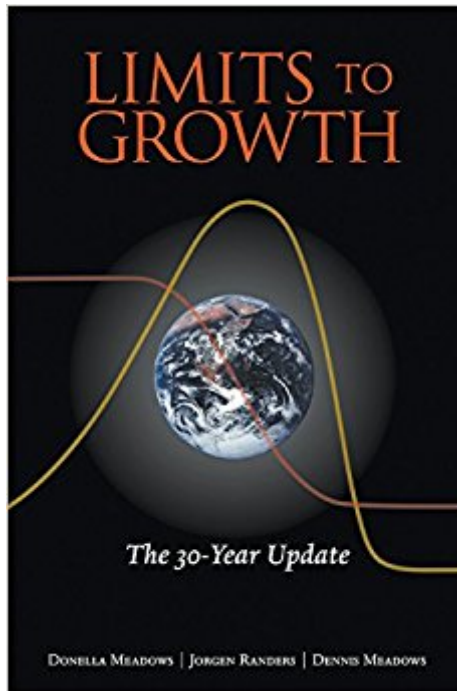




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Limits To Growth: The 30-Year Update



Synopsis

In 1972, three scientists from MIT created a computer model that analyzed global resource consumption and production. Their results shocked the world and created stirring conversation about global 'overshoot,' or resource use beyond the carrying capacity of the planet. Now, preeminent environmental scientists Donella Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and Dennis Meadows have teamed up again to update and expand their original findings in *The Limits to Growth: The 30 Year Global Update*. Meadows, Randers, and Meadows are international environmental leaders recognized for their groundbreaking research into early signs of wear on the planet. Citing climate change as the most tangible example of our current overshoot, the scientists now provide us with an updated scenario and a plan to reduce our needs to meet the carrying capacity of the planet. Over the past three decades, population growth and global warming have forged on with a striking semblance to the scenarios laid out by the World3 computer model in the original *Limits to Growth*. While Meadows, Randers, and Meadows do not make a practice of predicting future environmental degradation, they offer an analysis of present and future trends in resource use, and assess a variety of possible outcomes. In many ways, the message contained in *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update* is a warning. Overshoot cannot be sustained without collapse. But, as the authors are careful to point out, there is reason to believe that humanity can still reverse some of its damage to Earth if it takes appropriate measures to reduce inefficiency and waste. Written in refreshingly accessible prose, *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update* is a long anticipated revival of some of the original voices in the growing chorus of sustainability. *Limits to Growth: The 30 Year Update* is a work of stunning intelligence that will expose for humanity the hazy but critical line between human growth and human development.

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Customer Reviews

Updated for the second time since 1992, this book, by a trio of professors and systems analysts, offers a pessimistic view of the natural resources available for the world's population. Using extensive computer models based on population, food production, pollution and other data, the authors demonstrate why the world is in a potentially dangerous "overshoot" situation. Put simply, overshoot means people have been steadily using up more of the Earth's resources without replenishing its supplies. The consequences, according to the authors, may be catastrophic: "We... believe that if a profound correction is not made soon, a crash of some sort is certain. And it will occur within the lifetimes of many who are alive today." After explaining overshoot, the book discusses population and industrial growth, the limits on available resources, pollution, technology and, importantly, ways to avoid overshoot. The authors do an excellent job of summarizing their extensive research with clear writing and helpful charts illustrating trends in food consumption, population increases, grain production, etc., in a serious tome likely to appeal to environmentalists, government employees and public policy experts. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

John N. Cooper, for [AxisofLogic.com](#)-This is a wonderful book. Originally published in 1972 as *Limits to Growth* and refreshed in 1992 in *Beyond the Limits*, the authors have now issued a 30-year appraisal [[Chelsea Green Publishing](#), ISBN 1-931498-58-X], in which they examine the progress made both in their understanding of the mechanisms underlying the impact of humanity on the world ecology and of steps taken toward remediating the accelerating approach to trainwreck that is mankind's ill-managed and uncontrolled 'footprint' on this planet's environment. Briefly, humanity has overshoot the limits of what is physically and biologically sustainable. That overshoot WILL lead to the collapse of the planetary environment's ability to support not only our species but much of the rest of the biosphere if we do not act rapidly and effectively to reduce our footprint. These conclusions provide reasons for both optimism and alarm: optimism because humanity has demonstrated its capacity to act appropriately in one specific instance; and alarm because thirty years have been largely wasted since the consequences of our failing to act were detailed. There is still time but the need to act quickly and effectively is urgent. The authors demonstrate that the most

