



www.fao.org

Economic and social development

KEY FACTS

- Chronic hunger affects well over 900 million people worldwide today – representing almost 16 percent of the population in developing countries.
- The world will need to raise its food production by 70 percent to feed more than nine billion people by 2050.
- Roughly 20 percent of the world's undernourished people live in countries in protracted crisis, or more than a third of the global total if China and India are excluded.
- The impact of extreme price volatility falls heaviest on the poor, who spend as much as 70 percent of their income on food.
- The rate of growth in agricultural productivity is expected to fall to 1.5 percent between now and 2030 and further to 0.9 percent between 2030 and 2050, compared with 2.3 percent per year since 1961.
- Women make up, on average, 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, ranging from 20 percent in Latin America to almost 50 percent in East and Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.
- Closing the gender gap in agriculture could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4 percent and reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17 percent.
- Agriculture currently accounts for some 30 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Eradicating hunger and pushing growth

FAO's Economic and Social Development Department analyses trends and emerging issues related to food and agriculture. It maintains a variety of statistical databases to keep FAO member countries abreast of the latest global developments in food and agriculture. By conducting regular country-specific assessments, the department is able to alert the international community to impending food crises and provide valuable advice and support to policy-makers.

Long-term perspectives on world food and agriculture

In the first half of this century, world population growth will slow, but global demand for food, feed and fibre will continue to increase. Crops will be used more for bioenergy and other industrial purposes, creating additional opportunities for farmers and for rural development, but also posing challenges for food security. In certain regions, additional demands for agricultural produce will place growing pressure on already scarce resources. Climate change will further complicate matters. Agriculture will be

required to adapt to and help mitigate climate change and preserve natural habitats. Rural communities will need new technologies to grow more food on less land with fewer hands to do the work. Governments will need to foster conducive economic environments for farmers to invest in and adopt new technologies. Market incentives will need to guide farmers, traders and retailers towards making supplies consistent with demands along increasingly complex production chains.

Supporting global food security

FAO is actively involved in analytical studies, projects and programmes that examine the linkages between food security and vulnerability to improve the design of national policies and programmes and promote an integrated approach to addressing food insecurity and poverty.

In addition to a substantial technical publishing programme, the department's three flagship publications – *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*, *The State of Food and Agriculture* and *The State of Agricultural Commodity Markets* – provide relevant statistics and information to a wider audience. FAO also collaborates with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to produce the *OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook*, an annual, forward-looking assessment of the market and policy issues that are of most concern for the most traded food commodities.

FAOSTAT – the world's largest and most comprehensive statistical database on food and agriculture – provides time-series and cross-sectional data related to food and agriculture for some 200 countries. FAO also provides technical assistance to member countries to help improve their national food and agricultural statistics and to develop national and subnational data dissemination systems to enhance policy-making.

FAO, in collaboration with the World Food Programme, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and others, provides secretariat services to the reformed Committee on World Food Security, which supports the global analysis of food security and food aid policies while identifying key food security issues. The Organization also conducts work in support of the progressive realization of the Right to Food and hosts the secretariat of the Alliance Against Hunger.



FAO economic forecasts are used worldwide.

Market volatility and investment in agriculture

The 2007–08 world food crisis highlighted the critical need to enhance agricultural production capacity in all countries to meet current and future food demand. Increased investment in agriculture and adequate production incentives are required for many countries to meet this global challenge. Since 2007, world markets have also seen a series of dramatic swings in commodity prices. FAO is concerned about the impact of price volatility on international and domestic markets, and on the capacity of countries to cope with an increasingly unpredictable environment and still ensure the food security of their populations. Priority is being given to the analysis of market volatility and to policy guidance.

Achieving gender equality

Social and economic inequalities between men and women undermine food and nutrition security and hold back economic and agricultural growth. Recent data shows that closing the gender gap in access to agricultural resources could lift 100–150 million people out of hunger. FAO provides policy advice and works with governments and development partners to strengthen their capacity to formulate gender sensitive agricultural and rural development policies and programmes, including the generation and use of sex-disaggregated data for well-targeted policies.

Promoting sustainable, climate-smart agricultural systems

Increasing the food, income and other benefits farmers realize from agricultural production systems is essential to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. Improving the efficiency and sustainability of natural resource use in agricultural systems, as well as providing incentives for farmers to produce a range of ecosystem services, are also needed to reach the Millennium Development Goal of environmental sustainability. Climate change increases the magnitude of the challenge, requiring increased resilience for adaptation, as well as low emission strategies for development. FAO is currently assisting countries to develop “climate smart” smallholder agricultural development strategies.

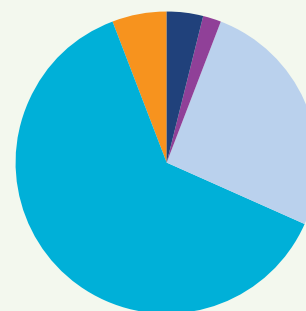
Understanding and strengthening rural livelihoods

Small-scale farmers often have little or no access to markets and productive resources and services that would enable them to improve their social and economic well-being. They are often left out of agricultural policies and programmes. Rural institutions – in particular, producer organizations – can enable small-scale farmers to gain greater access to and manage resources, inputs and services, such as land, credit, information and extension. FAO works with governments to strengthen rural institutions and to develop policies that would support and empower small-scale farmers.



Cereal prices have fluctuated wildly in recent years.

Number of undernourished people in the world, 2010 (millions)



- Northeast and North Africa 37
- Developed countries 19
- Sub-Saharan Africa 239
- Asia and the Pacific 578
- Latin America and the Caribbean 53

Total: 925 million

Developing countries account for 98 percent of the world's undernourished people.

Source: FAO

Promoting rural employment and decent work

Most rural poor people, particularly women and youth, are employed in the informal, low-productivity segment of rural economies, mainly in subsistence farming and seasonal or casual wage labour. Partnering with the International Labour Organization, FAO provides policy advice and supports national capacities for promoting decent rural employment as an essential driver for rural development and sustainable livelihoods.