



Drumbeat: December 22, 2010

Posted by [Leanan](#) on December 22, 2010 - 10:20am

[African Farmers Displaced as Investors Move In](#)

Across Africa and the developing world, a new global land rush is gobbling up large expanses of arable land. Despite their ageless traditions, stunned villagers are discovering that African governments typically own their land and have been leasing it, often at bargain prices, to private investors and foreign governments for decades to come.

Organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank say the practice, if done equitably, could help feed the growing global population by introducing large-scale commercial farming to places without it.

But others condemn the deals as neocolonial land grabs that destroy villages, uproot tens of thousands of farmers and create a volatile mass of landless poor. Making matters worse, they contend, much of the food is bound for wealthier nations.

[U.S. natgas rig count falls 10 to 931-Baker Hughes](#)

NEW YORK (Reuters) - The number of rigs drilling for natural gas in the United States slid by 10 this week to 931, oil services firm Baker Hughes said on Wednesday.

[Kurt Cobb: Will shale gas turn out to be an energy sink?](#)

The environmental and health horrors associated with shale gas drilling are now in the news on a daily basis. But I have begun to think about the issue in another way. All of these externalized costs have an energy cost. And, the toxic fracturing fluid--millions of gallons of which are pumped into each and every shale gas well--will stretch out the time frame during which such costs are borne. No one knows what will happen to the half of that fluid which never returns to the surface during operations. There is concern that it could migrate to drinking water aquifers and destroy the drinking water not just for the few who happen to live near a drilling site, but for people living in huge swaths of the United States by polluting water sources for large cities such as New York.

[Asian buyers still knocking on UK oil firms' doors](#)

(Reuters) - Bankers and analysts expect acquisition-hungry Asian national oil

companies (NOCs) to come drilling for more targets on the London Stock Exchange next year.

[Do Oil Price Spikes Cause Recessions?](#)

Okay, I have to admit, I didn't come up with the theory that major recessions are, in part, caused by spikes in the price of oil.

The idea as I originally heard it comes from Jeff Rubin, an energy analyst and former Canadian investment banker.

[How many bbl/day will \\$490 billion buy?](#)

Global exploration and production spending is expected to rise 11% to \$490 billion in 2011. The increase will be driven by gains in Latin America, the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia. Supermajors will show the largest increases. The big six including BP, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell and Total will increase spending by 18% in the aggregate. Much of the increase is related to liquefied natural gas projects. Pemex and Petrobras will drive Latin American spend.

[Pemex says does not expect hit to products supply after pipeline explosion](#)

Houston (Platts) - Pemex said Monday it does not expect its refined products supply to be negatively affected after an explosion at a 30-inch-diameter crude pipeline that brings feedstock to the Tula refinery.

The national refining system, particularly the Tula, Hidalgo, refinery, has sufficient supply of crude to continue its normal production, the state oil company said in a statement on its website.

[Saudi Aramco LPG exports to fall 24% in 2011 to 6.5 million mt](#)

Singapore (Platts) - Saudi Aramco's LPG export for 2011 will slump 23.5% to anywhere between 6 million mt and 6.5 million mt as it diverts product to meet local demand, term customers and trade sources said Tuesday.

The Middle Eastern oil giant is expected to close 2010 with total exports of anywhere between 8 million mt and 8.5 million mt, in line with the volumes it shipped out in 2009.

[Insurers Join for Well Policies](#)

A new consortium announced Tuesday aims to provide stronger insurance coverage for

U.S. deep-water drilling amid congressional proposals to boost liability limits after this year's Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

[Suncor slapped with fine for river discharge](#)

(Reuters) - Suncor Energy Inc (SU.TO) has been ordered to pay C\$200,000 (\$198,000) in fines after pleading guilty to charges of releasing effluent into an Alberta river during construction of an oil sands mine in 2008.

[Halliburton pays \\$35m to Nigeria over graft case](#)

LAGOS, Nigeria — Halliburton says that Nigeria has withdrawn charges against Halliburton and executives including former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney after a \$35 million settlement.

