



Who Will Feed China?: Wake-Up Call for a Small Planet (Worldwatch Environmental Alert)

Lester R. Brown

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In an integrated world economy, China's rising food prices will become the world's rising food prices. China's land scarcity will become everyone's land scarcity. And water scarcity in China will affect the entire world. China's dependence on massive imports, like the collapse of the world's fisheries, will be a wake-up call that we are colliding with the earth's capacity to feed us. It could well lead us to redefine national security away from military preparedness and toward maintaining adequate food supplies.

To feed its 1.2 billion people, China may soon have to import so much grain that this action could trigger unprecedented rises in world food prices. In *Who Will Feed China: Wake-up Call for a Small Planet*, Lester Brown shows that even as water becomes more scarce in a land where 80 percent of the grain crop is irrigated, as per-acre yield gains are erased by the loss of cropland to industrialization, and as food production stagnates, China still increases its population by the equivalent of a new Beijing each year. When Japan, a nation of just 125 million, began to import food, world grain markets rejoiced. But when China, a market ten times bigger, starts importing, there may not be enough grain in the world to meet that need - and food prices will rise steeply for everyone. Analysts foresaw that the recent four-year doubling of income for China's 1.2 billion consumers would increase food demand, especially for meat, eggs, and beer. But these analysts assumed that food production would rise to meet those demands. Brown shows that cropland losses are heavy in countries that are densely populated before industrialization, and that these countries quickly become net grain importers. We can see that process now in newspaper accounts from China as the government struggles with this problem.

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