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Facts about U.S. population reveal problems we overlook



Several recent focus groups and surveys show that most U.S. citizens don't believe overpopulation is an issue in the United States. Compounding this belief is the common notion that people in the United States do not consume natural resources at an excessive rate.

Here are a few facts about population growth and resource use in the United States that speak for themselves.

POPULATION GROWTH

■ It took the United States until 1950 to reach a population of 150 million. It took only the next 40 years to add another 100 million. Since 1950, U.S. population growth has outpaced all other developed countries.

■ The United States has about 255 million people and is the fastest growing industrialized nation in the world, adding some 3 million people each year. This country also has the highest immigration rate in the world, taking in more people than all other nations combined.

■ The U.S. population will double to 510 million by 2056 given its present annual growth rate of 1.1 percent. The U.S. population will have 359 million people by 2020, 470 million by 2050 and 611 million by 2080.

■ The average number of children per woman rose to 2.1 by 1990, up from 1.7 in the 1970s and 1.8 in the 1980s. Birth rates have risen for all age groups.

■ 3.4 million of the 6 million U.S. pregnancies each year are unplanned.

■ One of 10 teenage girls, or more than 1 million annually, becomes pregnant each year. That's more than double the rate in European countries.

RESOURCE USE

■ Each year, the average American generates 1,278 pounds of trash. Seventy percent of landfills have been closed since the late 1970s because they are full. Of those that remain, one-third will be full by 1995.

■ We develop 38 square miles of ru-

ral land for urban or suburban use every week. Much of that is prime farmland that will never be recovered. At the same time, we must feed the 57,000 additional people who either are born in or migrate into the country every week.

■ As much as three-quarters of all pollution entering our lakes and rivers comes from "non-point" sources such as pavement and lawn runoff. As we convert more than 38 square miles of agricultural land every week to accommodate our growing population, according to the EPA, non-point pollution will likely increase. And on much of the remaining agricultural land, soil is being depleted faster than it is formed.

■ Total U.S. energy use has increased an average of 1.1 percent each year since 1970. Ninety-three percent of that increase is due to population growth. Even if we were to decrease per-person energy use by more than 40 percent by 2030, population growth would still cause energy use to rise 12 percent.

If you have a suggestion for a column, a gripe, a success story or whatever, write it down and send it to me, care of the Columbia Daily Tribune, PO Box 798, Columbia, Mo., 65205.