

**Irrigation** is one of the world's oldest farming methods. For thousands of years people have used technology to bring water to growing crops. Irrigation may be used only during periods of drought in areas that usually get enough rain. In regions that are dry throughout the year, irrigation is essential. Civilizations in Japan, Egypt, Italy, and China have been practicing irrigation methods for centuries with success.

#### Spray irrigation in California citrus groves



There are many types of irrigation in use around the world. Some systems use man-made canals to divert water from rivers. Giant sprinkler systems linked to deep wells use pipes to carry and spread water over fields. Irrigation allows entire communities of people to support themselves better. Beyond growing food for local people, certain kinds of crops can be very profitable. Examples are cotton grown in Egypt and fruits and vegetables grown in southern California.



From the air, green circles in the orange desert show where irrigation is in use.

Humans Interact with the Environment  
Handout 11

Rice plants grow best in very wet fields. When rains do not flood the fields, farmers use irrigation.



When rainfall is far below the level the level we expect based on the usual water cycle, we say there is a **drought**.

What is the difference between a **hydrological drought** and an **agricultural drought**?