

Viewpoint: Intensive agriculture is the only way to sustainably feed the world

[In December], the World Resources Institute (WRI) [released a comprehensive study](#) embracing agricultural intensification as the only way to simultaneously close what it calls the food gap, the land use gap, and the greenhouse gas emissions gap.

Increased efficiency of natural resource use is the single most important step toward meeting both food production and environmental goals. This means increasing crop yields at higher than historical rates, and dramatically increasing output of milk and meat per hectare of pasture.

Raising agricultural productivity through technological innovation, substantially faster than the historic rate of recent decades, will be necessary, they conclude, even if human societies are able to achieve historically unprecedented reductions in food demand and waste. The authors even call explicitly for increased funding for gene editing research to increase crop productivity — biotechnology, in other words.

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The new WRI report is as notable for what it rejects as what it embraces. “Frequent claims that the world already has an overabundance of food and could meet future needs without producing more food are based on an unrealistic, even if desirable, hypothetical”

The authors cast a skeptical eye toward so-called regenerative agriculture and [soil carbon sequestration](#), which much of the environmental community [uses] to justify continuing fealty to low-productivity organic and agro-ecological farming systems

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The various agricultural wholisms and naturalistic fallacies [offered] as alternatives to intensive agriculture simply obfuscate that reality. “We wanted to avoid relying on magic asterisks,” WRI’s Tim Searchinger, the lead author, told The New York Times.

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