UN: Change Land Use To Avoid A Hungry Future

If global warming isn't personal enough to scare you to death, the UN trots out the rabid notion that you are going to starve to death as a result of it. Coupled with rising sea levels and shortages of drinking water, mankind has no future unless... it adopts Sustainable Development. ⎕ TN Editor

Human-caused climate change is dramatically degrading the Earth's land and the way people use the land is making global warming worse, a new United Nations scientific report says. That creates a vicious cycle which is already making food more expensive, scarcer and less nutritious.

"The cycle is accelerating," said NASA climate scientist Cynthia Rosenzweig, a co-author of the report. "The threat of climate change affecting people's food on their dinner table is increasing."

But if people change the way they eat, grow food and manage forests, it could help save the planet from a far warmer future, scientists said.

Earth's land masses, which are only 30% of the globe, are warming twice

as fast as the planet as a whole. While heat-trapping gases are causing problems in the atmosphere, the land has been less talked about as part of climate change. A special report, written by more than 100 scientists and unanimously approved by diplomats from nations around the world Thursday at a meeting in Geneva, proposed possible fixes and made more dire warnings.

"The way we use land is both part of the problem and also part of the solution," said Valerie Masson-Delmotte, a French climate scientist who co-chairs one of the panel's working groups. "Sustainable land management can help secure a future that is comfortable."

Scientists at Thursday's press conference emphasized both the seriousness of the problem and the need to make societal changes soon.

"We don't want a message of despair," said science panel official Jim Skea, a professor at Imperial College London. "We want to get across the message that every action makes a difference."

Still the stark message hit home hard for some of the authors.

"I've lost a lot of sleep about what the science is saying. As a person, it's pretty scary," Koko Warner, a manager in the U.N. Climate Change secretariat who helped write a report chapter on risk management and decision-making, told The Associated Press after the report was presented at the World Meteorological Organization headquarters in Geneva. "We need to act urgently."

The report said climate change already has worsened land degradation, caused deserts to grow, permafrost to thaw and made forests more vulnerable to drought, fire, pests and disease. That's happened even as much of the globe has gotten greener because of extra carbon dioxide in the air. Climate change has also added to the forces that have reduced the number of species on Earth.

"Climate change is really slamming the land," said World Resources Institute researcher Kelly Levin, who wasn't part of the study.

And the future could be worse.

"The stability of food supply is projected to decrease as the magnitude and frequency of extreme weather events that disrupt food chains increases," the report said.

In the worst-case scenario, food security problems change from moderate to high risk with just a few more tenths of a degree of warming from now. They go from high to "very high" risk with just another 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit (1 degree Celsius) of warming from now.

"The potential risk of multi-breadbasket failure is increasing," NASA's Rosenzweig said. "Just to give examples, the crop yields were effected in Europe just in the last two weeks."

Scientists had long thought one of the few benefits of higher levels of carbon dioxide, the major heat-trapping gas, was that it made plants grow more and the world greener, Rosenzweig said. But numerous studies show that the high levels of carbon dioxide reduce protein and nutrients in many crops.

For example, high levels of carbon in the air in experiments show wheat has 6% to 13% less protein, 4% to 7% less zinc and 5% to 8% less iron, she said.

But better farming practices — such as no-till agricultural and better targeted fertilizer applications — have the potential to fight global warming too, reducing carbon pollution up to 18% of current emissions levels by 2050, the report said.

If people change their diets, reducing red meat and increasing plant-based foods, such as fruits, vegetables and seeds, the world can save as much as another 15% of current emissions by mid-century. It would also make people more healthy, Rosenzweig said.

The science panel said they aren't telling people what to eat because that's a personal choice.

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Amazon Bonds With Law Enforcement Over Ring Cameras

Amazon is providing police with blanket surveillance in neighborhoods but homeowners bear the cost of installing its Ring cameras that replace doorbells with Internet connected cameras. Privacy? Forget it! ⬜ TN Editor

On July 12, a few hours before dawn, a man in Chandler, Arizona, was jolted awake by an alert on his phone. It was coming from his Ring security camera, which had detected movement outside his home.

The live feed showed a group of young men breaking into cars. The man hollered at them through his front door, then called the police.

As an officer arrived, the men sped off in a car, leaving behind cellphones, tools and other things they'd taken during their interrupted burglary spree. They abandoned the getaway vehicle in a housing complex and turned themselves in later that morning.

By then, the homeowner had showed police his camera footage and posted it to Neighbors, an app run by Ring, which is owned by Amazon. Ring doesn't just make the wireless security cameras — it also accesses police data to alert residents of potential crimes, encourages users to share recordings of suspicious behavior themselves, and connects them with law enforcement.

