

## 7.5 Billion's A Crowd

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HARRISONBURG — The future of the world as we know it may be bleaker than some think as the global population continues to increase.

Michael Galgano, a James Madison University history professor who teaches a first-year course about global population, led a discussion Tuesday evening about how the exploding world population is detrimental to the Earth's resources.

Climate Action Alliance of the Valley, a group of community members who support and advocate for clean energy to counteract the impacts of climate change, invited Galgano to discuss how overpopulation contributes to the problem. About 30 people attended the discussion at Massanutten Regional Library's Central Library.

Galgano, who has taught the global population course for six of his 33 years at JMU, said humanity will either run out of room, resources or both.

According to ThoughtCo, an online educational resource, the world's population was about 1.2 billion in 1850. Since then, the population has dramatically risen, reaching about 7.5 billion people today, Galgano said, and is expected to rise to 9 billion by 2050.

The rate is increasing dramatically, he said, which takes a toll on the planet's resources as sufficient food and energy to feed the growing population becomes harder to find.

"The reality is this, that the earth has become so overpopulated that its survival is at risk," he said, "and its survival is tied to things like its ability to produce food, clean air, clean water."

The boom in the world's population is partially due to the prevalence of vaccines and other medical breakthroughs that have allowed people to live longer, he said.

Different religious and cultural views also play a role. For example, some religions oppose the use of birth control.

"Morality plays a tremendous role in population," he said. "There are cultures in the world committed to no population control, and that has to be brought into sync with those who say, 'Well, we need to do something about all these people.' It's the blend there ... that we really need to talk about and take into consideration."

Education is one way to help with population control, by teaching families how to plan their families. Educated women tend to be more career-driven, marrying and starting families later in life, he said.

But combating the problem across the globe is challenging when each country addresses its population growth differently.

"This is a global problem," he said. "Reaching resolution is near impossible, unless it's done by force, 'This is the law. It's going to apply to everybody.' That would never fly in this country."

Instead, the U.S. must change its conversation around Planned Parenthood to help control population growth, he said, to focus on the other family planning services the nonprofit offers rather than primarily on abortions.

America's population, in terms of birth replacement of U.S. citizens by other American citizens, has leveled off, he said. But when the immigration rates are factored, that skews the numbers.

To address the people looking to move to the U.S., he said, the nation has two options: to take in immigrants seeking to leave their home countries or to invest in those countries to help improve the quality of life so people do not want to leave.

In Harrisonburg, Galgano called for more discussions about global overpopulation, no matter if people agree or disagree with his point of view. He encouraged people to write letters to the editor and hold discussions, anything to create a forum on the topic.

"We have to engage in meaningful conversations," he said, "which means respecting the other side and the other person's point of view, hearing them out, asking them to expand on things we don't quite understand. That's the discourse that has to happen. And it's not coming from the top from political leaders ... it has to come from people."

Cathy Strickler, Climate Action Alliance of the Valley founder, said she invited Galgano to educate community members on another facet

of climate change. She said he brought up points people need to think about, including how religion and culture affect women's reproductive decisions.

"I don't really want to focus myself on Harrisonburg because I think Harrisonburg is pretty well taken care of as [part of] a rich country," Strickler said. "We, as rich citizens of the world, need to look at how we can help those who don't have a voice in other countries because we are a world community."

Sandra Rose, a 71-year-old Rockingham County resident, said that Galgano's presentation would have been considered "taboo not so terribly long ago."

She said people must change their perspectives on having children.

"Giving birth has been considered a God-given, nature-given, universal right to every woman and man," she said, "and that's got to stop. It's a privilege to have a child. It should be. It's not a right."

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