Halliburton said in a statement Tuesday that it had agreed to pay \$35 million to the Nigerian government over "allegations of improper payments to government officials in Nigeria."

[Homeowners warned as heating oil thefts rise](#)

The national shortage of heating oil is leading to an increase in thefts, Avon and Somerset Police force has warned.

The force is warning people to ensure their fuel is secure after several oil tanks in south Somerset were targeted by thieves.

Heating oil has become a much sought-after commodity of late due to the high price and low supply throughout the UK.

[Concerns for fuel poverty among the elderly](#)

Concerns are mounting that the icy conditions will have a devastating effect on those suffering from fuel poverty, especially the elderly, according to the North West Pensioners' Association.

[China's Hubei rations power amid coal shortage](#)

BEIJING (Reuters) - Central China's Hubei province started rationing power supplies to some users from Wednesday, following similar moves by neighbouring Henan and northern Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces as coal stocks at power plants dwindled.

Hubei Grid Corp would cut 20 million kilowatt hours (kwh) of power to energy intensive

companies and small chemical makers today, the Changjiang Times reported on Wednesday.

[China Reduces Diesel Exports to Lowest in 22 Months](#)

(Bloomberg) -- China, the world's largest energy user, reduced net diesel exports to the lowest in 22 months in November as the nation battled a domestic shortage.

[TVA: Electricity demand on Dec. 14 broke record](#)

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (AP) -- The Tennessee Valley Authority set a record high December demand for electricity at 8 a.m. on Dec. 14.

A TVA statement Tuesday said the peak load of 31,436 megawatts was the highest for December in TVA history.

[Saudi Electricity eyes more private participation](#)

KHOBAR, Saudi Arabia (Reuters) - Saudi Electricity Co (SEC) may involve private firms in building more power plants to feed big consumers such as state oil giant Saudi Aramco, SEC's chief executive said on Tuesday.

[10 electric cars you can buy in 2011](#)

Not so long ago, electric vehicles were woeful. They were fringe models sometimes with no back seat, a short driving range or no amenities, or they were exorbitantly expensive converted gasoline-powered cars.

The idea of visiting a nearby car showroom to buy an electric car from a car company that might still be in business a year down the road was unheard of, until now. The first modern, mainstream electric vehicles are coming to market in 2011. Here are some of the options that will really, truly be available to car shoppers in most areas of the country in the next year ahead.

[U.S. challenges China subsidies for wind power](#)

WASHINGTON — The United States Wednesday accused China of illegally subsidizing the production of wind power equipment and asked for talks at the World Trade Organization, the first step in filing a trade case

[Plan to switch to solar energy gathers steam](#)

Karachi - On the pattern of the developed countries, Sindh Environment and Alternate Energy Department is planning to introduce solar stoves and cooking utensils, including solar pressure cookers, in the province to cut down on the use of natural gas for cooking and heating purposes.

[Top 10 peak oil stories of 2010](#)

The biggest stories of the year were financial. But you could say that the continuing Great Recession, the deficit debate, and more and more mortgage defaults were really stories of energy-driven economic crisis.

This year also had plenty of big stories directly on energy, including some breakthroughs on peak oil. Here are our top picks. It's a highly subjective list; so please chime in with any stories you think we left off.

[Energy and climate books I read in 2010](#)

Here is a selection of sustainable energy and climate change books I read in 2010. I've provided a few sentence summary of each book (from my perspective) and a Rating out of 5.

[James Hansen: A conversation with Bill McKibben](#)

The paperback version of my book *Storms of My Grandchildren: The Truth About the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our last Chance to Save Humanity* is now available. It includes, as an added section, a conversation between organizer Bill McKibben and me. Much of that Q&A is below. As was (and is) the case with the hardback and other formats of the book, all royalties go to 350.org. As I mention in the book, 350.org has demonstrated the most effective and responsible leadership in the public struggle for climate justice.

