

Food demand vs. food need

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A [recent report from PLOS One](#) finds that growth in global agricultural yield is not projected to keep up with growth in demand. Brad Plumer picked it up, and someone gave his post this blog-snappy headline: "[This terrifying chart shows we're not growing enough food to feed the world.](#)"

Well, not exactly. The report compares yield to human *demand*, not *need*. And a lot of us humans have been demanding a whole lot more food than we need. We [burn it as fuel](#), or [inefficiently convert it into way more meat than we should be eating](#), or simply [throw massive amounts of it away](#). Meanwhile, people are hungry—due to unjust distribution of the food that already exists.

Which isn't to say that the report's crap and we won't ever need to produce more food. We will (though [this doesn't mean](#) the highest-yield methods are the best or longest-sighted ones). But I wish the researchers didn't frame demand projections as practically inevitable, and conservation approaches as a mere afterthought:

Clearly, the world faces a looming and growing agricultural crisis. Yields are not improving fast enough to keep up with projected demands in 2050. However, opportunities do exist to increase production through more efficient use of current arable lands [\[4\]](#) and increasing yield growth rates by spreading best management practices and closing yield gaps under different management regimes [\[38\]](#)-[\[42\]](#) across the globe. A portion of the production shortfall could also be met by expanding croplands, but at a high environmental cost to biodiversity and carbon emissions [\[4\]](#), [\[43\]](#)-[\[45\]](#). Alternatively, additional strategies, particularly changing to more plant-based diets and reducing food waste [\[4\]](#), [\[46\]](#)-[\[48\]](#) can reduce the large expected demand growth in food [\[3\]](#), [\[4\]](#).

Add "stop using good food to make bad fuel" to that last sentence and you've got a reform program. Or you would if it wasn't confined to an aside about "additional strategies" alongside the obvious main one: grow way more food, so we can keep overconsuming and others can join us.