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Global crisis 'to strike by 2030'

By Christine McGourty
Science correspondent, BBC News

Growing world population will cause a "perfect storm" of food, energy and water shortages by 2030, the UK government chief scientist has warned.

By 2030 the demand for resources will create a crisis with dire consequences, Prof John Beddington said.

Demand for food and energy will jump 50% by 2030 and for fresh water by 30%, as the population tops 8.3 billion, he told a conference in London.

Climate change will exacerbate matters in unpredictable ways, he added.



Water shortages are predicted across large parts of Africa, Europe and Asia

'Complacent'

"It's a perfect storm," Prof Beddington told the Sustainable Development UK 09 conference.

"There's not going to be a complete collapse, but things will start getting really worrying if we don't tackle these problems."

Prof Beddington said the looming crisis would match the current one in the banking sector.

"My main concern is what will happen internationally, there will be food and water shortages," he said.

"We're relatively fortunate in the UK; there may not be shortages here, but we can expect prices of food and energy to rise."

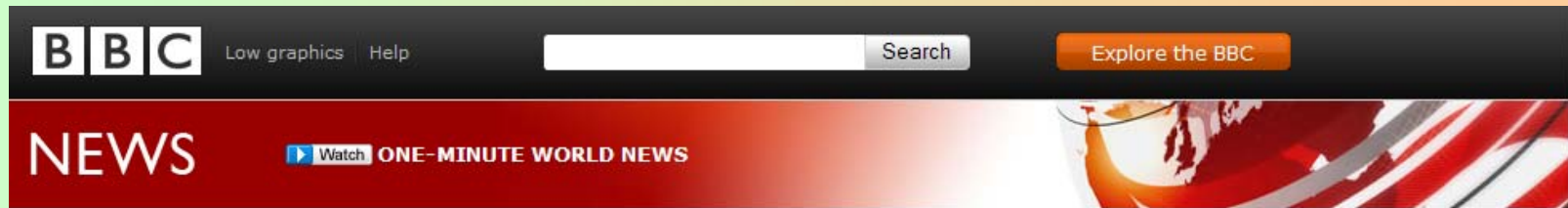
The United Nations Environment Programme predicts widespread water shortages across Africa, Europe and Asia by 2025.

The amount of fresh water available per head of the population is expected to decline sharply in that time.

The issue of food and energy security rose high on the political agenda last year during a spike in oil and commodity prices.



'Perfect storm' poses global threat, says Professor Beddington



Genetically-modified

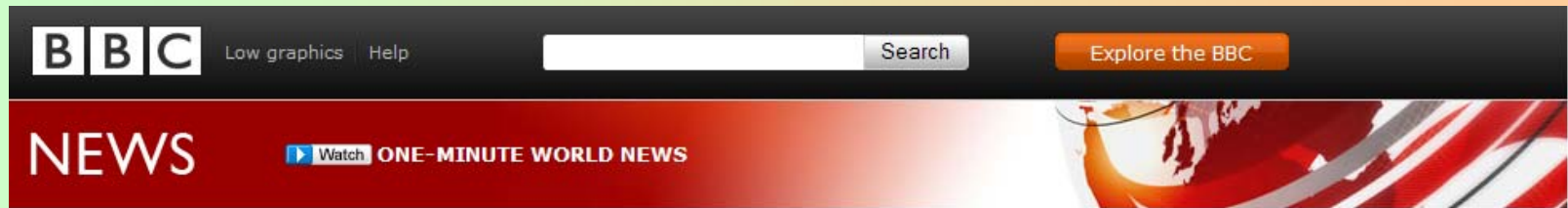
Prof Beddington said the concern now - when prices have dropped once again - was that the issues would slip back down the domestic and international agenda.

"We can't afford to be complacent. Just because the high prices have dropped doesn't mean we can relax," he said.

Improving agricultural productivity globally was one way to tackle the problem, he added.

At present, 30-40% of all crops are lost due to pest and disease before they are harvested.

Professor Beddington said: "We have to address that. We need more disease-resistant and pest-resistant plants and better practices, better harvesting procedures.



"Genetically-modified food could also be part of the solution. We need plants that are resistant to drought and salinity - a mixture of genetic modification and conventional plant breeding.

Better water storage and cleaner energy supplies are also essential, he added.

Prof Beddington is chairing a subgroup of a new Cabinet Office task force set up to tackle food security.

But he said the problem could not be tackled in isolation.

He wants policy-makers in the European Commission to receive the same high level of scientific advice as the new US president, Barack Obama.

One solution would be to create a new post of chief science adviser to the European Commission, he suggested.

Name: _____

