



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Science Committee Ranking Member Frank Lucas

Full Committee Hearing: Nature in Crisis: Biodiversity Loss and Its Causes

June 4, 2019

Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson, for holding this hearing and providing a platform to hold constructive dialogue on this issue.

The IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services is a 1,700-page report that was just released yesterday morning. I will be the first to admit I have not read the complete report and I admire any of my colleagues who found the time to do so. The purpose of this hearing is to examine the report's Summary for Policymakers.

While I welcome today's discussion, I would be remiss if I didn't say that waiting a week or two for time to read the full report and understand the underlying process used to reach conclusions would serve us better.

With that being said, I look forward to a productive discussion on how we can use innovation to combat the most pressing changes in global biodiversity.

Biodiversity, or the variability of species and ecosystems, plays a significant role in all aspects of human well-being. It's particularly important to agricultural producers who lead a system that feeds and clothes billions of people every day.

The IPBES report ranks land and sea use at the top of their five biggest drivers of change in nature and concludes that agricultural expansion is the most widespread form of land use change. This expansion of agricultural lands is a direct result of the need to feed the growing population.

The global population is on track to reach nearly 10 billion people by 2050, and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Association estimates that global food production will need to double by that time. That is why we must support innovation and research that will make food production more efficient and environmentally beneficial.

Increasing production while eliminating waste of all kinds, including land waste, is the goal of any operation. The best way to accomplish this in agriculture is utilizing modern science and conservation principles coupled with proven management practices.

The United States has been the model of conservation through voluntary coordination and innovation, and we must continue to carry that torch. Following the immense soil erosion and drought of the Dust Bowl, federal, state, and local governments partnered with producers to solve the disaster.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration initiated programs to conserve soil and restore the ecological balance of the nation. With producers leading the way, these U.S. programs and institutions that incentivize conservation have been incredibly successful and are still in effect today.

We have also benefitted from innovations like those of Nobel Peace Prize recipient Dr. Norman Borlaug, who developed varieties of semi-dwarf, high-yield, disease-resistant wheat. This variety's introduction to India and Pakistan during the population boom of the 1960s is credited with starting the Green Revolution and saving up to 1 billion people from starvation.

There are even more exciting innovations on the horizon. Genetic engineering and gene editing have the potential to produce plant varieties that require less land, water, and fertilizer all while increasing biodiversity. This next generation of crop genetics are closer than we think and current investments in research will pay unmeasurable dividends in the future. One of our witnesses today, Mr. Jeff Goodwin, will discuss efforts at the Noble Research Institute to increase soil health and productivity through improved land management techniques.

Mr. Goodwin will speak to voluntary agricultural conservation practices led by producers that should serve as a model for different industries. We've seen incredible success from these industry-led efforts without resorting to burdensome regulations.

In closing, I would like to remind my colleagues of this Committee's jurisdiction. This topic walks a fine line with the Natural Resources Committee, so I encourage my fellow Members to focus on research and innovation that can be used as solutions, not the doom and gloom of predicting what *might* happen in the future.

Too often we are bogged down by the alarmingly negative headlines that stem from these reports. What I see is another opportunity to revolutionize. I see another opportunity for the United States to show yet again that we are the best in the world at solving the daunting and complex problems we all face.

I look forward to hearing more on technology innovations and environmental stewardship that looks to improve our crucial biodiversity while promoting economic growth. Thank you Madam Chair and I yield the balance of my time.

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