

Food shortages could force world into vegetarianism, warn scientists

Level 2 • Intermediate

1 Warmer

- On average, how many days a week do you eat meat?
- Meat eaters: Imagine your vegetarian friend or colleague invites you to their house for dinner. How do you feel?
Vegetarians: Imagine your meat-eating friend or colleague invites you to their house for dinner. How do you feel?
- Meat eaters: How likely is it that you would ever become a vegetarian?
Vegetarians: How likely is it that you would ever start eating meat?

2 Understanding the title

Read the title of the article and answer these questions.

- What is the problem?
- What is the solution?

3 Key words

Write the key words from the article next to the definitions below. Then find the words in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers have been given to help you.

arable	crops	devastating	droughts	energy	erratic
protein	resources	malnourished	scarcity	catastrophic	surplus

- causing a disaster _____ (para 1)
- a substance in foods such as meat, eggs, and milk that people need in order to grow and be healthy _____ (para 2)
- a situation in which the supply of something is not enough for the people who want or need it _____ (para 5)
- long periods of time when there is little or no rain _____ (para 5)
- causing a lot of harm or damage _____ (para 6)
- changing often so that it is difficult to know what will happen next _____ (para 7)
- this kind of land is suitable for or used for growing food _____ (para 7)
- plants grown for food, usually on a farm _____ (para 7)
- an amount of money or goods that is left because a country or business has more than it needs _____ (para 7)
- weak or ill because you do not eat enough or do not eat enough of the right foods _____ (para 8)
- things such as coal, trees, and water that exist in nature and can be used by people _____ (para 10)
- a form of power such as electricity, heat, or light that is used for making things work _____ (para 10)

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John Vidal, environment editor
26 August, 2012

- 1 Water scientists have given one of the strongest warnings ever about global food supplies. They say that the world's population may have to change almost completely to a vegetarian diet by 2050 to avoid catastrophic shortages.
- 2 Humans get about 20% of their protein from animal-based products now. However, this may need to decrease to just 5% to feed the extra two billion people expected to be alive by 2050, according to research by some of the world's top water scientists.
- 3 "There will not be enough water to produce food for the expected nine-billion population in 2050 if we follow current trends and changes towards diets common in western nations," the report by Malik Falkenmark and colleagues at the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) said.
- 4 "There will be just enough water if the proportion of animal-based foods is limited to 5% of total calories."
- 5 Warnings that water scarcity could limit food production come at the same time as Oxfam and the UN prepare for a possible second global food crisis in five years. Prices for items such as corn and wheat have risen nearly 50% on international markets since June. The price increase has been caused by severe droughts in the US and Russia, and weak monsoon rains in Asia. More than 18 million people are already facing serious food shortages across the Sahel.
- 6 Oxfam says that the price increase will have a devastating effect in developing countries that rely heavily on food imports, including parts of Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East. Food shortages in 2008 led to fighting and riots in 28 countries.
- 7 Changing to a vegetarian diet is one way to increase the amount of water available to grow more food in a world where the climate is becoming increasingly erratic, the scientists said.
- 8 Animal protein-rich food uses five to ten times more water than a vegetarian diet. One third of the world's arable land is used to grow crops to feed animals. Other options to feed people include stopping waste and increasing trade between countries that have a food surplus and countries that don't have enough food.
- 9 "Nine hundred million people already go hungry and two billion people are malnourished although per-capita food production continues to increase," they said. "Seventy per cent of all water is used in agriculture, and growing more food to feed an extra two billion people by 2050 will place greater pressure on water and land."
- 10 The report is being released at the start of the annual world water conference in Stockholm, Sweden, where 2,500 politicians, UN groups, non-governmental groups and researchers from 120 countries meet to discuss global water supply problems.
- 11 Competition for water between food production and other uses will increase pressure on essential resources, the scientists said. "The UN predicts that we must increase food production by 70% by mid-century. This will put additional pressure on our water resources, which are already stressed, at a time when we also need more water to satisfy global energy demand and to create electricity for the 1.3 billion people who are without it," said the report.
- 12 Overeating, malnourishment and waste are all increasing. "We will need a new recipe to feed the world in the future," said the report's editor, Anders Jägerskog.

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4 Comprehension check

According to the article, are these statements true (T) or false (F)? Correct any that are false.

1. The population of the world is expected to increase by two million by 2050.
2. If we don't reduce the amount of meat we eat, there probably won't be enough food to feed the world.
3. If we reduce the amount of protein we get from animal-based foods by 5%, we might be able to feed everyone in 2050.
4. Five to ten times more water is needed to produce meat than is needed to produce vegetables.
5. At the moment, 60% of the world's water is used for food production.
6. The cost of food has increased as heavy monsoon rains have damaged the crops.
7. To reduce food shortages, we should also try not to waste food and water and to improve the trade in food between countries.

5 Collocations

- a. What nouns in the article follow the words *food* and *water*?
 Write them below.

food

water

- b. Which of the collocations above do you think would be useful to learn?
 Write a sentence of your own for at least five of the collocations.

6 Discussion

- Do you think that changing to a vegetarian diet will allow us to feed the world?
- What else could we do?

7 Group task

Speaking idiomatically, Anders Jägerskog, the editor of the report mentioned in the article, said, 'We will need a new recipe to feed the world in the future.'

Taking this advice literally, share your favourite vegetarian recipes with your class by either:

- writing recipes to share;
- making a home video while you prepare vegetarian food (the commentary should of course be in English);
- demonstrating or presenting your recipe to your class.

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KEY

2 Understanding the title

1. There will not be enough food in the future.
2. We might all have to become vegetarians.

7 Group task

Teacher's note: The group task could be set as homework or even as a project that runs over the whole term.

3 Key words

1. catastrophic
2. protein
3. scarcity
4. droughts
5. devastating
6. erratic
7. arable
8. crops
9. surplus
10. malnourished
11. resources
12. energy

4 Comprehension check

1. F – two **billion**
2. T
3. F – **to** 5% not **by** 5%
4. T
5. F – 70%
6. F – **droughts** and **weak** monsoon rains
7. T

5 Collocations

a.

food: shortages, supplies, production, crisis, imports, surplus

water: scientists, institute, scarcity, conference, supply, resources