

Ecofriendly Farming Takes Center stage on Earth Day

Written by Naftali Mwaura

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Environmental scientists have galvanized attention to the role of sustainable farming practices in combating climate change-induced vagaries that include droughts and famines, and their potential to ignite civil unrest.

They are urging governments to consider agriculture as a solution and not a driver to environmental degradation that has denied food and water security to millions in the poor South.

These and other options will be key issues set to be on focus as the world marks the Earth Day 2011, which will be celebrated globally on Friday, April 22, as conservationists, scientists, farmers and policymakers reflect on the status of our planet and how it can be improved for future generations.

This day has been observed for the last forty years and has provided a platform to mobilize individuals and organizations around the world to address environmental challenges choking the planet.

Researchers at the Washington based research outfit, World Watch Institute, says that agriculture is the primary source of food and income for the world's poor.

"It also offers untapped potential for mitigating climate change and protecting biodiversity and for lifting millions out of poverty", notes the Researchers in a statement.

Nourishing the Planet, a landmark publication released by World watch Institute early this year recommends fifteen solutions that have proved viable in anchoring sustainable farming while protecting soil, water and other nature based assets.

Danielle Nierenberg, Nourishing the Planet co-project Director, says that "agriculture encompasses such a large chunk of the planet that creating healthy economies, mitigating climate change, and improving livelihoods will require a longstanding commitment to the world's farmers".

Previous attempts to alleviate hunger and malnutrition have focused on a few types of crops that are heavily dependent on chemical fertilizers and ignored the input of women and other marginalized demographics.

Christopher Flavin, the President, World watch Institute, adds that "There has been relatively little focus on low cost ways to boost soil fertility and make better use of scarce water, and on solutions that exist beyond the farm and all along the food chain".

Documented evidence contends that urban farming projects have provided respite to food deficit in burgeoning cities in the South.

Likewise, rotational farming practices have aided carbon storage in soils to mitigate climate change.

According to the statement from World watch Institute, small scale and low input innovations can go a long way in protecting the environment-not only on Earth Day, but every day.

During this year's Earth Day celebration, Worldwatch Institute proposes fifteen solutions that would guide farmers, scientists, politicians, agribusiness and aid agencies in promoting a healthier and food secure future for the planet.

Governments are challenged to recognize the right to food among all citizens in the policy and legal framework.

Researchers point out that every government has the mandate to support sustainable agriculture, including extension service, farmer to farmer transmission of knowledge, storage facilities, and infrastructure that links farmers to consumers.

Promotion of indigenous vegetables is key to reducing malnutrition that affects one billion people worldwide.

The report stresses the need to reduce food waste, scale up urban agriculture to feed growing population in cities and harness efficient water management tools to spur irrigated farming.

Farmer led research and development will accelerate the implementation of innovations that boost productivity.

The World watch Institute report further calls on countries to embrace green agriculture that includes ecoagriculture and agro forestry to boost soil fertility, safeguard local food biodiversity and build resilience to climate change impacts.

Harnessing the skills and knowledge of women farmers is critical in alleviating global hunger and poverty.

As demand for animal products such as milk and meat soar, governments must support innovations in livestock feed, disease control and climate change adaptation, to boost livestock yield and farmers` income.

Researchers conclude by urging governments to help farmers better organize their means of production- from obtaining inputs to selling their crops.

This will help them become resilient to fluctuations in global food prices while ensuring stability in local food supply chains.