

The Sensible Environmentalist

Rising Population Means Growing More on Same Land

**(NAPS)—DEAR DR. MOORE:
Can the world produce
enough food to keep up with its
growing population?**

According to the United Nations, there will be two billion more mouths to feed over the next 30 years. Food production will have to increase substantially, with the biggest burden on developing countries.



Dr. Moore

As in the past, there will be pressure on farmers to increase crop yields. In his book, "The Skeptical Environmentalist," Bjørn Lomborg, writes about the effort that began in the 1960s to get the maximum amount of food from each acre of soil. Through a combination of selective breeding, irrigation, fertilizers and pesticides, farmers were able to produce much more food on the same amount of land. Worldwide, the number of people starving fell, while the population doubled. The price of food also came way down.

In the future, farmers will increasingly have to rely on mineral fertilizers (nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium). It's a controversial subject. Too much fertilizer can harm the environment, but the benefits of proper use are huge and there are no viable alternatives—including organic farming.

The UN has done preliminary calculations on what would happen if the global demand for

organic produce rose substantially. "The consequences are quite staggering," says Louise Fresco, Assistant Director General of the Agriculture Department. "While organic agriculture does fill a niche market, its limits—and its dangers, in terms of nutrient depletion—need thorough review."

Organic farming is fine on a small scale, but it can't produce enough food to be relied on globally. To use this method widely, there'd be no choice but to convert additional forests to farmland. This is unacceptable, given the role that forests play in regulating the climate and taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere (among many other things).

Genetically modified (GM) foods are another part of the solution. Many people fear the unknown, but there is every indication that GM technology will enable us to feed more people while reducing the use of chemical pesticides, and with no harmful consequences.

As a sensible environmentalist, I believe that we can continue to feed a growing population by supporting the responsible use of fertilizers and GM technology to produce more food on the same amount of land.

Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmentalist.com.