EGU21-15434
https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-egu21-15434
EGU General Assembly 2021

Advancing the Water Footprint into an instrument to support achieving the SDGs

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The water footprint has developed into a widely-used concept to examine water use and resulting local impacts caused during agricultural and industrial production. Building on recent advancements in the water footprint concept, it can be an effective steering instrument to support, inter alia, achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) - SDG 6 in particular. Within the research program “Water as a Global Resource” (GRoW), an initiative of the Federal Ministry for Education and Research, a number of research projects currently apply and enhance the water footprint concept in order to identify areas where water is being used inefficiently and implement practical optimization measures. We aim to raise awareness on the potential of the water footprint concept to inform decision-making in the public and private sectors towards improved water management and achieving the SDGs. In particular, we show how modern water footprint methods and tools developed in GRoW can inform policy planning towards more sustainable use of water resources at various levels. They can also support producers in determining their indirect water use and associated impacts in supply chains, in addition to their (often comparably low) direct water use at production sites. Finally, we show how the water footprint can raise awareness and inform consumers about the hidden water use and resulting impacts of daily products and services.