[Christmas plan for a peak oil pilgrim](#)

4. Pass on the 'Tacky Lights' tours.

You are just gonna poo-poo it and make people upset, all the while stuck in the microcosmic confines of an SUV full of overfed frenemies and family.

[Afghan official says Iran bans fuel exports](#)

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) -- Iran has banned fuel exports to Afghanistan, stranding about 3,000 fuel trucks at the border and driving up wholesale prices for the refined

products ahead of what many Afghans fear will be a blistery winter in their oil-poor nation, officials said Wednesday.

Although Tehran has not officially confirmed the move, it appears to reflect Iran's concern that the fuel is being funneled to NATO forces fighting the Taliban.

[Nigeria shuts refineries after pipeline attacks](#)

ABUJA (Reuters) - Nigeria's state-oil company said on Wednesday three of the country's four refineries were not operating because pipelines feeding the facilities were damaged in militant sabotage attacks.

The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) said vandalism of pipelines led it to shut down the Warri, Kaduna and Port Harcourt refineries but it did not say how long they had been out of action.

[Snohvit offline 'indefinitely'](#)

Norwegian giant Statoil has shut in the Snohvit liquefied natural gas plant for an unknown length of time, pinning the blame for the shutdown on "unspecified technical problems".

[2nd phase of China-Kazakhstan gas pipeline begins construction](#)

BEIJING -- The China National Petroleum Corp. (CNPC) disclosed Wednesday that the second phase of the China-Kazakhstan gas pipeline has begun construction in Kazakhstan.

[Indonesia says will consider more incentives for oil investors](#)

(Reuters) - Indonesia will consider offering more incentives to foreign investors to encourage oil and gas projects but will not agree to every demand made, an official said on Wednesday.

[Ottawa told to establish oil-sands monitor](#)

Canada lacks a world-class environmental monitoring system for the oil sands and one should be established under Ottawa's watch with funding from energy companies, an advisory panel of scientists commissioned by the federal government said Tuesday.

[Jordan moves to exploit its oil shale](#)

Jordan is pressing ahead with a plan to supply 14 per cent of its energy needs from oil shale, becoming only the second country in the world to exploit the unconventional fuel source commercially.

By 2020, oil shale could be the country's biggest energy source, even as Amman pursues large-scale wind and solar development and plans to build the Levant region's first civilian nuclear power plant. Jordan has the fourth-largest oil shale accumulation in the world. The 40 billion to 70 billion tonne resource, underlying as much as 60 per cent of the country's land surface, may contain the equivalent of 100 billion barrels of oil, according to the UK firm Jordan Energy and Mining, which is one of three companies holding 40-year oil shale concessions in the kingdom.

[US embassy cables: Ireland grappling with climate change and energy](#)

The Irish government is developing policy measures to deal with environment/energy concerns, including climate change, energy security, and power generation and distribution. A lack of indigenous energy resources has focused the government on a mix of energy efficiency and renewable power sources. The Irish government has not written off traditional fossil fuels, having "fast-tracked" the approval process for an LNG regasification terminal. It remains hopeful that significant gas fields will be uncovered in the North Atlantic. While planned additional electricity generating capacity looks sufficient to meet rising demand, the government will need to significantly upgrade the transmission system. A strong sense of urgency to tackle these issues, however, is lacking.

[Congress Waddles Ahead on Cleaning Up Diesel Fuel](#)

On Tuesday, presumably one of the last days of the 111th Congress, the House gave final passage to a five-year extension of the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act, which aims to clean up old diesel engines. The bill authorizes the \$500 million in spending over the next five years but does not actually appropriate any money; that is a battle for the next Congress.

[Kuwait moves to clean up oil lakes](#)

Two decades after Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait and set fire to its oil wells, the emirate is finally coming to grips with cleaning up the toxic oil lakes left behind.

[After Oil Spill Crisis, a Protector Keeps Watch](#)

The BP oil spill of 2010 has come and gone, mostly. The cleanup armies have been reduced to platoons, the oil company's public-relations blitz has lost its apologetic urgency, and you have to know where to look to find any remnants of the catastrophe. But Albertine Kimble, protector of these waters, is still here; she has neither forgotten nor forgiven.

