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9th & 10th Grade Winning Essay
Fargo, OK

Drought

I watched our pastures turn brown. We sold part of the cattle herd and struggled to keep the remaining cows watered and fed. Then range fires; when we went to town we wondered if our home would still be there when we returned. Finally, the rains came and almost overnight the grasses turned green and the wildflowers began blooming. It was a beautiful sight.

While we cannot control the weather, management of our water and plant resources is crucial to our survival. I enjoy visiting my grandparents' old homestead and I have noticed the plants and trees that they used to beautify and shade their home. Their heirloom varieties of iris, roses, lilacs and fruit trees are still surviving in Oklahoma's climate with no special care. People take pride in a beautifully landscaped home.

However, the plant choices we make can impact our land and water use for decades. That is why it is so important that people know how to use the best plants and grasses for our climate. Since it is estimated that over 50 percent of residential water use is for landscape watering, there is tremendous potential for water conservation, if we can combine the use of native and drought-tolerant plants and grasses, with minimal irrigation for urban and residential landscaping. As our state becomes more urban, the demands on Oklahoma's water will be even greater.

A wealth of information on xeriscaping, native grasses and irrigation technology is readily available. The problem is that the information on the importance of water conservation is not being effectively communicated to the citizens of Oklahoma. And even when citizens want to conserve water, they may not know what steps they personally need to take. By creating an education program, we can get the information on the importance of water conservation to all of our citizens and show them how to landscape with drought tolerant plants and grasses, and use irrigation efficiently.

This education program must include Oklahoma's schools. Our future leaders need to know how to conserve our water and how to landscape properly for our climate. Schools can also set a good example for water-efficient landscaping and other conservation measures, so that our education dollars won't be spent wasting water. Oklahomans enjoy an outstanding quality of life, but continuing to use water guzzling turf grass varieties and exotic plants will strain our water resources. We must develop a program to educate our citizens on how to conserve and protect our precious water resources for future generations.