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How will we feed and water 10 million Londoners by 2031?

First posted on https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/how-will-we-feed-and-water-10-million-londoners-by-2031-a3629106.html

Extra farmland more than one and a half times the size of London will have to be cultivated to grow the food needed for the capital's booming population by 2031, according to new analysis.

The figures reveal the huge resources that will be necessary to keep western Europe's biggest conurbation fed as it continues to expand rapidly over the coming decades.

London's population rose by more than 100,000 in the year to June 2016. It stands at about 8.8 million and is expected to hit 10 million by the early 2030s, according to recent data from the Office for National Statistics.

On current trends, over the next quarter of a century an area of fields three times the size of Camden will have to be cultivated with wheat. Land the size of Lewisham will be required for the extra potatoes consumed by Londoners, the research reveals.

It is published as the Standard, in partnership with agri-science company Syngenta, today highlights the increasing challenge posed by the population explosion with a 3D installation on the concourse at King's Cross station.

The artwork visualises the London landscape taken over by wheat fields and sunflower plantations, while a series of infographics explain how the pressure on resources such as water and soil will increase.

They also address how innovations in agriculture can reduce the impact. The predicted population growth means that the "field" needed to feed the capital will grow from 12.1 times the size of London now to between 12.6 and 13.3 times as big by 2031, assuming current consumption levels.

However, according to Syngenta's analysis, an area up to 30 times bigger than London would have to be allocated to feeding its population if it had not been for breakthroughs in modern agricultural techniques, such as seed breeding and crop protection, since the Sixties.

In addition, a new "lake" of fresh water more than 500 times bigger than Loch Ness will be needed to water the crops feeding Londoners, as well as for use for washing, showering and bathing.

Gary Mills-Thomas, Syngenta's UK and Ireland head, said: "We are extremely excited about this unique opportunity to raise awareness on the facts and figures behind food production and the vital role played by modern farming in ensuring the required food supplies in our societies.

"Also this event is giving us the opportunity to listen and take on board the opinions and concerns of the general public on these matters.

"At Syngenta we believe that an open and constructive relationship with society will strengthen our commitment to continuously invest in research and innovation in order to provide farmers with advanced solutions for a sustainable quality food production."

The argument was challenged by Peter Melchett, policy director at the Soil

Association, who said: “What Syngenta fails to mention is that we are required by UK law to cut greenhouse emissions from food and farming by 80 per cent by 2050.

“Scientists agree that the only way we can achieve this, and feed everyone a healthy diet by 2050, is to adopt agro-ecological farming systems such as organic, review diets, and do without most or all manufactured fertilisers. We also need to make these same changes to reverse the catastrophic declines in farmland wildlife, to end diffuse pollution from farming and to radically improve animal welfare.

“The main challenges facing farming in the future are not about increasing yields, as suggested by Syngenta. Instead we need to look at our farming systems, our diets and our environmental impacts in a holistic way.”

Mr Mills-Thomas responded: “New genetic techniques in seeds, precision application of crop protection chemicals, and greater accuracy in planting and harvesting is delivering measurably improved environmental and yield outcomes from our farm land.

“To dismiss new agricultural technology is to accept more land being cleared for crops to feed a growing population with the knock-on impact on carbon-capturing woodland and wild spaces and the biodiversity it supports.”