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## UNEP: Farming Can Double Production, Protect Ecosystems

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A “radical overhaul” in agriculture could double production while protecting ecosystems, according to a report released today by the United Nations Environment Program and the **International Water Management Institute**.

The authors warn, however, that the world must act quickly to save the Earth’s breadbasket areas, where resource depletion is so severe that it threatens to decimate global supplies of fresh water and cripple agricultural systems worldwide.

The report, *An Ecosystem Services Approach to Water and Food Security*, says an urgent rethink is needed on 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 analysis finds that in many breadbaskets, including the western U.S., plains of northern China and India’s Punjab, water limits are close to being “reached or breached.”

Meanwhile, 1.6 billion people already live under conditions of water scarcity, and this could soon grow to 2 billion, the report warns. The authors said the current famine in the Horn of Africa is a timely reminder of just how vulnerable some regions are.

“Agriculture is both a major cause and victim of ecosystem degradation,” said lead scientific editor Eline Boelee of the non-profit IWMI. “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.”

In the report, contributors from UNEP, IWMI and 19 other organizations say that adopting a more sustainable approach to food production requires a new level of cooperation among officials involved in agriculture, environmental issues, water management, forestry, fisheries and wildlife management. These officials and organizations routinely operate in separated, disconnected worlds, presenting a major challenge, the authors say.

A previous report by IWMI, *Wetlands, Agriculture and Poverty Reduction*, warned against seeking to protect wetlands by simply excluding agriculture. It argued that policies focused only on wetland preservation ignore the potential of “wetland agriculture” to increase food production and reduce poverty.

“Blanket prohibitions against cultivation do not always reduce

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