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In 20 Years, We Will Need a Second Earth

By [Ariel Schwartz](#)



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If humanity continues sucking up resources at its current rate, we will need a second planet to meet our material needs by 2030 and the equivalent of 2.8 planets by 2050. That's the conclusion of the World Wildlife Fund's biennial "[Living Planet Report \[1\]](#)", which evaluates our ecological footprint--the total demand on Earth's ecosystems. The good news is, we can still turn things around.

The WWF's ecological footprint metric tracks "the area of biologically productive land and water required to provide the renewable resources people use, and includes the space needed for infrastructure and vegetation to absorb waste carbon dioxide (CO2)." According to the organization, our footprint exceeded the planet's capacity by 50% in 2007. It has doubled in size since 1966.

But humanity can still save itself--at least on the carbon footprint front:

WWF is currently carrying out a new analysis that shows how it is possible to ensure that global temperatures stabilize at less than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels whilst providing clean energy for the world. Using solutions with today's technology only, this involves some aggressive action to improve energy efficiency in buildings, appliances, transportation and industry...We estimate that such measures will allow 95 per cent of all energy to be provided from renewable sources.

A stabilized temperature won't solve all of our problems, however. Even with reduced CO2 emissions, the report says we would still need two planets by 2050 if 9.2 billion people were to munch on the diet of today's average Italian. Why have Italians been singled out? We're waiting for a response from the WWF on that one, but presumably the answer is because it is a fairly average Western diet, and despite all that healthy olive oil, it's also high in meat and dairy.

If the planet is to sustain all of us, we will have to make better use of existing land and sacrifice our penchant for meat and dairy products. That won't be easy, especially for developed countries. But until we find another Earth-like planet to settle on, it is a mathematical necessity.

Ariel Schwartz can be reached on [Twitter \[2\]](#) or by [email \[3\]](#).

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