



Thirsty Crops, Hungry People: Climate Change Threatens Our Health

Western U.S. Drought

as of August 31, 2021

Drought level



California is facing extreme drought, making water insecurity a major issue for residents and the systems that rely on water. For example, these [droughts have ravaged California's agricultural hub, Central Valley](#), where farms produce over [60% of fruits and nuts](#) and over [30% of vegetables](#) in the United States. This year alone, it's projected that their rice production will drop 20 percent. Farms are struggling to grow food that serves the local community and far beyond, which impacts health.

Climate change is behind the extreme nature of these droughts as temperatures rise and water cycles are disrupted, causing rain and snow to come too infrequently or dangerously all at once.



Food Scarcity's Unequal Impacts

The impacts of decreased food production has many health impacts. Black and Latino households already experience [food insecurity rates of at least twice](#) that of non-Hispanic White households. When food insecurity rises because of climate change, these households are hit first and hardest with rising food costs, making healthy food options like fruits, vegetables, and other produce even less accessible. Rural and tribal communities that rely on smaller water supplies are also more [at risk to food scarcity when there are droughts](#).

The economic impacts of threats to agriculture are also uneven in the United States. Farm workers, [a majority of whom in California are Latino](#), face more dangerous working conditions as temperatures rise and take an economic toll as demand for labor falls, impacting the area's economy and the farmers' own ability to feed themselves and their families. The stress of these experiences has been connected with [increased rates of depression and anxiety](#).

What We Can Do: Changing Our Food System to Prepare for and Prevent Climate Change and Improve Health

There are many ways we can improve how we grow, transport, and consume food to improve health and address climate change, and starting with how we grow food can have a substantial impact. Improving the way we use and manage our soil can help protect crops from climate change that is already locked in from past emissions, capture and store carbon to reduce future climate change, and [even make food more nutritious](#). Most of all, our soil is one of the best ways to trap carbon dioxide greenhouse gasses; if enough farms implemented regenerative agriculture, [we could begin to reverse the impacts of climate change](#).

Promoting Policies that Reinforce Solutions

In California, some school districts across the state have already started reducing the carbon footprint of their food by serving healthier plant-based entrees, which often run out quickly because they are so popular. In 2019, the EAT-Lancet Commission acknowledged the link between human health and environmental sustainability. They proposed a diet rich in plant-based foods.

In order to extend and reinforce the state's ability to provide plant-based lunches, California Bill AB-479 applied insights directly from EAT-Lancet Commission to provide critical technical and financial support to expand menu offerings and encourage many other schools to follow suit.

