

Op-Ed: World's meat-eaters may be forced to turn vegetarian

Posted Aug 27, 2012 by [C.S. McClellan](#)

Meat-eaters may have to become vegetarians if water shortages and population growth continue. Consumption of protein from animal-based products must drop from the current 20% of the average diet to 5% in order to feed a projected 9 billion people.

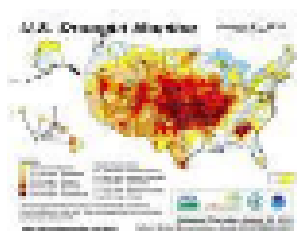
A stern warning about global food supplies has been issued by leading water scientists. "There will not be enough water available on current croplands to produce food for the expected 9 billion population in 2050 if we follow current trends and changes towards diets common in western nations," according to Malik Falkenworth and his colleagues at the [International Water Institute](#) in Stockholm.

The United States is only one of several countries already suffering from a drought that scientists almost unanimously believe is a sign of global warming. Feed crops for animals are among the severe shortages that will soon be reflected in higher food prices. With no end in sight for this summer's rainless skies, [US farmers are already moving cattle](#) to areas where pasturage is still available.



Wheat

Effects of US drought on corn crops August 2012



NOAA/NCEP/Climate.gov

August 21, 2012
Drought Map

As prices rise, hunger and outright starvation will increase in nations that depend on food imports. In the Sahel region, more than 18 million people are already facing food shortages. Previous drought in other parts of the world led to civil unrest in 28 countries, but those were comparatively short periods. What we're looking at now is drought that may run from one year to the next, as has happened in Syria. The [Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists](#) cited a drought that lasted from 2006 to 2010 as one of the triggers for the current uprising against President Bashar al-Assad. "...the drought destroyed many farming communities and placed great strain on urban populations. Although not

the leading cause of the Syrian rebellion, the drought-induced migration from farm to city clearly contributed to the uprising and serves as a warning of the potential impact of climate change on political stability."

The price of corn and wheat, basic staples for much of the world, has already risen nearly 50 percent just since June, and if drought conditions continue, crop shortages will worsen, with a continued rise in prices, and starvation among poor populations, many of which can barely afford food at normal prices.

Water wars have been predicted as competition increases for a diminishing supply. Raising animals for food consumes five to 10 times more water than grain and vegetable crops. The use of water power to produce electricity is another area where demand continues to grow.

Large-scale crop irrigation is an extremely wasteful use of water, and the **International Water Management Institute** recommends investment funds for simple growing technologies, such as small pumps, for areas with little rainfall. But as water tables drop, pumps will have to be drilled deeper and deeper. Eventually, farmers are going to have to learn dry-land farming techniques, similar to those used by Native Americans in the north-western US.

Both the United Nations and Oxfam are preparing for a major food crisis within the next five years. Unless weather patterns return to normal, the crisis is almost guaranteed. Over the next four decades, the world's population will increase by 2 billion, putting even more pressure on a fragile food supply. But population control is still off the table as a subject of vital importance.