"Thank goodness for the Ring!!!" the man wrote on Neighbors.

"Thanks for posting," a Chandler police officer responded.

The exchange was typical of the way police are using Ring, helping it spread its business while using it to detect and investigate crime. The arrangement in Chandler is among dozens of such partnerships around the country, and part of a much broader effort by Amazon to deepen its reach into law enforcement — which critics say is expanding the government's surveillance of Americans.

Amazon, known mainly for its online consumer marketplace, is becoming a potent resource for federal, state and local authorities, peddling an array of tools that harness the power of cloud-based computing, artificial intelligence and video analysis.

Some of the products seem mundane, offering agencies a relatively cheap method of storing, sharing and crunching data through networks of remote web servers known as the cloud. Others are contentious, making it easier for police to identify and monitor people. Together, they show how one company has broadened its influence by supplying law enforcement with technology that has modernized crime-fighting but is evolving too fast for government oversight to keep up.

Amazon's government work has become a significant component of the company's move beyond e-commerce and into tools that run the internet. Its government contracts, through the company's cloud-computing subsidiary, Amazon Web Services, have ballooned from $200 million in 2014 to $2 billion today, said Daniel Ives, who researches Amazon at the financial advisory firm Wedbush Securities. That has allowed the company to build "a fortress of cloud deals" that include police departments, federal law enforcement, national intelligence agencies

and immigration authorities.

"In so many investigations, time is of the essence, and this enables many police departments to access data so much more quickly and in forms that are much more helpful," Ives said.

But critics say Amazon's products and services also show how a corporation can position itself within government in ways that could lead to overreach and abuse.

Privacy and civil liberties advocates have warned that the Ring partnerships are creating a new layer of government surveillance. Amazon employees, artificial intelligence researchers and activist investors have asked the company to stop selling its facial recognition service to law enforcement, to stop providing web-hosting services that help federal immigration authorities, and to create a committee that would review the potential societal consequences of its products.

"While providing secure cloud storage does not appear to pose privacy threats, providing a package of technologies that includes powerful surveillance tools like facial recognition and doorbell cameras, plus the capability to pool data into a massive database and run data analytics, does create very real privacy threats," said Sharon Bradford Franklin, policy director of New America's Open Technology Institute, a nonprofit that advocates for digital rights.

For example, Franklin said, a homeowner might voluntarily share the footage from their doorbell camera with police seeking clues to a nearby crime. The police might then run the video through facial recognition software, which is imperfect and might incorrectly identify innocent people as potential suspects. Those wrong matches could then be shared with other agencies, such as immigration enforcement, with far-reaching consequences.

"I am not sure Amazon has quite grappled with how their innovative technologies intersect with issues of privacy, liberty and government police power," said Andrew Ferguson, a law professor at the University of the District of Columbia who studies how police use technology.

"The pushback they are getting comes from a failure to recognize that there is a fundamental difference between empowering the consumer with information and empowering the government with information. The former enhances an individual's freedom and choice, the latter limits an individual's freedom and choice."

When law enforcement agencies are the customers, a company has an obligation to slow down, Ferguson said.

But Amazon is not slowing down. It says it has a duty to help police, defense and intelligence agencies.

"We believe our customers — including law enforcement agencies and other groups working to keep our communities safe — should have access to the best technology and believe that cloud services can materially benefit society," Amazon said in a statement.

'A game changer for law enforcement'

Police often say that they're not interested in which company sells a piece of technology, as long as the product is affordable and easy to use and helps keep people safe.

That is the philosophy in Chandler, a rapidly growing city outside Phoenix, where authorities noticed an increase in the number of residents who'd outfitted their homes with a new generation of internet-connected video cameras that monitor activity outside their front doors. The Chandler Police Department began looking for ways to make use of that growing network, and came across the Neighbors app.

The app is run by Ring — [bought by Amazon](#) for an estimated $1 billion in early 2018 — which uses Neighbors to promote its popular line of doorbell cameras by encouraging members to share videos of suspicious activity. The platform includes a law enforcement portal that allows police departments [to post alerts and request video](#) from members who live near where a crime occurred. The portal can tell police agencies if anyone in a particular area recorded a Ring video at the time of a crime.

Chandler police got access to the portal by entering into an agreement with Ring in which the company agreed to "seed" the partnership with a donation of 25 cameras to the department. The department gets another free camera for every 20 people who sign up [using a particular text code](), Assistant Chief Jason Zdilla said. The city has given the free cameras away as door prizes to boost attendance at community meetings, he said.

