

VOA Special English Agriculture Report

FAO WATER REPORT

This is Bill White with the VOA Special English Agriculture Report.

Experts, environmental activists and political leaders gathered in The Netherlands last month for the second World Water Forum. The conference examined water issues, including calls to guarantee fresh, clean water for all people within 25 years.

One major concern is providing enough water for crops to feed the growing world population. The world population is expected to rise to more than 8,000 million people within the next 30 years. Experts say the expanding population would require 60 percent more food than is now produced.

Most of the world's water is used in agriculture. Increasing crop production will mean taking more water from already limited supplies.

However, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization suggests that the rise in world water requirements is slowing. The FAO findings are based on a study of water use in 93 developing countries.

The UN agency says increasing the use of irrigation could be the answer to feeding the world's people. Irrigation is the watering of land by other than natural methods. Irrigation provides water for plant growth in areas that have long periods of little or no rainfall.

FAO officials note that irrigated land produces two or three times more crops than land dependent on rain. The

officials say the ability to produce more food with less water is improving in developing countries with limited water supplies. They say such limitations will force some countries to use water more carefully. They say more research and training programs in correct water use are helping.

In some areas, no amount of careful water use will improve food production. FAO officials say water in these areas is better used to produce high-value crops that can be sold to buy imported food. For example, farmers in Tunisia are using irrigation to grow fruits, vegetables and flowers. These crops are sold because of their high market value.

The study says the issue sometimes is not lack of water, but water rights. It says one solution may be for governments to treat water as an economic good and social right.

FAO officials note that farmers still need to learn to produce more food with less water. And, some areas need immediate help. But officials believe there is enough water to feed the world.

This VOA Special English Agriculture Report was written by George Grow. This is Bill White.

Source: Voice of America, 4/04/2000

Re-posted by eigozai
No. 0100pdf (399 words)