During a week of immersion in global water issues in Stockholm, Sweden, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln specialist learned never to take Nebraska's abundant water for granted.

Although some parts of the state are dealing with limited water, we in Nebraska and most of the United States take our water for granted, said Jim Goeke, U.S. Conservation and Survey Division hydrogeologist. Yet, significant numbers of people around the globe lack dependable drinking water and sanitation.

"More and more, I appreciate why we can't be complacent in Nebraska and why we have a lot to offer with our involvement in the world's water supply," Goeke said. "And it goes both ways."

Right now, the global network of international water programs and centers does not include the United States. The centers have developed through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the U.S. opted out of UNESCO for 20 years between 1984 and 2004/2005.

"We've been doing wonderful things, but we have not interfaced with the rest of the world," Goeke said. "I think we can share with other countries."

One of the subtle but persistent themes of the conference was global climate change and what that will do to our water supply, Goeke said. There was a lot of talk about water footprints and green water, blue water, red water and all different categories of water.

Two thousand people attended the conference and they talked about how municipalities and concentrations of population will manage to have enough water to drink and maintain sewage disposal. Discussion centered on conserving water as supplies diminish.

Climate will change, Goeke said, and people around the world are concerned about how to cope with that. All kinds of experts have made all kinds of predictions of where that change will take place.

These cycles are so complex that nobody's born with an understanding of how they function, but we need to know how they function—at a state level, how the state level functions within the country and how the country functions within the globe. Goeke believes only the educational institutions will be able to make those connections.

"That's why the University of Nebraska has to be involved with people of all ages across the state," Goeke said. "That's worth talking to people at every level as much as we can so they don't take the resource for granted. We don't have to wait until there's a gun to our heads before we prepare and act in an informed way."

Goeke said that, after the conference, he will think more about how the programs he conducts will interact with other programs. He met some people from Kenya where they depend on surface water supplies and those supplies are running out. Nebraskans have drilled over 100,000 irrigation wells and he thinks that drilling expertise in the development of water could easily be transferred to other areas of the world.

We're all in this together, Goeke said, and attending conferences like World Water Week bring that fact into clear focus.