She is not an oil rigger, or an oysterman, or a shrimper. She is the coastal program manager for Plaquemines Parish, tending to its wounded banks. She is also the parish itself, rooted generations-deep in its soft soil, an outdoorswoman living in a remote mobile home raised nine feet off the ground by creosote poles and galvanized girders.

[Icelandic clean energy solution in the desert](#)

Iceland's president says the UAE could be the first of many countries in the Middle East to develop geothermal resources.

[Singapore in tough environmental balancing act](#)

With a land area smaller than that of New York City, Singapore has no space among its five million citizens for wind farms, while it is devoid of hydro and geothermal power sources.

"We are dependent on fossil fuels because our small size severely limits our ability to switch to alternative energies," the National Environment Agency (NEA) said in a statement to AFP.

[Dr. David Fleming: a tribute](#)

'The next oil shock?', Fleming's April 1999 article for *Prospect* magazine, argued that the International Energy Agency's (IEA) most recent report represented a coded message, warning of an impending energy crunch with potentially profound impacts. After publication, to Fleming's surprise, Fatih Birol - the future Chief Economist of the IEA - suggested a meeting, at which Birol intimated that 'you are right... there are maybe six people in the world who understand this'. This encounter gave greater impetus to Fleming's drive to see an effective energy rationing scheme put in place. Having first published on his TEQs scheme in 1996, 2008 saw a UK Government funded pre-feasibility study into the idea, which will be followed by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Peak Oil's report in January 2011.

[America's Childlike Desire to Avoid Making Trade-Offs](#)

America has not yet grown up because it refuses to make any adult trade-offs that require sacrificing one desire to bring another desire within reach, or matching reality with competing demands. Energy offers a cogent example.

[Jeff Rubin: EIA's forecast is an energy fantasy land](#)

The recently released base case that will be used in the coming Annual Energy Outlook 2011 from the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration (EIA)

paints a future of cheap and abundant energy for the U.S. economy over the next quarter of a century. But its underlying assumptions are no more credible than those that underpinned the equally optimistic forecasts released by the International Energy Agency.

[Oil rises above \\$90 amid US crude supply drop](#)

SINGAPORE – Oil prices rose above \$90 a barrel Wednesday in Asia after a report showed U.S. crude supplies dropped more than expected for a second week, which suggests demand is improving.

[Oil to Reach \\$100 on OPEC Capacity Drop, Goldman Says](#)

(Bloomberg) -- A drop in OPEC spare production capacity will signal a “second stage” in the oil market’s recovery, lifting crude higher than \$100 a barrel by the second half of 2011, according to Goldman Sachs Group Inc.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries will supply more oil, reducing its spare capacity, as global inventory levels “normalize” from an overhang cause by the recession, the bank said in its 2011 commodities outlook dated yesterday. The 12-member group, which pumps about 40 percent of the world’s crude, said at a Dec. 11 meeting it will maintain production targets at levels agreed in December 2008.

[Fuel-Oil Loss in Asia Set to Jump to Two-Year High on Glut](#)

Refining losses from producing fuel oil in Asia may widen 30 percent to the most in two years in the next month as an increase in crude processing leads to a glut.

The loss from turning crude into the fuel, the so-called crack spread, may rise to \$13 a barrel by the end of January from about \$10 this month, a Bloomberg News survey of four traders showed. The last time it was at that level was in November 2008, when crude traded below \$60 a barrel, compared with almost \$90 today, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

[Gasoline up on tight Northeast supply](#)

Gasoline futures gained yesterday, as a problem at a refinery in the Caribbean contributed to tight supplies in the heavily populated Northeast and promised to help keep pump prices up heading into the New Year.

[China Raises Gasoline Prices for Third Time This Year as Crude Costs Jump](#)

China raised gasoline and diesel prices today by less than half of what crude oil has

gained in the past month as the world's fastest-growing major economy seeks to contain inflation.

