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North American Millets Alliance

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Water Friendly Proso Millet

Some crops squander water – not proso millet. Proso has about twice the water efficiency of corn.

Farmers seek efficiency. For at least ten thousand years they have been selecting the best seeds for grains. Millets fit family needs. Proso is a good grain for cooking, very nutritious, easy to store, has a very short growing season, and produces grain during droughts.

Scientifically, proso has a low transpiration ratio and high water use efficiency.

A warm season crop grown at low to high elevations, proso is also heat tolerant.

Agronomically, water-friendly proso has a shallow and very fibrous root system allowing it to collect nutrients and moisture even when limited.

Microscopic soil biome needs moisture. The vast array of soil organisms is constantly collecting moisture, reproducing, dying and decomposing. Microscopic activity is most active during the warmest part of the grain-growing season feeding proso's fibrous roots which constantly grow into physiological maturity seeking moisture and nutrients.

Proso produces grain with less water than barely, wheat, corn and rice.¹ Tens of millions of those crop acres are irrigated each year.

Ground water is being overused.² The U.S. irrigates over sixty-three million acres a year with forty-eight percent extracted from groundwater.³ It is logical, ecological, and agronomically prudent to plant proso millet with the goal of maintaining sustainable ground water use.

About the author: Gary W. Wietgreffe has been a Certified Crop Advisor for three decades, written two books on proso millet, and coordinated proso irrigation research at Gobi-Altai Province, Mongolia (State University) and Uludag University, Bursa, Turkey.

¹ Rituraj Khound and Dipak Santa, Supplementing Dryland Wheat and Irrigated Corn with Proso Millet in Drought Years, March 4, 2026, <https://cropwatch.unl.edu/supplementing-dryland-wheat-and-irrigated-corn-proso-millet-drought-years/>.

² Alice Gibbs, The Largest U.S. Groundwater Supply is Running Out, *Newsweek*, May 29, 2026, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/weather/topstories/the-largest-us-groundwater-supply-is-running-out/ar-AA24gPTf?ocid=msedgntp&pc=DCTS&cvid=6a1905229af74e89ac78e33cf484c716&ei=21&cvpid=6a190c38841f467fb5e6e9ded5c13337>.

³ Irrigation Water Use, U.S. Geological Survey, March 1, 2019, <https://www.usgs.gov/mission-areas/water-resources/science/irrigation-water-use>.