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Challenge for Sustaining Agriculture

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Making the Most of Our Water Supply

ARL researchers in Ithaca, New York; College Station, Texas; and other locations are scanning the genomes of corn, wheat, and other crops, searching for genes that will prove useful in developing varieties with deeper roots and other traits that will help them grow with less water and under higher temperatures. At the ARS Soybean and Nitrogen Fixation Research Laboratory in Raleigh, North Carolina, scientists have developed and released the first-ever drought-tolerant soybean, which carries a gene that allows it to wilt more slowly than a normal soybean. Under drought conditions, slow-wilting types yield about 4 to 8 bushels per acre more than normal varieties and also show good yield potential when rain falls.

Many experts say the 2012 drought was a harbinger of future problems and should be considered a call to action. Drought is expected to become more common, forcing farmers and ranchers to spend more time, energy, and resources trying to raise crops and livestock on drier soils with less water. Our goal is to help growers maximize the potential of every drop of water available so that they can continue to produce the kind of bounty we have come to expect in our supermarkets and neighborhood stores.