

## How Much Water Do You Eat?

[One Comment](#) by [ANYA HART DYKE](#) on 19th Sep 2012

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The beginning of this month saw international bigwigs meet in Stockholm for [World Water Week](#), the theme of which was water and food security. Of the many statistics discussed, one in particular really stands out: [70% of all fresh water](#) is used for irrigation. Now one woman, Jane Withers, has decided to use her design skills to communicate how much water we really consume.

70% of fresh water used is for irrigation – World Water Week 2012

The [Wonderwater Cafe](#) is a pop-up café curated for London Design Festival, and aims to raise awareness about the amount of water it takes to produce our food and drink. More than that, it also aims to make us think about *whose water* has been used for produce that is farmed and/or processed in parts of the world where water is scarce – a fact that can have a huge impact on local communities.



Jane Withers, founder of [Wonderwater](#), explains how it all began: “A few years ago I curated an exhibition in Belgium and we began to explore how we could collaborate with designers to help communicate critical water issues in an engaging way. As agriculture is by far the largest slice of the global water footprint this was the obvious starting point.”

Withers has successfully taken the project from a gallery setting and transferred it to the dinner table, in a space where people are actually making choices about food. The Wonderwater Café shows customers the water footprint of what they are buying, separating out the ingredients and explaining where they originate.

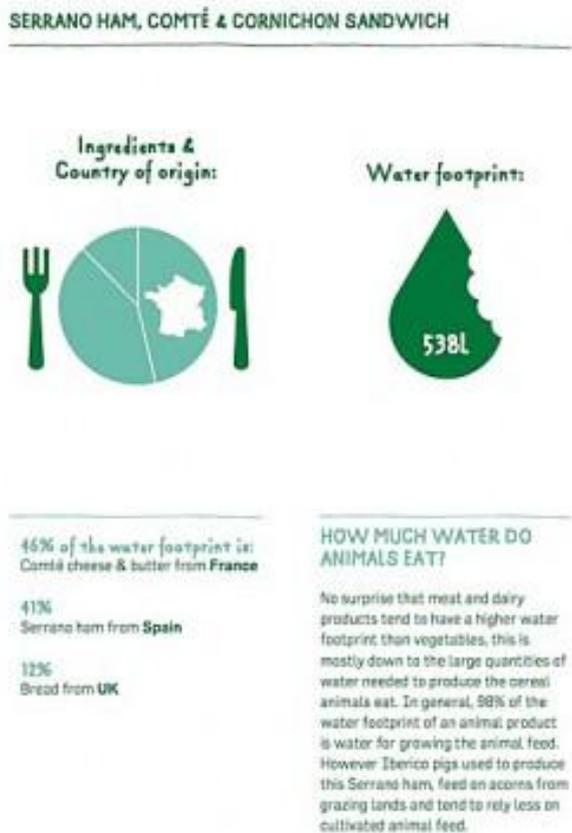
According to Wonderwater, 60% of the 4,645 litres of water each person consumes daily in Britain comes from abroad and almost half is water for food. “I think much more about where food comes from now and whether it drains resources in water-scarce regions” says Withers. “I try to eat seasonally and think about whether a vegetable or fruit will require extensive irrigation”.

Very few people know enough about the water footprint of food – Jane Withers, Founder of Wonderwater

This may feel like yet another issue that needs to shape what goes on our shopping lists, but it complements what many of us are already thinking about in the context of a wider, growing interest in understanding how our food reaches our plates. As with food miles, it’s not as straight forward as saying that a lower water footprint is always better, as it depends on where the crop or livestock were raised. In the same way that poor soil and an inappropriate climate can push up the [carbon footprint](#) of a crop, particularly if something is grown out of season, regions of water scarcity are less able to support water-hungry crops and livestock.

“Although the idea has been around since 2002,” explains Withers “it has been really interesting because very few people know enough about the water footprint of food. Most people are amazed by the quantities of water required for food production, and there have been some really interesting and animated discussions.”

I have been amazed too. The National Geographic has come up with a handy online [water footprint calculator](#) for



different foodstuffs, although it doesn't say where produce has

come from. Nevertheless, it still gives a good idea. The [water footprint](#) of something includes calculations of 'green' rain and 'blue' irrigated water as well as the 'grey' water needed to clear pollution from the production process.

**1 cup of coffee = 140 litres of water**

**0.5kg of potatoes = 450 litres of water**

**0.5kg of beef = 6,810 litres of water**

I would hope that rather than feeling overwhelmed by yet another consideration to make in our food choices, this can be seen an opportunity to learn more about how our actions impact on the world, giving us space to better understand, and therefore own, the choices we make. For my part, I have written to Appletiser, one of my favourite drinks, to ask about the water footprint of a 275ml bottle. It's part of my [#AsktheQ campaign](#). They have yet to reply.

The Wonderwater Cafe will be curated in more independent venues in 2013 but Withers is also looking to stage the project on a larger scale. "We are also beginning to stage workshops on the water footprint with schools", she says "and I am really looking forward to seeing how this goes".

The Wonderwater Café is being hosted by Leila's Shop in Shoreditch until 23rd September.

[www.wonderwater.fi](http://www.wonderwater.fi)