

Firms pledge to cut back on guzzling

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New Delhi: In another 10 years, India will be very, very thirsty. By 2030, water supply will be just enough to meet only half the country's demand. Agriculture consumes 88% of India's overall water currently, but industry and households will be the big guzzlers, accounting for 54% and 85% of incremental demand by 2025 and 2050.

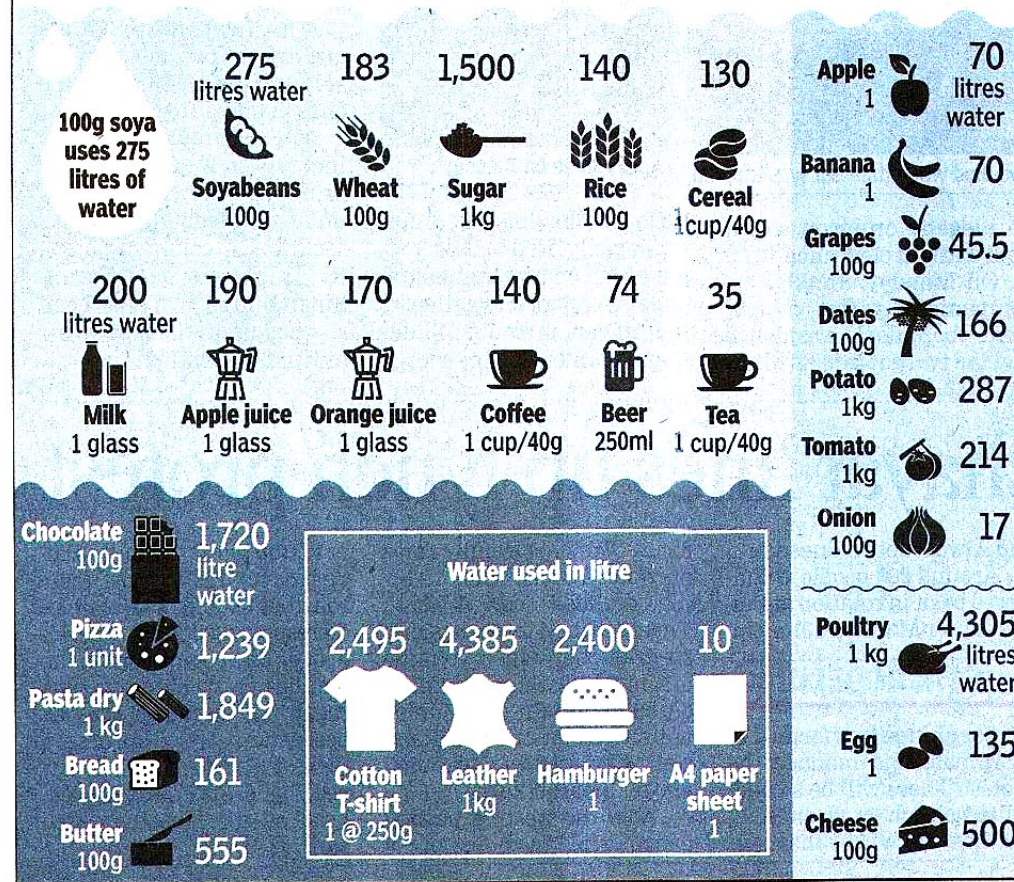
Industry is well aware of the crisis and, by all accounts, many companies are at various stages of using water responsibly. In wealthy countries, industry use (51%) and domestic consumption (14%) contribute to 65% of total demand for water. As India's demand for electricity, consumer goods and food increases, it will mirror a similar situation forcing businesses to rethink water-efficiency strategies.

For starters, shower heads and faucets could soon be designed to save water. Many companies TOI spoke to seemed keen to achieve a positive water balance. But green think tanks say industrial water use and efficiency efforts are still low priority in India because there are no regulations. "Water audits are not compulsory in India. What's also alarming is that there's no reliable data here about water supply and usage," said officials at Centre for Science & Environment. "Most companies have relegated water efficiency as CSR activities. Politicians invite companies to their states and offer free water as incentive."

Given that industries are the biggest polluters of India's water system with over 70% of all industrial waste dumped untreated into water bodies, this is a frightening scenario. But businesses claim confi-

HOW THIRSTY IS YOUR FOOD?

This is water used in growing and/or making various commonly used commodities. There are variations across the world so global averages are given just to indicate the hidden water in each



Source: UNWater; The Water Footprint Network; Inst. Of Mech. Engineers; USGS

dence that their water-saving efforts will bear fruit.

Some are focused on making products that need less water to 'consume' — FMCG major Hindustan Unilever says it is developing water-saving products for its laundry, home cleaning and haircare range — 38% of its water footprint comes from the laundry process. "The goal is to halve the environmental footprint of the making and use of products by 2030. This includes halving the water associated with the use of our products by 2020," said a HUL spokes-

person. It is also tackling the issue at the manufacturing end: "We've reduced water usage by 48% across manufacturing, compared to 2008."

Japanese auto giant Honda Motorcycle & Scooters has invested in rainwater harvesting, says its spokesperson, claiming that upto 95% of water required at its Narsapura plant is met through this process. "Our factories in Narsapura (Bengaluru) and Tapukara (Rajasthan) have achieved positive water balance through water charging into the ground."

Beverage giants Coke and PepsiCo, in the crosshairs of activists for siphoning off groundwater, also brag about being water positive. PepsiCo India's spokesperson said: "We reduced our water debit (water used for operations), then we increased our water credit — what we 'gave back' by recharging and replenishing water through sustainable agriculture and in our plants." But both companies still use around two litres of water to make one litre of beverage, which they say is an improvement from the previous years.

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Apart from power, cement, steel and paper, the textile sector is a water-intensive industry. Over 2,000 litres go to 'grow' and produce a cotton T-shirt. "We aim for positive water balance by 2020. We're scaling internal recycling to 75%," says an Arvind spokesperson, the company yet to be water-positive. "We've cut back by 50% our freshwater use. About 10% of freshwater consumption is offset with measures on cotton farms."

Swedish furniture company Ikea, yet to open its store in India, has a water working group. It is also working on shower heads and faucets, using aerators. "Using a faucet with an aerator reduces water consumption in the kitchen by 30% without altering water pressure," said an Ikea India spokesperson. "We're developing showers and taps with water-saving features." While there seem to be plans aplenty company to company to go water-positive, it will likely need some regulatory framework to make going water-positive an all-industry mandate.