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[China](#)[World](#)[Magazine](#)[Facts & Figures](#)[Opinions](#)[Focus](#)[HR Pictures](#)[Video](#)[HR Stories](#)[New Countryside](#)[Poverty Alleviation](#)[Social Security](#)[Environment](#)[Specific Groups](#)[Judicial Guarantee](#)


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## UNEP advocates "green farming" initiatives to boost crop yields

NAIROBI, Aug. 23, 2011 -- The UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) is advocating for a mixture of massive tree planting to boost the [world's](#) ecosystem in return for more agriculturally productive land which would enhance food [security](#) to the [poor](#).

In a new [report](#) released Monday, authored jointly with the [International Water Management Institute \(IWMI\)](#), the UN body said recognising [healthy](#) ecosystems as the basis for sustainable water resources and stable food security can help produce more food per unit of agricultural land, improve resilience to [climate](#) change and provide economic benefits for poor communities.

The report shows that investing in water and food, through diversifying crops, planting trees on [farm](#)land and improving rainwater collection, could help avoid water scarcity and meet the growing food demands of a global population.

The report, titled "An Ecosystems Approach to Water and Food Security," says farmland, fisheries and other agricultural areas should be considered as "agro-ecosystems," which provide sources of food as well as performing diverse ecosystem services such as water purification. Declines in these "regulatory" ecosystem services, leading to problems such as a loss of soil nutrients or increased vulnerability of crops to disease, have already begun to adversely affect agricultural productivity.

Worsened by climate change, these declines could result in crop yields that are up to 25 percent short of demand by 2050, greatly impacting poor communities worldwide. One of the main challenges in boosting current levels of food production is the availability of water, which is needed for livestock, crop irrigation and fisheries and other agricultural uses.

Groundwater levels are declining rapidly in several major breadbaskets and rice bowl regions such as the North China plains, the Indian Punjab and in the Western United States.

Maintaining healthy, resilient ecosystems to ensure water availability for agriculture and other ecosystem services is thus essential for long-term food security. Increases in food production through intensive farming methods have come at the expense of other ecosystem services, such as biodiversity, pollination or soil erosion protection, caused by [pollution](#) from agricultural run-off or the diversion of water from rivers to farmland.

The report says ecosystems-based approach to agriculture can result in a more efficient use of water, a reduction in the 5-10 million hectares of farmland that are lost each year to degradation, fewer yield losses as a result of pests and increased benefits to poor communities dependent on farmlands, rivers, forests and other ecosystems for their food and livelihoods.

The report was authored by over 50 contributors from 21 organizations, using case studies from China, Guatemala, Jordan and other communities, which recommends changes to three specific areas, environmental protection, water resources management and food production.

The report also sets out recommendations for drylands, wetlands, crop systems, fisheries and livestock systems. The report calls on governments to act on three basic principles, including creating corridors to promote the movement of livestock, to reduce overgrazing and land degradation caused by confining animals to small areas.

It seeks the diversification of land to integrate crop, tree and livestock production and promote soil fertility through manure, crop residues and provide tree fodder for feed.

The third principle is to seek cultivation of local plants better adapted to dry conditions, which can capture benefits from infrequent rainfall and control erosion in areas too dry to support traditional field crops.  
Enditem

from: Xinhua

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