

Are Water Systems Important?

By Randy Hellbusch, Circuit Rider

The number one concern among water systems and water system managers is the protection of public health. It always has been and always will be. But if you step back and take a closer look at water quality and quantity with a holistic approach, you would soon realize that water systems are also a major factor in the economic vitality of our communities. We take clean and affordable water and wastewater treatment for granted in most of this nation, but without this key ingredient, economic growth would be paralyzed. The majority of our energy, the food we eat and a large portion of our manufactured products come from rural America. Wimmer's Meats/Land O' Frost in West Point, Nebraska employs 125 people and does approximately \$50 million plus in sales annually. This would not be possible without the safe, quality water supplied by the City of West Point. This is just one example. Over 50% of the water produced by the Cuming County RWD is consumed by livestock. This is just one example of how abundant, affordable, clean water is a benefit to some of the over 20,000 beef cow operations in rural Nebraska that adds \$12.1 billion to the state's economy.

Rob Johnson, CEO of the National Rural Water Association, recently attended a function of utilities in which each utility was explaining the important roll they played and the impact they had on the nation's economy. After listening to several entities speak, he had the realization that although each was vital, without clean, safe water, none of them would exist! Water is the one utility that impacts everyone's lives.

Although your system may not have a Wimmer's Meats or serve large cattle feeding operations, just think of the impact on your local businesses if your water systems were unable to operate. For example, convenience stores, hair salons, restaurants, meat lockers, and the list goes on and on.

Often times, when a small water system is in need of major upgrading or needs to undertake a major project to remain in compliance and supply clean, safe water I hear, "We just can't afford it!" The real question is: How can you afford not to?