

**Agriculture and food in crisis - Conflict, resistance and renewal** by Fred Magdoff and Brian Tokar. Published by Monthly Review Press Website: [www.monthlyreview.org](http://www.monthlyreview.org). June 2011, 348pp, ISBN 978 1 58367 226 6 (Pb), \$18.95.

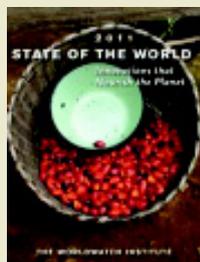
The title says it all - there is no denying that world population, growing in number and aspiring to diets rich in calorie-demanding meat and livestock products, is fast outstripping food production. Simultaneously, there is clear evidence that declining soil fertility, urbanisation of prime agricultural land, competition for water for domestic use and industry, and the reduction in cereal yields due to raised temperatures are all limiting capacity to raise crop yields. Some still look to science and technology to provide the doubling in food production required by 2050 but the contributors to *Agriculture and food in crisis* believe that there are social, political and economic answers, including returning power to the smaller farmer, removing the domination of agriculture by a handful of global agribusinesses, and recasting agricultural trade to remove the inequities that they see penalising farmers.



The final chapter by Jules Pretty responds to the question ‘Can ecological agriculture feed nine billion people? He concludes: “Time is short and the challenge is enormous...At this time we are neither feeding all the 6.7 billion people in the world nor conducting agriculture in an environmentally sound way. It may be possible to feed the estimated 9 billion people living on earth by mid-century. However, this will take a massive and multifaceted effort that may include changing the way animals are raised, and limiting the ill-conceived use of cereals for conversion to transport fuels. In addition, support is needed for the development of social capital in the form of farmers’ groups that can innovate and adapt. We need to begin this project today.” This book is worth reading for Pretty’s insight alone.

**State of the World 2011: Innovations that Nourish the Planet**  
The book is published outside of the US, Canada and India by Earthscan and can be purchased at [www.earthscan.co.uk/sow2011](http://www.earthscan.co.uk/sow2011) or by calling +44(0)12 5630 2699 with ISBN number 9781849713528.

The 2011 edition of our flagship report is a compelling look at the global food crisis, with particular emphasis on global innovations that can help solve a worldwide problem. *State of the World 2011* not only introduces us to the latest agro-ecological innovations and their global applicability but also gives broader insights into issues including poverty, international politics, and even gender equity.



Written in clear, concise language, with easy-to-read charts and tables, *State of the World 2011*, produced with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provides a practical vision of the innovations that will allow billions of people to feed themselves, while restoring rural economies, creating livelihoods, and sustaining the natural resource base on which agriculture depends.

**Climate change, water and food security** by Hugh Turrall, Jacob Burke and Jean-Marc Faurès. Published by FAO. Website: [www.earthprint.com](http://www.earthprint.com). 2011, 174pp, ISBN 978 9 25106 795 6 (Pb), US\$45 or free to download

With more frequent and increasingly severe droughts and floods, climate change is set to significantly impact agricultural productivity and food security by increasing the demand for water, limiting crop productivity and reducing water availability. “Both the livelihoods of rural communities and the food security of a predominantly urban population are at risk,” says FAO assistant director general for natural resources, Alexander Mueller, in the preface.



“The rural poor, who are the most vulnerable, are likely to be disproportionately affected.”

To improve the understanding of the impact of climate change on available water sources and agricultural productivity and enable policymakers to implement strategies that will make agricultural systems more resilient to climate change, *Climate change, water and food security* outlines the challenges that face agriculture and water supply, and considers options for adaptation and mitigation. “Substantial adaptation will be needed to ensure adequate supply and efficient utilization of what will, in many cases, be a declining resource,” the authors write. Better soil and crop management, water storage, mixed agroforestry systems, improved data gathering, and investment in irrigation, are just some of the adaptation and mitigation options the book covers.

One key area highlighted by the report is ‘water accounting’ - the measurement of available water supplies and use of water. “Water accounting in most developing countries is very limited, and allocation procedures are non-existent, ad hoc, or poorly developed,” the report states. “Helping developing countries acquire good water practices and developing robust and flexible water allocation systems will be a first priority.”

**The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11. Women in Agriculture Closing the gender gap for development.** FAO, 2011, ISBN 9789251067680; 158 pages; Price US\$75.00

Women make significant contributions to the rural economy in all developing country regions. Their roles differ across regions, yet they consistently have less access than men to the resources and opportunities they need to be more productive. Increasing women’s access to land, livestock, education, financial services, extension, technology and rural employment would boost their productivity and generate gains in terms of agricultural production, food security, economic growth and social welfare. Closing the gender gap in agricultural inputs alone could lift 100–150 million people out of hunger.

No blueprint exists for closing the gender gap, but some basic principles are universal: governments, the international community and civil society should work together to eliminate discrimination under the law, to promote equal access to resources and opportunities, to ensure that agricultural policies and programmes are gender-aware, and to make women’s voices heard as equal partners for sustainable development. Achieving gender equality and empowering women in agriculture is not only the right thing to do. It is also crucial for agricultural development and food security.