

Roth: Overshooting our planet Earth

By [Jim Roth](#), Director and Chair of the Firm's Clean Energy Practice Group. This column was [originally published in The Journal Record](#) on August 7, 2017.



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Overshooting our planet Earth

As of Aug. 2, we earthlings consumed more natural resources than Earth can renew throughout the entire calendar year. Eight months and a day into 2017 and we have tipped past the point of sustaining ourselves as a species. This day each year has become known as Earth Overshoot Day and it has been occurring five days sooner each year.

According to the Global Footprint Network, an international research organization, "we use more ecological resources and services than nature can regenerate through overfishing,

overharvesting forests, and emitting more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than forests can sequester.”

And while sounding the alarm, GFN also offers some practical, real-world (pun intended) global ideas for improving our planet’s sustainability, in four main categories: food, cities, population and energy.

All human beings require food to survive and sadly too many are faced with too little, and even here in Oklahoma food scarcity is a serious threat to many people. While it is estimated that food demand makes up 26 percent of the global ecological footprint, two major issues help understand what drives this challenge.

First, food production is rife with inefficiencies and animal calories are significantly more resource-intensive to produce than plant calories, and so countries like China are actively working to reduce meat consumption by 50 percent per person by 2030.

Food waste is also a causative issue, with almost 33 percent of all food produced worldwide being wasted or lost. Here in the United States, an estimated 40 percent of all food goes to waste and there are efforts underway via UN Sustainable Development Goal 12 to halve the per capita global food waste at both the consumer and retail levels by 2030. These objectives would move the Overshoot Day back 11 days if successful.

Energy is certainly something we Oklahomans know a good deal about and we do so because we are that rare donor as a state, meaning we produce more forms of energy than we consume. But our individual footprints are still an area of concern when you consider the broader effect. And even though the current American president has indicated his intention to remove the federal U.S. government from the 2015 Paris Accord on Climate, 99 percent of the rest of the world remains committed.

As it relates to energy, this nearly unanimous consensus centers around decarbonizing the world economy, which is not welcome news if you are in the energy production business and your product contains large amounts of carbon. But if you are in, or moving toward, low- and no-carbon energies, your horizon is looking brighter based upon the UN Sustainable Development Goal 7 for Affordable and Clean Energy and its stated promise. Goal 7 calls for increasing the share of renewable energy in the world's energy mix by 2030, reduces the carbon component of humanity's footprint by 50 percent and would move back the Overshoot Day by 89 days, almost three months. This goal alone, as detailed in the Paris Accord on Climate, would make the Earth three months more sustainable in just the next 13 years.

It's perhaps because of this enormous potential that last month 19 nations of the world's largest economies recommitted themselves, in a joint statement of the G20, to the accord and the goals within it. For there is always one thing we earthlings share in common and that's the reality this third planet from the sun is the only place in the universe known to harbor life.

Moreover, if you are curious about your own ecological footprint, that specific date in which you and your habits shot past the Earth's renew point, you can download your own footprint calculator at www.footprintcalculator.org.

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