

Putting Agriculture at the Center of Climate Talks



This June in Brazil, delegates will mark the twentieth anniversary of what is commonly known as the Earth Summit. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development took place in Rio de Janeiro in nineteen ninety-two.

One of the issues that the delegates plan to discuss in June at Rio+20 is the role of agriculture in climate change. A recent article written by a team of scientists says agriculture should be a top priority in climate change negotiations. It says there was some progress in this area, but not much, at the United Nations climate conference in December in Durban, South Africa.

The article "What Next for Agriculture After Durban?" appeared in the journal Science. Britain's chief scientific adviser, Sir John Beddington, led the international team that wrote it to try to influence policy makers.

Molly Jahn from the University of Wisconsin-Madison was one of those authors.

"Well, agriculture is important, period, because of the imperative of food security. And we're falling short there in significant ways that have come to our

attention, especially recently with the significant price shocks."

Prices on the world market have remained high since the food crisis of two thousand seven and two thousand eight.

Professor Jahn says agriculture is a major producer of greenhouse gases blamed for trapping heat in the atmosphere. But agriculture also offers ways to lessen their effects with known and proven farming practices.

"So it represents both an activity that's essential for our survival -- an activity that is threatened by climate change, especially in vulnerable parts of the world -- and an opportunity to better manage meeting our needs, while we reduce the emissions of various greenhouse gases that are accumulating in the atmosphere."

Professor Jahn says moving toward "climate-smart agriculture" should be at the center of policy considerations.

The scientists call for efforts to reduce the huge amount of food that gets wasted or goes bad before it can be eaten. Professor Jahn says another recommendation is for farmers to plant more crops that put less pressure on the environment.

"Given current knowledge, there's a great deal we can do within current budgets and within current economic structures that will bring us forward to a better place with respect to agricultural practices in the developing and in the developed world."

The article says the "integration of agriculture in the climate change negotiating process" has been moving slowly. But, it says, at the same time climate change and population growth have been moving much faster.

The article calls on scientists to play a bigger part in the issue by making sure climate change negotiators have clear data available. Such information, they say, could help increase investment in agriculture.

Welcome to Voice of America's Special English Article Activity

This worksheet is designed to be used with: *Putting Agriculture at the Center of Climate Talks.*

Level: beginner - intermediate

Time: 20 - 30 minutes

This worksheet will help you learn new vocabulary about the environment. You will answer questions about climate talks in Brazil, and write a short paragraph about how the environment has changed in the last 20 years.

1. What do you think was discussed at the Earth Summit in Brazil in 1992? Use the internet to search for more information

2. According to the article, what will be discussed in June at Rio +20?

3. Why was the article "What Next for Agriculture After Durban?" written?

4. Describe Professor Jahn's viewpoint, in your own words.

5. How can scientists play a bigger part in this issue?

OVER TO YOU

What other things do you think will be discussed at the RIO+20 conference? How has the environment changed since the last conference—20 years ago?

Write 5-8 sentences explaining your answer.

ANSWER KEY

1. students' own answers
2. the role of agriculture in climate change
3. to try to influence policy makers.
4. students' own answers
5. by making sure there is clear data available for climate change negotiators