[Japan's November Imports of Crude Oil, LNG Increase, Finance Ministry Says](#)

Japan's crude oil imports rose 5.8 percent in November to 18.8 million kiloliters from a year earlier, the finance ministry said in a preliminary report today.

[Oil imports to China set to slow in 2011](#)

China's appetite for oil may ease next year as the government takes steps to tackle inflation and work on expanding refineries slows, Bloomberg news reported Tuesday.

China may import 5.1 million barrels a day in 2011, up 6.3 percent from this year, according to the average of six analyst estimates in a Bloomberg survey. That compares with a 20 percent jump so far in 2010.

[Delta, American May Have to Raise Fares as Oil Climbs Toward \\$100 a Barrel](#)

Delta Air Lines Inc., American Airlines and other large U.S. carriers may be poised to boost fares with fuel surcharges as crude oil moves closer to \$100 a barrel.

"Every dollar that fuel rises erodes their earnings," said Jim Corridore, a Standard & Poor's equity analyst in New York. "It's not good news to see fuel prices back up. Once we start approaching \$100 a barrel, you'll start to see fuel surcharges come back."

[Why the oil price could go a lot higher from here](#)

I subscribe to 'Peak Oil' theory by the way. This is the idea that there is a finite amount of oil in the world, and at a certain point we will be consuming more than we can readily produce. Indeed, judging by all the deep-water exploration that goes on, it's probably fair to say that the easy-to-find oil is already long gone.

However, the inexorable rise you see in the chart above is as much a result of the declining purchasing power of money as it is of oil 'running out'.

['A big noise about nothing'](#)

When people refuse to look beyond their own noses, or the jumping stallion on their sports car, they can contradict whatever you say about the state of the world. Why is this a problem? Because the rich and powerful, who sit behind the closed glass doors of a boardroom or the windscreen of their motor car, tend to have loud voices and, because

of their position, many poorer people aspire to that state and therefore listen to their false proclamations. "Peak Oil is just a big noise about nothing," some of the people I meet tell me.

[Signs of the Peak: Oil and Gas M&A](#)

I submit it's not high oil prices that's driving M&A; but rather a decline in discoveries of easily accessible oil.

These deals didn't include drillers of easy-to-get-to stuff. Every single one involved a company that has expertise in getting energy from hard-to-reach places.

[Enbridge forced to ration pipe capacity](#)

Enbridge Inc. was forced to ration capacity again on its oil pipeline system, as shippers clamoured to move barrels out of Western Canada and the company conducted testing following ruptures last summer. Enbridge, which carries the bulk of Canada's oil exports to the United States, said on Tuesday five of its pipelines in the U.S. Midwest were overbooked for January shipments, extending a string of months in which it has had to ration space.

[Iran deploys police as gas prices go up](#)

(CNN) -- Police manned gas stations, some cab drivers raised fares and several residents complained privately after gas and oil prices rose in Iran this week when the country cut subsidies to bolster the nation's sagging economy.

A day after the cuts went into effect Sunday, the government deployed security forces to several major gas stations in the capital city, Tehran, to offset the threat of potential protests.

Witnesses told CNN they saw up to 20 police officers at three major gas stations in central and northern Tehran.

[Iraq's Oil Output Up By 100,000 B/D To 2.5 Million B/D - New Oil Min](#)

Iraq's crude oil production increased by 100,000 barrels a day to 2.5 million barrels a day from Wednesday, the newly appointed oil minister said Wednesday.

Abdul Kareem Luaiby, who was sworn in as new Iraqi oil minister Tuesday, said that the 100,000 barrels a day come from the southern Rumaila and Zubair oil fields which are being developed by international oil companies.

[Spring Deluge at Australian Coal Mines Will Force Gains in Global Prices](#)

Record rain and floods in north eastern Australia are disrupting coal output from Xstrata Plc and Rio Tinto Group mines. With more storms coming, prices are forecast to jump from the world's biggest exporter of the fuel.

