The Coming Famine: The Global Food Crisis And What We Can Do To Avoid It.


Julian Cribb is a renowned journalist and specialist in science communication. He has published more than 7000 articles and is an author of five books. He teaches science communication at Australian National University. His most recent book “The Coming Famine” is an excellent attempt to address substantial problems that the world’s population is going to face in the middle of this century. The problems that are presented in the book include shortage of food and scarcity of resources to produce safe, healthy, and affordable food, fiber, and fuel. The book has been divided into twelve chapters, each highlighting specific issues/challenges to humanity.

The introductory chapter “What Food Crisis?” provides lucid information to the reader that a man-made food crisis and its unbearable consequences are major concerns of every individual on the planet earth. The international farming community has to take the lead and double food production by using fewer inputs with sky-high prices and scarce resources. The author depicts a strong and positive correlation between famine (shortage of food, water, and land) and war in the second chapter. This relationship can be broken down by increasing the gap between production and consumption which is narrowing due to over population. The most noticeable decrease of crop yield, which in turn boosts food prices, affects at least one billion people around the globe. The crisis can only be solved by saving and recycling water, through creating awareness and incentives, and making technical advances. Population growth only contributes to water shortages by directly affecting the area under cultivation, and increasing soil toxicity and its context. The author pays tribute to the world’s farmers and agricultural scientists for their consistent efforts to produce more food per unit area of land.

The wastage of food and loss of nutrients (Chapter 5) are other concerns that are pulling us towards famine. Fertilizer use has been increased many fold as compared to food production. Chapter 6, “Troubled Waters”, provides a nice overview on the production and consumption of fish in the world. Fish production has shown a downward trend due to various reasons such as over fishing, water pollution, sea-level rise, and increasing soil toxicity. The shift of agricultural production (Chapter 7) from the public to the private sector, along with intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in the field of agriculture, will not only make it a profitable business but also increase starvation. However, transferring cultural technology from laboratories is of primary importance to boost agricultural production at a fast pace.

An increasing gap also exists between the supply and ever-increasing demand (Chapter 8). A dire need is felt in the chapter for improving agriculture research and development.