



Radical overhaul of farming could be 'game-changer' for global food security



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Radical overhaul of farming could be 'game-changer' for global food security

New practices could enhance rather than degrade the world's ecosystems, double agricultural production and protect natural systems

This release is available in [French](#).

STOCKHOLM (22 August 2011)—According to the authors of new research released today at the World Water Week in Stockholm, a radical transformation in the way farming and natural systems interact could simultaneously boost food production and protect the environment—two goals that often have been at odds. The authors warn, however, that the world must act quickly if the goal is to save the Earth's main breadbasket areas—where resources are so depleted the situation threatens to decimate global supplies of fresh water and cripple agricultural systems worldwide.

A new analysis resulting from the joined forces of the **International Water Management Institute (IWMI)** and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) outlines the urgent need to rethink current strategies for intensifying agriculture, given that food production already accounts for 70 to 90 percent of withdrawals from available water resources in some areas. The report, *An Ecosystem Services Approach to Water and Food Security*, finds that in many breadbaskets, including the plains of northern China, India's Punjab and the Western United States, water limits are close

to being "reached or breached." Meanwhile, 1.6 billion people already live under conditions of water scarcity, and the report warns that number could soon grow to 2 billion. The current situation in the Horn of Africa is a timely reminder of just how vulnerable to famine some regions are.

"Agriculture is both a major cause and victim of ecosystem degradation," said Eline Boelee of IWMI, the lead scientific editor of the report. "And it is not clear whether we can continue to increase yields with the present practices. Sustainable intensification of agriculture is a priority for future food security, but we need to take a more holistic 'landscape' approach."

Meanwhile, a separate report by IWMI, Wetlands, Agriculture and Poverty Reduction, warns against seeking to protect wetlands by simply excluding agriculture. It argues that policies focused simply on wetland preservation and ignore the potential of 'wetland agriculture' to increase food production and contribute to reducing poverty.

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