



Peak Oil? Peak Soil?

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You don't have to be a [peak oil](#) news junkie to know that something's up with the global oil supply. Yesterday, prices went above \$104 for the first time on the announcement from OPEC nations that they were quite satisfied with the amount of available supply (and the price that supply is fetching), rebuffing President Bush's request to open the spigot a little wider.

Reasonable people can disagree on the causes and the implications of rising oil prices, but there seems to be a gathering consensus that the era of easy and cheap oil is over. If you don't want to take my word on that, [then take it from an oil executive](#).

What few people grasp is the connection between oil and the food supply. Put simply, the food and farm economies of industrialized countries run on the stuff. Oil and its derivatives are used to power farm equipment, to create synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, to run food processing equipment, and to transport food from field to fork, a journey of 1500 miles for the average forkful.

It has been estimated that our highly-industrialized food system in the US requires 10 calories of fossil fuel energy to create 1 calorie of food energy. Needless to say, that equation just doesn't compute in the long run.

Meanwhile, as we're depleting one natural resource, we're busy creating an abundance of another: people. The UN estimates that the global population will approach 9 billion (up from the current 6.6 billion) by the year 2050. Last year, [an article in the British paper The Guardian pointed out the enormity of the challenge we face](#) in feeding 9 billion people. In order to do this, we will need to produce more food over the course of the next 50 years than we have produced in the past 10,000 years combined.

So, what's the solution? The answer to peak oil is peak soil. The more people who have their hands in it and have a little of it under their fingernails, the better placed we will be to feed our communities and, indeed, the world.

There are different things you can do to be part of the solution. If you are a gardener already, keep up the good work this spring and try to scale up your growing, if your time and space allow. More importantly, try to bring some non-gardeners into the fold this year, perhaps by organizing a backyard or community gathering on [Kitchen Garden Day](#). If you're not a gardener, this is the year to start.



FOOD & SOCIETY POLICY FELLOWS

If you can't garden because of where you live, make as direct a connection as you can with someone in your area who's growing and selling food whether it's through regular purchases at a farmer's market or membership in a community supported agriculture (CSA) farm. Your support helps protect that farmland from development and helps keep that farmer farming.

We can't change what President Bush or OPEC will do today, but we can change our own actions and that's a good place to start.

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