

L II 2. LESTER BROWN is undoubtedly the best and most readable writer on environmental subjects. Although this country had a few people in its early history who were known as naturalists, there was little public awareness of any serious environmental problems until the publication in 1972 of two books: Rachel Carson's SILENT SPRING which warned that our songbirds would be destroyed if we continued overuse of dangerous pesticides, and the MIT-Club of Rome study THE LIMITS OF GROWTH. Both were attacked, but both alerted more people to environmental problems on which Lester Brown became the most prolific and popular writer.

In the 1970s, Lester Brown published WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS, calling on us to begin thinking in world terms. This was followed in 1974 by THE GLOBAL POLITICS OF RESOURCE SCARCITY, then by HUMAN NEEDS AND THE SECURITY OF NATIONS, a redefinition of national security.

He dealt early with important agricultural developments, starting with THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE GREEN REVOLUTION, then with a less desirable development, SPREADING DESERTS: THE HAND OF MAN, and THE WORLDWIDE LOSS OF CROPLAND. By the end of the 1970's he wrote his own story THE TWENTY-NINTH DAY: ACCOMMODATING HUMAN NEEDS AND NUMBERS TO THE EARTH'S RESOURCES to tell us not to wait too long before we wake up to the need to protect ourselves from possible catastrophes lest it become too late to do so.

He went on to write about THE FUTURE OF THE AUTOMOBILE IN AN OIL-SHORT WORLD and THE FUTURE OF URBANIZATION. Another problem people would rather not face is the population problem. Lester Brown has tackled it in several books starting in 1974 with IN THE HUMAN INTEREST: A STRATEGY TO STABILIZE WORLD POPULATION, and tackling the subject twice in the 1990s, once in FULL HOUSE: REASSESSING THE WORLD'S POPULATION CARRYING CAPACITY, and then in BEYOND MALTHUS; SIXTEEN DIMENSIONS OF THE POPULATION CHALLENGE.

Everybody now needs to think about how to build a sustainable society, because no economy in the world is as yet operating on a long-run sustainable basis. Lester Brown began writing about the problem back in the 1980s starting with a book entitled BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY, followed shortly by SIX STEPS TO A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY. It is more comfortable to think about the problem for other countries, so Brown turned out a 1995 book entitled WHO WILL FEED CHINA: WAKE-UP CALL FOR A SMALL PLANET.

You can best decide where to start reading Lester Brown by finding out whatever your library has of his, or, better yet, see what your library has that was published by the WORLDWATCH INSTITUTE (Worldwatch.org) which Brown founded and led for 26 years. For many years it has published an annual book entitled STATE OF THE WORLD (date of that year as part of the title). In addition it published a good compilation of environmental statistics entitled

VITAL SIGNS. It also published many pamphlet sized research studies (by Lester Brown and the Institute staff on environmental problems) and even published a monthly magazine.

At present Lester Brown is leading another institute which he established in 2001, THE EARTH POLICY INSTITUTE (Earth-policy.org). The same year it published Lester Brown's ECO-ECONOMY: BUILDING AN ECONOMY FOR THE EARTH.

In 2002 it published THE EARTH POLICY READER by Lester Brown & others. And in 2003 the Institute published a book, half of which is telling us that the world will soon be in real trouble feeding itself, as too much of the world's agriculture is dependent upon using up underground water aquifers faster than they can be replaced. The other half of the book tells us what can be done about that & other problems. The title of the book is PLAN B: RESCUING A PLANET UNDER STRESS AND A CIVILIZATION IN TROUBLE.

There is no better way to keep well-informed about the state of environmental problems and about good ways to handle them than by reading Lester Brown's books and the various publications of both the Institutes he founded. The Earth Policy Institute has a web site: earth-policy.org

Other sources for good information on environmental problems are Resources for the Future (rff.org) and the World Resources Institute (Earthtrends.org). Also see some of the publications of the World Bank (IBRD) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). There are numerous environmental organizations people can join. Names of these can be obtained from any library if you are not already aware of the most widely known ones. One I saw listed only recently is Citizens for a Humane and Sustainable Planet.