critical areas needing immediate attention are: population; wasteful, inefficient growth; and pollution. They show how attention to all three simultaneously can result in returning the human footprint on the environment to manageable, sustainable size, while sharply reducing the disparity between human well-being and fostering a generous quality-of-life worldwide. Absent this, the prospects are grim indeed. The book is divided into three sections, the first outlining in principle the authors' systems analytical approach to understanding the planet's ecology. Their presentation is clear and comprehensible with an abundance of charts and figures that make visualizing the concepts easy. They successfully avoid the pitfalls of many technical presentations by using familiar analogies and largely avoiding professional jargon. As a result readers come away with insights not just into global interconnectedness of inputs, outputs, accumulation and feedback but also the significance of such dynamics in local, even personal, situations. The second section deals with the authors' updated and revised modeling program, World3, which they utilize to test the plausible effects of changes in human political, economic and social behavior on the environment. Their discussion of World3 focuses on the assumptions for, and results of, a variety of calculational scenarios. Details of their latest programming revisions are reserved for an index. Repeatedly they emphasize that their results are NOT prescriptive, but merely descriptive in general terms of likely consequences of humanity's failure or success in rising to meet the issues cited. Again excellent graphics for the various scenarios allow the reader to see at a glance what different approaches toward rectifying past, present and future environmental damage may have. The final chapters describe options open to humanity that the authors believe have the best chance of avoiding social, economic and probably political collapse in the next century or so. We have a choice: the human experiment, possibly even the biological experiment, that is life on this planet can yet succeed and persist in a sustainable way. But to do so will require our species as a whole consciously and deliberately to take immediate, remediating steps, now, seriously and adequately to address the issues we have so far failed to do so effectively. It IS up to us. © Copyright 2005 by AxisofLogic.com. (John N. Cooper)"In 1972, *The Limits to Growth* was published as a clarion call to begin changing the way the world worked so we safely made it to 2050-2070. The authors were clear that the path of change needed to begin "now" so we made a course correction within the next 30 years. Sadly, the message they wrote got badly misunderstood and by 30 years later, scores of critiques to the book claimed the authors warned that the world would run out of oil and other scarce resources by 1990 or 2000. It is time for the world to re-read *Limits to Growth*! The message of 1972 is far more real and relevant in 2004 and we wasted a valuable 30 years of action plans by misreading the message of the first book."--Matthew R. Simmons, energy analyst and founder, Simmons & Company

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The book looks back at the conclusions in the book *The Limits To Growth* and assesses them based on recent data on energy, resources, the environment, etc. The original "Limits" book warned that continuing growth on the pattern of the past would lead to an "overshoot" and collapse of industrial civilization within a century. This book demonstrates conclusively that the world is now in "overshoot," using resources and producing wastes and environmental impacts in a way that won't be sustainable over the generations just ahead. The analysis is sobering, but it never gives way to gloom and doom. The best parts of the book are its clear, thoughtful recommendations on how to back down our impacts and avoid a collapse.

The 30-year update to "Limits to Growth" is possibly the most thought-provoking environmental book I've ever read. I had not read the original, but knew it was heavily criticized as "hysterical" by free-market enthusiasts, especially economist Julian Simon. So, I wasn't expecting the thoughtful, cautious, and considered analysis of the likely scenarios of an ever-expanding human population facing finite resources. The authors make an excellent point that infinite growth (people, food, water, economy, etc.) is simply not possible. Yet, every politician in the world advocates a policy of never-ending growth. The point of the book is not that we will all die from starvation. The point of the book is that if we do not want to run out of resources and live a miserable existence, we have to start planning now. Excellent book to read for your own education, and in some ways, it serves as an antidote to the popular culture's love affair with growth and consumption at any cost.

It makes so much sense---we are in overshoot on our way to collapse. In such simple and convincing ways, these process engineers lay it out with their updated model and give you a semi-academic vocabulary and analysis that provides a strong critique versus stupid unplanned growth economics. And they show how making substantial yet not impossible changes could change the fortunes and bring us back to a sustainable balance. Do they overly-discount the potential benefits of new technology yet to be discovered to prevent collapse? I hope to hell they do because if there is anything that is clear, it is that human nature has 1) blind faith in new technology to save us (e.g. how else could nuclear power/waste be justified?) and 2) there is no way that humans will make substantial changes prior to collapse--balance will only be achieved afterwards and of course that means it will be less-rational, more-drastic, less-controllable, more-expensive, more-devastating, etc.

This is an amazing explanation of the present world condition in terms of its coined word, "Overshoot": population and food supply, resources and climate warming, and political ramifications. Its amazement lies in the balanced development and explanation of each topic. It is a worthy study for anyone interested in understanding our overall situation, but, it is an amazing primer on how to write about something so disgraceful in such controlled language and example.

An interesting read that offers a great example of a complex model. The explanations of the feedback loops are great for those new to stochastic modeling. The application and analysis paints an unbiased view of what may occur if nothing changes which is hard to hear for some but necessary to hear for all. Overall the authors do a good job building the model in the readers head from a component by component level until the entire system can be realized. A recommended read for those familiar with probabilistic modeling or interested in the ramifications of short sighted actions to the long term welfare of the planet.

The theories are sound logic to me, but their computer models sound silly. Of course if we use more resources than we make, eventually the planet will run out. Models are only as good as the underlying factors and the margin for error is nothing more than a best guess. Nevertheless, if you look past the fancy model, the book is a great warning about what we have done to our planet. Kind of a scary ending where it looks like our only way to survive is to stop population growth (Can't china teach India how to use birth control)?

Limits to Growth gives an updated version of the original paper/book. It goes into enough detail to be informative, but does not get bogged down in just one aspect or topic. Seems to be a wake-up-call for all of us to be more informed, more in touch with everything that we do and take for granted in our American lifestyle, and gives some concrete suggestions about what to do about it. Certainly worth the time spent reading it. If it does nothing more than make us aware of how fragile our life (style) is, it is worth the investment. Read it, enjoy it, but take it to heart and DO something about it!

Meadows' update on the original Limits to Growth brings a helpful focus to the modeling used to project resource depletion and all of the other projections provided in this book. Beware, though, that this is an update for 2003. I look forward to seeing the update for 2013. Although Meadows is

no longer with us, the pioneering work of Limits to Growth will continue to have an impact, as evidenced by the widespread use of computer modeling today to project anthropogenic influences on the earth overall. It would be good to see that work featured in the next update.

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