International Resource Panel releases report on land resource management

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The International Resource Panel's (IRP) working group on Land and Soils released a report outlining tools and policies for utilizing land resources sustainably into the future. The IRP, launched by the United Nations Environment Programme in 2007, is an interdisciplinary group of scientists and experts who provide independent environmental assessments and resource management advice.

According to the report, an estimated 33 percent of soil is moderately-to-highly-degraded due to erosion, nutrient depletion, acidification, salinization, compaction, and chemical pollution that results from the expansion cropland and resource utilization.

Moving forward, the Panel emphasized determining a landscape's long-term "potential," referring to its ability to support crop, forage, and trees based on the local climate, topography, and soils. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Land Capability Classification System and the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization Agro-Ecological Zoning System were cited as two examples of potential evaluation systems.

These land evaluations can be leveraged to determine the best lands for a particular crop, management practices for high-risk areas, areas for restoration, and lands best suited for agricultural production or biodiversity conservation. This information may eventually be supplemented with tools like the Land-Potential Knowledge System, providing freely available tips to individuals interested in managing specific land types.

The Panel hopes that by establishing the policy of matching land use with land potential, future resource management failures such as Britain's Tanganyika groundnut scheme or the U.S. Dust Bowl can be avoided.

Sources: ClimateWire, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, LandPotential.org, The White Horse Press, United States Department of Agriculture, United Nations Environment Programme, U.S. Geological Survey

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