

Well-Fed World

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Dimensions of Hunger

- Worldwide, 840 million, or one in seven, people suffer from chronic hunger. The vast majority live in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.
- 24,000 people per day or 8.8 million per year die from hunger or related causes. Three-fourths are children younger than five.
- Chronic hunger also causes stunted growth, poor vision, listlessness, and increased susceptibility to disease.
- In the US, more than 30 million people, including 12 million children, are classified "food insecure," meaning that they are hungry or lack food prospects.



Causes of Hunger

Only 10% of hunger deaths are attributed to catastrophic events such as famine or war. Most are due to chronic malnutrition caused by the severe maldistribution and waste of food resources.

Although food needs are fairly evenly distributed among the world's people, distribution is governed by economic incentives, rather than by need. This can be illustrated by the persistence of hunger in the US, with its vast food surpluses, and by the fact that the number of the world's hungry is roughly equivalent to the number of overweight people.

Wasting Food Resources

Maldistribution of food is exacerbated by unsustainable agricultural practices, such as depletion of cultivable land, topsoil, water, energy and minerals, and the conversion of plant-based foods to animal protein.



A meat-based diet requires 10-20 times as much land as a plant-based diet. The process begins with the clear-cutting of forests to create pasture for cattle and other ruminants. Eventually, the land is turned into feedcrops for animals raised and slaughtered for food.

Depletion of topsoil and minerals begins soon after the trees are cut and escalates with tilling. Without the plant growth to hold it in place, topsoil, laden with minerals, fertilizer, and organic debris, is carried by rain and melting snow into nearby streams. Animal agriculture produces more water pollutants than all other human activities combined and contributes to global warming more than automobiles.



The intense demand for animal feed crops leads to the use of sloping land, with greater runoff, arid land requiring irrigation. Water shortages also result.

Proposed Solutions

The grains and soybeans fed to animals in the US alone could provide enough food to feed the world's hungry.

Yet, intensive animal agriculture in low-income countries is growing rapidly, exacerbating further the maldistribution of food resources. Western agribusiness interests seek to expand the demand for their products and to export factory farming practices to these nations.

Such a development will have disastrous consequences. Decreased grain supplies could precipitate major food shortages, even famine. The public health impacts will impose an intolerable burden on the economies of low-income nations. And, the impacts on soil, water, and wildlife will threaten fragile ecosystems.



Sustainable cultivation of plant-based foods offers a commonsense response to hunger and malnutrition.

Vegetables, legumes, grains, and fruits can be grown in most climates on small plots of land. Such crops require minimal investment in water, energy, equipment, fertilizers and pesticides, and they cause negligible soil degradation and water pollution.

Plant-based foods contain the nutrients required for healthy growth and vigorous activity. They are free of the cholesterol, saturated fats, hormones, drugs, and pathogens that cause widespread death and disease in affluent nations.

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promoting just and sustainable solutions for a healthy, well-fed world