

Food and Climate Change

How can we feed the world without destroying the planet?





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The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Special Report on Climate Change and Land (2019) estimates that agriculture is directly responsible for up to 8.5% of all greenhouse gas emissions with a further 14.5% coming from land use change (mainly deforestation in the developing world to clear land for food production).

The challenges are growing. By the middle of this century, the world population is expected to reach 9 billion. As people become richer, they eat more food like meat, eggs and dairy which take more resources to produce. If nothing else was to change, we'd need to double the amount of crops we grow by 2050.

Cutting down forests to make more farmland is not an option. Trees absorb and store carbon dioxide and forests have a big influence on rainfall patterns, water and soil quality and flood prevention too. We can't afford to lose any more forests for farmland. So how are we going to feed everyone?

The global response

There are some big changes we need to see at the international level. Instead of making new farms, we have to grow more on the farms we already have. It's tempting to rely on intensive use of water and fossil-fuel-based chemicals for fertilizer, but that's not the only way. Commercial farming has already made great strides in combining older approaches like organic farming with high tech innovations like fertilizer tailored to soil conditions. That means they can improve yields without increasing fossil fuel use.

Engineering a complete rethink of global farming will take massive, coordinated change by the international community. But fortunately, there are things we can do as individuals as well, starting with our diet.

What can we do?

Eat less meat

It would be easier to feed 9 billion people if more of the crops we grew ended up in human stomachs. For every 100 calories of grain we feed animals, we get only about 40 new calories of milk, 22 calories of eggs, 12 of chicken, 10 of pork, or 3 of beef. Shifting to less meat-intensive diets could free up substantial amounts of food across the world.

Waste less

In poorer countries food is often lost before it reaches the market, due to unreliable storage and transportation. But in the developed world, most waste happens in homes, restaurants and supermarkets. We can all take simple steps to reduce waste by serving smaller portions, eating leftovers, and encouraging cafeterias, restaurants, and supermarkets to develop waste-reducing measures.

Be the change

Like much of the fight against climate change, fixing our diet will need a combination of individual lifestyle adjustments and global political action. It's up to us to change what we can in our own lives and encourage our leaders to change the bigger picture.

For more information, why not have a look at some of these links:



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE

A five-step plan to Feed the World

www.nationalgeographic.com/foodfeatures/feeding-9-billion



THE GUARDIAN

Can the world feed 8bn people sustainably?

www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/nov/15/can-the-world-feed-8bn-people-sustainably



WWF

The effects of deforestation

www.wwf.org.uk/learn/effects-of/deforestation

