

Water for food and energy

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The World Economic Forum lists water crises as the largest risk in terms of potential global impact. The quickly growing water footprint of humanity strongly relates to the increasing consumption of animal products and biofuels. International trade has made water a global resource; for example, 60% of the water footprint of Italian consumers is outside Italy. To ensure the sustainable, efficient and equitable use of the world's limited freshwater resources and become less dependent on insecure imports, we need to adopt four principles. First, governments should agree on water footprint caps per river basin. Second, we need to establish water footprint benchmarks for the most important water-intensive products, for example for food and beverage products, cotton and biofuels. The benchmark for a product will depend on the maximum reasonable water consumption in each step of the product's supply chain, given best available technology. Third, we need to ensure equitable water use across communities. Eating less meat, the biggest water user in our diet, and stopping the rapid growth in biofuels will be most effective. Fourth, Europe, which strongly depends on imports from severely water-scarce regions, should become more self-sufficient in supplying its own food.