

Evaluating the Quality of Your Farm's Water Sources

Water for your property can come from a variety of sources, and its quality will often differ across these sources. So you need an understanding what each of your available water sources would be suitable for based on their quality.

In our article [Types of Rural Water Sources in Farming](#) we identified a wide range of natural

water sources that would need testing or treatment if used on livestock or crops. These included water from dams, groundwater, rivers/creeks and stormwater.

The quality of water from these sources should not be considered safe for consumption (should not come into contact with food) without proper treatment, but are normally good for irrigation of non-edible plants. Common problems found in surface and underground water sources often include salinity, metals, organic matter and chemical pollutants.

Safer water supplies (those fit for consumption) include rainwater from a well-maintained storage tank, trucked in water or a reticulated water supply.

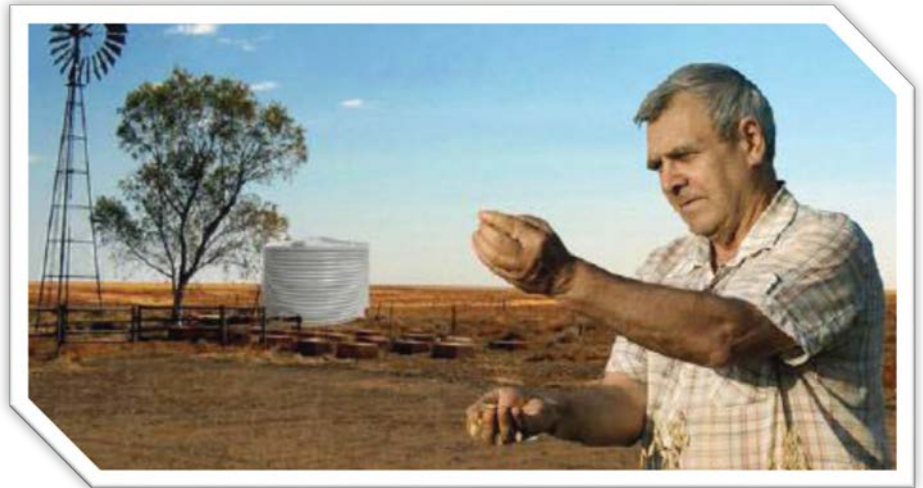
Water Quality Factors

The quality of your water will affect your farm's plants, soils, livestock, aquaculture, irrigation equipment, and general farm activities. Understanding your water quality allows you to plan for any necessary water treatment and avoid production problems.

Water quality factors include:

- particles floating in the water
- dissolved materials and chemicals
- living organisms or their remains.

These could be sediments, heavy metals, salt content, acidity, hardness, ammonia, oxygen levels, temperature, algae, chemical spraying, effluent and other pollutants.



The quality factors that matter will depend upon how you utilise the water throughout your farm. If you have any doubts about the quality of water you intend to use for irrigation, stock or domestic purposes, then you should have it tested.

Testing Your Water Quality

Water quality cannot be detected by eye or smell, but requires testing in an accredited laboratory. Since the salinity of surface and ground water can change quickly, they should be tested at regular intervals throughout the irrigation season. This can be performed with a hand-held salinity meter.

Without continuous testing and monitoring, a build-up in salinity will first show itself in poor plant growth and reduced production. At this stage in your production cycle it will obviously be too late to rectify the situation for that crop.

For further water testing advice or information on local testing laboratories, you should contact your state government department for primary industries:

- [QLD Department of Agriculture and Fisheries](#) provide advice on how to collect water samples and send them to an accredited testing laboratory.
- NSW Department of Primary Industries provide [free water testing kits](#) for you to take samples and send in.
- [VIC Department of Environment and Primary Industries](#) can be contacted for advice and have a number of accredited water testing laboratories on their website.

If you have found this article helpful, contact Clark Tanks to discuss your needs.

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