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Water Essential for Food and Drink

THE excellent series of articles about our future water supplies published recently in The Oklahoman should awaken greater concern among citizens about this vital but costly resource.

Too many of us give the matter little thought as long as we can turn the tap and let the water flow. We usually don't bother ourselves about how much water we use for various purposes, although we may fret about our water bills.

We realize, vaguely perhaps, that large amounts of water are essential for growing the food we eat, that water is used in manufacturing nearly all products that we use, and that industries locate where water is available, creating jobs.

We know that water is essential for drinking purposes but few of us could say how much water we drink in a month or a year. Even "Honest Johns" would have to admit that legalizing liquor by the drink has done nothing to alleviate water crises that result in poor quality and water rationing in many towns.

Consumer analysts at the USDA

Economic Research Service in Washington have studied what Americans drink, but they didn't say how much water we consume per person.

They did find out through their studies that soft drinks have become the leading identifiable beverage. With diet, no-caffeine and artificially sweetened drinks attracting more customers, we consumed an average of 40 gallons per person in 1983, more than double what we drank 20 years ago.

For generations milk was the favorite beverage but it has dropped to second place at 26.5 gallons per person per year, just ahead of coffee, which also has slipped considerably.

Tea, fruit juices, tomato juice and other vegetable drinks are gaining but still rank far behind those mentioned.

Of total beverage consumption, the statisticians say that roughly one glass out of five is an alcoholic drink. On average, Americans consume 28.4 gallons of beer, liquor and wine in a year, up from 17.6 gal-

lons in 1963. Beer consumption has been promoted to increase 60 percent in 20 years.

Soft drinks, beer, wine and liquor contribute about 10 percent of the daily calories consumed by Americans, ERS says.

Which brings us back to water. Every one of those beverages requires ample supplies of pure water to produce the ingredients and manufacture the products. Even those who claim to drink very little water must be concerned about our water resources if they want what they do drink to be available.

During this holiday season water consumption might drop, as it is rarely served on festive occasions. We should be concerned about what is served.

A recent report said that on most nights of the week only one out of 50 automobile drivers coming toward you is drunk, but that on Friday and Saturday nights it is one out of 10. The ratio might be higher during the long New Years weekend ahead.

We would be a lot safer if everybody drank more water.