

Published: 15 July 2013

Feeding humanity: more to the challenge than increasing yields

A paper just published in the journal *Science* argues that policymakers must focus on more than just food production to ensure sustainable food supplies for the Earth's growing population.



Credit: Jonas Merian via flicker under Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 licence

The [paper](#) urges a rethink of the increasingly popular policy goal of 'sustainable intensification', which aims to produce more food per unit area in ways that exert less pressure on the environment.

While this is important, say the authors – who include CSIRO scientist Dr Mario Herrero – it is too simple a definition, and it ignores other radical changes that are also required to tackle waste, improve governance and resilience, and reduce the resource-intensity of consumption.

'Sustainable intensification — as policymakers currently understand it— does not guarantee food security,' says co-author Dr Camilla Toulmin, director of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

'We need a new and more sophisticated definition; one that is clearer about what sustainable intensification can and cannot achieve, about how and where it should be implemented, and about how it will interact with other important areas of food policy.

The authors identify five areas of policymaking that national or international efforts to pursue sustainable intensification will affect: biodiversity and land-use; animal welfare; human nutrition; rural economies; and sustainable development.

'To feed the world's growing population, we must do more than simply produce more food per unit area in ways that exert less pressure on the environment,' says Dr Toulmin.

'We must also ensure that food is diverse and rich in micronutrients, and that we make the right choices when allocating land for farm production or biodiversity.

'We must ensure that sustainable intensification contributes to other important goals for rural development, such as climate-resilient livelihoods for poor farmers, and we must revitalise agricultural extension services and use modern communications tools ensure that

these farmers can participate.'

Source: IIED

From **ECOS** online <http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?paper=EC13160>