crop. The roots are feeding the microorganisms, bacteria that work to convert nitrogen from the air into nitrogen the plant can use. Gazillions of these microorganisms lie underground in the humus.”

Humus is another name for soil with organic matter (SOM). It retains more moisture than synthetic or even organic soils. A report published by *Soil Science* found humus to hold water at 80–90 percent of its weight.

Humus isn’t present on all farms. When soil is chemically treated the microorganisms are eradicated along with weeds and pests. The living organisms in humus, like the crops, need to be cultivated with patience and planning.



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