

abuse of land

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One of the big environmental problems at the moment is abuse of

land. Climate change is making it harder to grow food. (In a small amateur way, I experience this.) But also abuse of land makes climate change worse. Then you have got the problem of increasing population and how to feed them and the use of land for other stuff like biofuels. Its a really major conundrum. There isn't much good news except perhaps on population. There are increasing indications that birth rates are plunging globally. There are some exceptions, like most of Africa, but in the last few week we've learnt that UK birth rates are way below replacement level. Up until now migrant groups have had birth rates which has meant the UK population is set to increase, but now rates in this group have plunged as well. The global population is set to increase until 2050 though, so its still a challenge. On the land use problem there is not such good news. UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have been looking for some solutions. They believe we need to:

- Protect as much forest as we can, particularly tropical rainforest.
- Eat less red meat and more vegetables.
- Safeguard peatlands and restore them where possible.
- Grow plants and trees to produce energy, but only on a small local scale.
- Do more agro-forestry, where food crops are mixed in with trees.
- Improve crop varieties to cope with climate change/increased diseases.

There is also a debate going on about whether its best to try and do the above on a large scale or grow food and other stuff in an intensive climate unfriendly manner on a smaller area but effectively rewild unused land to soak up CO₂. Neither option is an easy one. Both will be challenging. For example switching from one form of vegetable cultivation to another may make soil erosion worse. As a general point I would say we need to eat more vegetables grown as closely as possible to our plate. Plant as many trees as possible (whilst protecting those we have), after all there are a recent report stated many places where the land is is too poor for growing food and cut down on meat eating. Neil

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