

# Growing tobacco

Tobacco is grown in over 120 countries on more than 4 million hectares of the world's agricultural land.

Globally, tobacco production has almost doubled since the 1960s, totalling nearly 6.5 million metric tonnes in 2004. In developing countries, increasing demand and favourable policies have resulted in a threefold increase in production, while production has declined by more than 50 percent in developed countries. If this trend continues as projected to 2010, more than 85 percent of the world's tobacco will be grown in developing countries.

Tobacco agriculture causes widespread environmental and public health problems. Pesticide and fertilizer runoff from fields and massive deforestation associated with tobacco curing damage the environment. Workers suffer pesticide poisoning, Green Tobacco Sickness (an occupational hazard unique to tobacco), and lung damage from exposure to tobacco and field dust.

Although tobacco farming is very profitable for multinational corporations, many small farmers are caught in a debt trap perpetuated by the tobacco companies.

The WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control calls for financial and technical assistance to tobacco growers in countries, such as Zimbabwe and Malawi, heavily dependent on tobacco agriculture. Shifting to economically viable and environmentally sound agricultural alternatives promises a healthier future for tobacco-producing nations.

