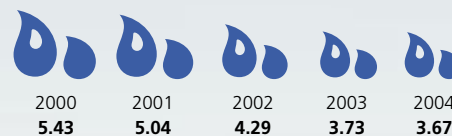


“Saving water in our food factories is good for business, good for the environment and helps our communities.”



Unilever's Water Use
m³ per tonne of production



Shifting weather patterns are creating unusually dry conditions in parts of Latin America that had never before experienced drought. Brazil has had to take drastic action to save water to ensure its output of hydroelectricity, on which the country depends.

Water produced by the evaporator (above, right) at Unilever's tomato processing plant in Goiânia, near Brasília, Brazil, is recycled for further use in the plant. Globally, Unilever continues to reduce its water use (see graphic above).

“Only take short showers and stop ironing your clothes or the lights will go out”

This was the message of a US\$10 million advertising campaign by the Brazilian government in late 2001, urging its people to cut energy consumption by 20% or risk a total blackout.

The lights had begun to flicker in Latin America's largest country, not because of oil shortages but because of drought. Brazil depends almost entirely on hydropower for its electricity. When the dams were built, nobody thought that a vast country of free-flowing rivers would run out of water.

Crippling drought throughout the continent

– which continues today in many parts, especially southern Brazil – led to power shortages and blackouts. This underlines the potential threat to the region with its fast-growing population, which Unilever serves by making and selling its popular food, home and personal care brands, such as *Hellmann's*, *Knorr*, *Omo* and *Rexona*.

Water is not only essential to everything Unilever makes, but consumers need water to use its products. Unilever's top management in Latin America were determined that the company would play its part to relieve the drought-induced crisis.

They issued this challenge to Unilever food factories: “show me you can cut your water use by a million cubic metres in two years.” That's about 16.5% of their water consumption in 2002 – the equivalent of the average annual water usage of a town of around 16,000 people.

“Cut your water use by a million cubic metres in two years”

Fifteen food manufacturing sites in 10 countries in the region took up the challenge. “There is

nothing we like better than a challenge. We were determined to show that we could meet it,” says Fabiano Vilela, Environment Co-ordinator for Unilever's food factory in Goiânia near Brasília, Brazil. “We knew that it was good for our business, good for the environment and helpful to our communities.”

Saving water has been part of the job of Unilever factory managers for some time. Sites worldwide have measured their water consumption since 1995 and set reduction targets. Water use per tonne of production has been cut by 54% since then.



The Medusa project brought together expertise from around Unilever to share existing knowledge and develop new best practice: Toni Saunders (UK), Leonor Casanova (Argentina), Roy Willey (UK) and Fernando Urbano (Brazil).

Water conservation is part of the company's drive to use energy, raw materials and water as efficiently as possible – known as eco-efficiency. This saves resources and money. It also demonstrates to the people who live near the factories that Unilever is working to conserve and protect the resources on which the community depends.

Many environmental issues are outside the company's direct control. This has led it to develop three global sustainability initiatives that focus on areas that are relevant to its business and where it believes it can make the most difference: agriculture, fish and water.

Unilever's Latin American water challenge marked the beginning of Project Medusa, named after a small jellyfish that only survives in fresh, clean water.

The region's Safety, Health and Environment (SHE) Co-ordination team brought together people from different backgrounds and countries to produce an international team to work on the project. Medusa fused simple management techniques with local passion to protect the environment, and demonstrated that dramatic strides can be made by taking a number of small positive steps. To make every drop count.

"Water is cheap and certainly here in Goiânia, there has always been lots of it," says Fabiano. "But we must remember that it is a finite

resource and in many places there is a drought. Any waste easily adds up to a big loss."

Toni Saunders from Unilever's Safety and Environmental Assurance Centre (SEAC), the group that provides advice and assistance to Unilever companies around the world, says the cost of wasting water can quickly escalate. The Latin American SHE team called on Toni and his SEAC team in the UK to help meet their Medusa challenge.

"Unless you live in the desert most people take water for granted"

"Unless you live in the desert most people take water for granted. We worked with the SHE co-ordinators to change the mindset of our people, to make sure that they understood the consequences of wasting water," says Toni.