"It never stops raining," said Peter Maguire, mayor of Queensland state's Central Highlands Regional Council, home to Xstrata's Rolleston mine, Rio's Kestrel operation and BHP Billiton Ltd.'s Blackwater venture. "It's forecast to rain until April-May."

[India to Seek Coal Mines in Africa to Plug Shortfalls in Domestic Supplies](#)

India's Coal Minister Sriprakash Jaiswal said state-run companies will seek deals to buy mines in South Africa, Botswana and Mozambique when he visits the continent next month in a bid to plug a domestic shortfall.

"The top priority is to buy coal mines," Jaiswal said in an interview in New Delhi yesterday. "We already have two mines in Mozambique and the government is seeking more there and in other countries in Africa."

[China May Spend \\$1.7 Trillion in Decade on Power Generation, 21st Reports](#)

China, the world's largest energy user, may spend 11.1 trillion yuan (\$1.7 trillion) in the next 10 years building electricity infrastructure, the 21st Century Business Herald reported today, citing a research report by the China Electricity Council.

[Partnership, collaboration at root of Research Shop at U of G](#)

Anne Bergen is a PhD student of applied social psychology. She was on the design team for the Research Shop in its early days and now is an embedded researcher with Transition Guelph, a new grassroots group interested in building community resilience in the face of climate change and declining reserves of peak oil by 2030.

Gas prices are poised to rise, Bergen said. The time to prepare is now.

"We want to present a message of hope though," she said. "Getting people aware is the first step."

[New Hepburn Shire mayor Rod May, from Blampied, wants 'can do' council](#)

Cr May also said climate change and peak oil had both been acknowledged by the council as "potential game changers" and that planning at all levels would need to encompass this phenomena.

[Parallels of 'Moby-Dick,' oil industry defined by writer](#)

Petroleum deposits have become the white whale of our time, becoming more difficult and more dangerous to find even as demand increases annually and threatens to explode in the coming years.

For one Westlake Village resident with years of experience as a Wall Street banker and working with the oil industry in Houston, there are many parallels between Melville's story of "Moby-Dick" in the waning years of the whale oil trade and what is happening now in what he calls the "Petroleum Age" of the past 150 years.

[Gulf oil spill voted top news story of 2010](#)

NEW YORK – The massive Gulf of Mexico oil spill, triggered by a deadly blast at a rig used by BP, was the top news story of 2010, followed by the divisive health care overhaul, according to The Associated Press' annual poll of U.S. editors and news directors.

[How nonprofit journalism is changing the 'news ecosystem'](#)

Today's msnbc.com story on how a super-toxic second generation of rat poisons is mysteriously seeping into the environment might have remained a buried and unnoticed piece of history if not for a new movement sweeping America: nonprofit journalism. It's an important force that is likely to become a key part of what folks are calling an evolving "news ecosystem" in this country. Today's pairing of the efforts of two nonprofit journalism entities with the for-profit msnbc.com is an example of the kind of experimentation that's becoming common.

[New level of Labor cynicism](#)

ACCORDING to a popular theory of a few years ago, the planet was rapidly approaching a moment of "peak oil" -- when the amount of oil able to be extracted finally reaches its maximum and then begins to decline.

Various parties are still locked in dispute as to the accuracy of peak oil thinking, but we already seem to have hit peak ethanol.

An Australia-wide shortage of the cane-derived fuel, which makes up 10 per cent by volume of the E10 petrol/ethanol blend, is driving E10 prices ever upwards.

[Automakers sue EPA over plan to sell 15% ethanol gas](#)

Automakers say they are worried the EPA decision would eventually lead to motorists

unknowingly filling up their older cars and trucks with E15 and hurting their engines.

[Oil-soaked boom from BP spill recycled for GM's Volt](#)

DETROIT, Michigan (AFP) – Oil-soaked boom from the BP spill is being recycled into plastic parts for the plug-in Chevrolet Volt electric car, General Motors said Monday in a bid to boost its "clean and green" image.

