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# Sugar Produces Bitter Results for the Environment

Sugar Farming and Production Affect Soil, Water, Air and Biodiversity

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**Dear EarthTalk: What is the environmental impact of sugar, aside from its not-so-healthy aspects? Ive heard that the industry is no friend to the outdoor environment.** *Mary Oakes, via e-mail*Sugar is present in products we consume every day, yet we rarely give a second thought to how and where it is produced and what toll it may take on the environment.

### Sugar Production Damages the Environment

According to the [World Wildlife Fund](#) (WWF), roughly 145 million tons of sugars are produced in 121 countries each year. And sugar production does indeed take its toll on surrounding soil, water and air, especially in threatened tropical ecosystems near the equator.

Ads A 2004 report by WWF, titled [Sugar and the Environment](#), shows that sugar may be responsible for more biodiversity loss than any other crop, due to its destruction of habitat to make way for plantations, its intensive use of water for irrigation, its heavy use of agricultural chemicals, and the polluted wastewater that is routinely discharged in the sugar production process.

### Environmental Damage from Sugar Production is Widespread

One extreme example of environmental destruction by the sugar industry is the Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Australia. Waters around the reef suffer from large quantities of effluents, pesticides and sediment from sugar farms, and the reef itself is threatened by the clearing of land, which has destroyed the wetlands that are an integral part of the reefs ecology.

Meanwhile, in Papua New Guinea, soil fertility has

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WWF blames Europe and, to a lesser extent, the United States, for over-producing sugar because of its profitability and therefore large contribution to the economy. WWF and other environmental groups are working on public education and legal campaigns to try to reform the international sugar trade.

The world has a growing appetite for sugar, says Elizabeth Guttstein of the World Wildlife Fund. Industry, consumers and policy makers must work together to make sure that in the future sugar is produced in ways that least harm the environment.

**Can Everglades Damage from Sugar Cane Farming be Reversed?**

Here in the United States the health of one of the countrys most unique ecosystems, Floridas Everglades, is seriously compromised after decades of sugar cane farming. Tens of thousands of acres of the Everglades have been converted from teeming sub-tropical forest to lifeless marshland due to excessive fertilizer run-off and drainage for irrigation.

A tenuous agreement between environmentalists and sugar producers under a [Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan](#) has ceded some sugar cane land back to nature and reduced water usage and fertilizer run-off. Only time will tell if these and other restoration efforts will help bring back Floridas once teeming river of grass.

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declined by about 40 percent over the last three decades in heavy sugar cane cultivation regions. And some of the worlds mightiest riversincluding the Niger in West Africa, the Zambezi in Southern Africa, the Indus River in Pakistan, and the Mekong River in Southeast Asiahave nearly dried up as a result of thirsty, water-intensive sugar production.

**Do Europe and the U.S. Produce Too Much Sugar?**

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