Water is especially significant in making food products. At the Goiânia factory, for example, fresh tomatoes are washed, skinned and cooked to make the popular *Pomarola* pasta sauces and *Extrato Elefante* tomato paste.

Farmers deliver tomatoes to the factory where they are floated in a small water-filled canal to the processing plant (see cover picture). Water is used to wash the fruit, clean the equipment and cool the machinery.

It was at Goiânia that the two-year Medusa project was launched in 2003. The SHE team gathered together managers responsible for the use of water in Unilever's food factories from the West Indies to Argentina to share examples of good practice at Medusa's official launch.

The examples were grouped into three distinct areas: **mindware** – training, awareness campaigns, posters, competitions and slogans; **software** – operating procedures and job instructions; and **hardware** – changes to equipment and recycling systems.



For us they are drops, for the planet they are tears. A poster encouraging water saving, produced by Unilever employees at a food processing plant in Pilar, Argentina.

"Managers were asked to implement good practices at their own sites. We asked them to show which projects could be done for very little or no cost, such as identifying sites' 'water balances'. Based on the concept of 'What can be measured, can be controlled', a campaign was started to encourage sites to identify how, why and where water is used. But we also advised them to scrutinise every water-using operation to see if it could be improved or completely re-thought and done in a different way," says Toni.

Each site made a pledge of the minimum savings it would make within two years. This was laid out in an action plan.

"We insisted that each site monitor its water use very carefully. In this way we could all be sure that the actions were working, the savings were being made and the targets met," says Toni.

The overriding emphasis was to get everyone in the factories involved.

Suggestion programmes were encouraged and at one site an operator introduced a portable water meter that could collect data from remote places, enabling better analysis of water use. In Pilar, Argentina, a water-saving poster competition (see left) produced evocative slogans such as: *For us they are drops, for the planet they are tears.*

One of Goiânia's major projects was to reuse the water evaporated during the making of tomato paste. In the past this water was sent directly to the water treatment plant but it is now used to wash equipment and for cooling.

"Another of our factories in Pouso Alegre, Brazil, invited employees to enter a song contest on the theme of water saving. A water song festival (recorded on CD) was organised with the community who were invited into the factory to see how water was being managed and conserved," says Fabiano.

The factories all responded well and the Medusa challenge was all but met, with savings of 919,000 cubic metres. The Goiânia factory, the biggest in the region with up to 2,800 employees in the high season, made savings of over half a million cubic metres.

The simple concept behind the Medusa project – getting commitment, sharing best practice, enthusing colleagues and taking simple but effective actions – is now being applied to eco-efficiency projects in other parts of the world. For example, in Southern Africa it is being used to cut waste. In India, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam the principles are being applied to improve energy efficiency. And in Latin America the concept that worked so well to save water is now driving Project Electra to cut energy use.

"In Medusa we showed clearly that all the small steps we took added up to a big step for our company and for the environment," says Fabiano.



Laboratory analyst Patricia Rodrigues de Souza inspects a water sample taken from the Goiânia factory's effluent treatment plant. From here, cleaned water is returned to the local river. The factory's water-saving initiatives have substantially reduced the need

to take water from the local Meia Ponte river: Goiânia's savings of half a million cubic metres are equivalent to the average annual water usage of a small town of about 8,000 people.

Unilever believes that one of the best and most sustainable ways it can help to address global social and environmental concerns is through the very business of doing business in a socially aware and responsible manner.

This is one in a series of occasional articles called **Global Challenges – Local Actions** that looks at how Unilever companies are tackling global social and environmental concerns by working in partnership with local, national and international agencies, governments, business organisations and NGOs.

If you would like to know more about Unilever's social and environmental activities, please visit www.unilever.com/ourvalues/environmentandsociety. There you will find copies of our latest environmental and social reports and copies of previous articles in this series. Subjects of other articles include:

- Global Challenges – Local Actions**
- Micronutrient deficiency in Africa
 - River pollution in Indonesia
 - Climate change/refrigeration in Europe
 - Rural micro-entrepreneurs in India
 - Sustainable fishing off Africa
 - Tackling diarrhoeal disease in Asia through hygiene education
 - Diversity and Unilever
 - Combating HIV/AIDS in Africa

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