The agreement — which appears to be a boilerplate document used in partnerships with police agencies around the country — also allows Ring to access Chandler Police Department's "incidents/call logs." Ring obtains that information through the city's publicly available data portal and uses it to post alerts on Neighbors.

More than 20,000 Chandler residents are now on the Neighbors app, according to Zdilla. Police typically use the videos posted there to investigate property crimes, such as car break-ins and package thefts, but have also used the app to seek evidence of more serious crimes, including a fatal shooting. The department has an officer in each of its precincts assigned to search Neighbors for residents' posts about potential crimes. But the department has also had to address false perceptions, stoked by the app and the publicity around it, that crime is on the rise.

Most videos obtained by police through Ring are voluntarily provided by homeowners, according to police and Amazon; the company declined to say how many subpoenas or court orders it has received for access to videos.

"This is a game changer for law enforcement because it basically is a virtual block-watch giving us the ability to communicate with a large number of people and the ability to ingest video from cameras in any case," said Chandler police Cmdr. Edward Upshaw, who manages the department's partnership with Ring. "It's more information, more intelligence. We have a better sense of what's going on in every single neighborhood."

By embracing law enforcement in this way, Amazon has expanded Ring's

national network, from Fresno, California, to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, from Houston to Norfolk, Virginia. Amazon declined to say how many police agencies have arrangements with Ring, but the nonprofit group Fight for the Future, which advocates against government surveillance, has [assembled a map](#) that identifies more than 50 of them.

The strategy fits into Amazon's aim to improve its home-delivery operations; the use of Ring cameras to catch people stealing packages from the front of homes has become a television news staple. Amazon has also provided materials to police to [conduct](#) [sting](#) [campaigns](#) aimed at luring thieves to snatch Amazon-labeled bait boxes from doorsteps under surveillance by Ring cameras. And the company has [filed a patent application](#) for outfitting Ring cameras with facial recognition.

Amazon's investment in this technology has prompted warnings that it is contributing to the creation of a runaway surveillance state fed by an overblown fear of crime.

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Germany Fights Global Warming, Slaps Tax On Sausage

The non-existent evidence behind the claim that livestock produce more emissions globally than do automobiles is driving attacks on the meat industry with taxes being levied to discourage consumption. ⁂ TN Editor

German legislators have proposed raising the sales tax on meat from seven percent to 19 percent to fight climate change and improve animal welfare.

Research has [shown](#) that greenhouse gas emissions from livestock account for a higher percentage of total global emissions than the world's 1.2 billion automobiles, a fact [underscored](#) by some German Greens who are pushing for higher meat taxes,

A United Nations [report](#) from 2012 found that the earth's cattle population generates more carbon dioxide than automobiles, planes, and all other forms of transport *combined*. Moreover, the cow pies they deposit and the wind they break produce a third of the world's methane emissions, considered 20 times more detrimental to the environment.

According to Germany's Federal Statistics Office, slaughterhouses in Germany killed 29.4 million pigs, cows, sheep, goats and horses during the first six months of 2019. During this period, Germany produced 3.9 million tons of meat, led by pork, the primary ingredient in German sausages.

"I favor abolishing the VAT reduction for meat and using it (the increased revenues) instead for more animal welfare," said Greens agriculture spokesman, Friedrich Ostendorff.

The idea of raising meat taxes would be to reduce livestock numbers — as well as their gaseous output — by discouraging people from eating meat.

Last June, Germany's Green party vowed to ban industrial farming to reduce global warming if it ever were to come to power.

The [measure](#) was proposed by Katrin Goering-Eckardt, the party's leader in the Germany parliament, as part of a massive €100 billion project to finance climate initiatives.

Even prior to this, in 2013, the Green party had sought to launch a weekly, meatless "veggie day," a project that reportedly failed to garner much support from ordinary citizens.

Recalling this fiasco, Christian Lindner, the leader of the pro-business Free Democrats, warned last June that the Greens "dream of a meat-less country."

"Whoever wants to be vegan is free to do so, but the rest of us shouldn't be banned from eating our schnitzel," Mr Lindner said.

Germany is not alone in proposing meat tax hikes to combat global warming.

In March of 2018, a *New York Times* [op-ed](#) put forward the idea of a special tax on the beef industry to compensate for the alleged damage Big Beef has caused to the environment by provoking climate change.

In his article titled "The Case for a Carbon Tax on Beef," Richard Conniff contended that it is time to break off "our collective love affair with beef" because the cattle industry "has a larger impact on the environment than that of any other meat or dairy product."

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