[Can solar-power startup Solyndra harness the sun's power and beat China at its own game?](#)

Solyndra, a solar startup based in Fremont, Calif., is a test case of what happens when Silicon Valley know-how and money go up against mass-produced Chinese competition. Founded in 2005, the company has been producing and selling solar modules since 2008; for each of those three years, it has exported between 75 percent and 80 percent of its products, the vast majority of which go to Europe—primarily to Germany, and also to France, Spain, and Italy. But Solyndra executives say this is about to change. How the next few years unfold will determine the fortunes of the company and its roughly 1,000 employees, but Solyndra is also the canary in the coal mine for the future of the American solar industry.

[Firms look to up solar power presence in India](#)

The initiative by the Sydney-based Solar-Gem to run LED lamps from panels that soak up the sun's rays and store them as electricity in battery units comes as domestic and foreign firms look to India as a growth market for renewable energy.

[Huge hydro plant starts operation in Vietnam, says official](#)

HANOI (AFP) – Southeast Asia's largest hydroelectric power station has begun operating to help ease an electricity shortage in fast-growing Vietnam, an official said Monday.

[Mayors' group reports rising need for food assistance](#)

The number of Americans needing help to put food on the table is growing, according to city officials and the federal government.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors reported Tuesday that trips to food banks are up 24% this year in all 27 cities it surveyed. Food stamp use is at record levels. And the number of working Americans barely getting by has jumped.

[Is organic always the best pick when it comes to buying food?](#)

Are the amounts of pesticide found on conventionally grown foods so low that it doesn't warrant the extra expense that comes with organically grown produce? Are the foods more nutritious? Because organics take relatively more farmland, will the planet be able to support the needed production?

And what do we have in mind when we think organics, anyway? Does it have to be a plate of kale and a side of tofu, or can it be an organic toaster pastry? Is it little, sustainable family farms or big industrial organic farms that supply supermarkets and Walmart?

[Rival gas producers Russia, Qatar talk reindeer meat](#)

MOSCOW (Reuters Life!) – When rival energy producers Russia and Qatar talk business, it's no longer only about natural gas -- they're talking reindeer meat, which Russia has promised to export and butcher according to Muslim dietary law.

The prospect of Russia exporting halal reindeer meat products to the desert kingdom first came up last month when the governor of Russia's Arctic Yamal Nenets region, where most of Russia's gas is produced, was in Qatar for investment talks.

[UN Carbon Regulator Sees Fast Pace of Credit Supply After November Record](#)

The increased pace of carbon credits flowing from a United Nations-overseen market will be maintained as European Union officials seek improvements to the biggest program for emission offset credits, a senior UN regulator said.

[Obama administration takes on climate change in national forests](#)

WASHINGTON - In the absence of comprehensive legislation on climate change, the Obama administration is moving forward with plans to combat the effects of global warming in the nation's increasingly fire-prone national forests.

Beginning this year, all 155 national forests -- including San Bernardino and Cleveland national forests in the Inland area -- must begin to incorporate climate change and its effects into long-term management plans.

[Game Theory: Climate Talks Destined to Fail](#)

Just because climate change is a serious problem doesn't mean politicians will come together to actually do something about it, he said. First and foremost, leaders will, by and large, act on what keeps them in power or helps them to get re-elected, and promising their constituents light economic pain now for vaguely understood benefits years into the future isn't a winning formula.

"People have a tendency to slide too easily from the facts of a matter to the political response as if the facts simply dictate what politicians do because politicians are going to do what is good for society," said Bueno de Mesquita. "It's a nice thought; unfortunately, it's not how it happens. Politicians are out for politicians."

[A Scientist, His Work and a Climate Reckoning](#)

As the political debate drags on, the mute gray boxes atop Mauna Loa keep spitting out their numbers, providing a reality check: not only is the carbon dioxide level rising relentlessly, but the pace of that rise is accelerating over time.

"Nature doesn't care how hard we tried," Jeffrey D. Sachs, the Columbia University economist, said at a recent seminar. "Nature cares how high the parts per million mount. This is running away."



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