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Good News, Bad News on Food Prices and Production

This is the VOA Special English Agriculture Report.

Food prices have risen sharply over the past few years. The good news is that the rate of increase has slowed. The bad news is that prices will not go down anytime soon.

Also, the rate of global agricultural production is slowing. Yet it needs to increase sixty percent over the next forty years to feed a growing world population.

These are among the findings from the OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2012-2021. The OECD is the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The FAO is the Food and Agriculture Organization, a United Nations agency.

FAO Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva spoke at a news conference in Rome last week when the report was released. Mr. Da Silva said that, not surprisingly, the world's poorest people will feel the greatest effects of higher prices.

JOSE GRAZIANO DA SILVA: "For the millions and millions of people living in extreme poverty, the implications of high food prices are clear -- they might have to change their diets, usually to ones with poorer nutrition quality."

In middle-income countries, people are gaining weight as they eat fewer fruits and vegetables and more of the cheaper but less nutritious foods.

The report also shows that farmers in poorer countries will be leading efforts to feed an expected nine billion people by twenty-fifty. The outlook predicts that farmers in Latin America, the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa will drive agricultural production in the future. Angel Gurría is chief of the OECD.

ANGEL GURRIA: "We can feed nine billion people by twenty-fifty in this planet without stretching things too far. But we have to organize ourselves better." But there are plenty of challenges. One-fourth of all agricultural land is damaged. Many countries face water shortages. And experts believe climate change is driving increasingly unusual weather patterns.

The report says farmers need to use more environmentally sustainable growing methods. At the same time, it says governments should end economically

harmful supports and invest more in agricultural production. Mr. Gurria says rich and poor nations need to treat agriculture more like a business.

ANGEL GURRIA: "In many cases, agriculture is related in people's minds to the poorest. It's related to aid. It's related to very depressed living conditions, etcetera. We got to shake that image away."

It also means reducing waste. The FAO and the OECD estimate that about one-third of world food production is lost -- either because of poor growing and harvesting methods or because people are throwing away good food.

And that's the VOA Special English Agriculture Report. You can find a link to the Agricultural Outlook report at voaspecialenglish.com. You can also read, listen and learn English with our programs and activities. I'm Karen Leggett.

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