



Testimony Before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works Committee
Hearing: Climate Change is Driving up all Household Costs
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Ranking Member Senator Whitehouse, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the invitation to talk to you today about how climate change is contributing to higher prices for American consumers. My name is Andrew Pershing. I am the Chief Program Officer at Climate Central. I am also a climate scientist and the director of our Attribution Science and Climate Fingerprinting program.

Climate Central's mission is to help people see how climate change is affecting them and their families. We do that by producing compelling science and interactive tools designed for the media and decision makers to use with their audiences. We are known for our work to support TV meteorologists and journalists and for our sea level rise maps. Most recently, we resuscitated the U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters¹ dataset that was shut down by NOAA last year.

I'm going to start with something important to most of us this morning: coffee. Like all plants, coffee trees have a specific range of temperatures at which they grow best. If temperatures rise above 30°C (86°F) for too long, the plants suffer, and they produce fewer and lower quality beans.

My colleagues at Climate Central examined temperatures in 25 coffee-growing regions that together produce about 97% of the world's coffee². We found that over the last five years, every location has experienced more extreme heat due to carbon pollution. On average, these countries now endure roughly 47 additional days each year of temperatures above the 86°F threshold. The impact is even higher in the world's top five coffee-producing nations – Brazil, Vietnam, Colombia, Ethiopia, and Indonesia – where climate change has added about 57 extra days of damaging heat annually. These countries supply three-quarters of the global coffee market, meaning the impacts are not isolated; they are systemic.

Our ability to quantify the extra days of stressful heat that were added by climate change is a new application of attribution science. This science was developed to talk about the influence of climate change on extreme weather. For example, thanks to this work, we can say that the astounding heatwave in the west from March 17-21, 2026 was made at least 5x more likely

¹ <https://www.climatecentral.org/climate-services/billion-dollar-disasters>

² <https://www.climatecentral.org/climate-matters/more-coffee-harming-heat-due-to-carbon-pollution-2026>

because of carbon pollution in the atmosphere. We can use that same statistical machinery to construct an estimate of what the temperature would be without climate change. For coffee, we can compare the number of days at or above the coffee threshold in climates with and without carbon pollution.

One of the things that we find when we do these attribution studies is that the signal is much stronger in the tropics. For example, we found a similar pattern in our recent analysis of cocoa³, the key ingredient in chocolate. In key cocoa-producing regions of West Africa, climate change has significantly increased the number of dangerously hot days during the growing season — conditions that can affect the quantity and quality of the harvest. It also creates conditions that are stressful or even dangerous for farm workers. Taken together, these findings show that from coffee to cocoa, carbon-driven warming is already reshaping growing conditions, putting pressure on global supply chains and the farmers who depend on them.

Our main work has focused on the effects of rising temperatures, but warming is only one of the climate hazards that can affect food production. For example, according to the USDA, the 2020-2023 drought in the Great Plains prompted ranchers to reduce the size of their herds⁴, contributing to the rise in beef prices. Many of the key beef producing states like Texas and Nebraska are currently experiencing drought conditions, and unusually warm and dry conditions are expected to continue into the summer.

Considering food production also highlights one of the insidious challenges of climate change: climate impacts will grow and compound each year until carbon pollution stops. You can see this most clearly by thinking about investments that pay out over many years. If you are contemplating planting an apple orchard, you have to consider whether those trees will be productive in the future climates. The same is true in fisheries, where investments in boats, gear, and permits may not pay off if fish stocks decline or move away. The climate trend imposes a cost burden through the need for constant adjustment and reinvestment⁵.

Climate change is no longer a far away problem. Whether it is the life-threatening heat being experienced in the West this week, more frequent billion dollar disasters damaging crops and pushing up insurance costs, or heat in the tropics making this morning's coffee more expensive, climate change is something that every one of us experiences everyday.

³ <https://www.climatecentral.org/report/analysis-climate-and-cocoa-2025>

⁴ USDA Economic Research Service (2023). "Drought Conditions Have Contributed to Lower U.S. Beef Cow Inventory." Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry Outlook, March 2023.

⁵ Pershing, Andrew J., et al. (2019). "Challenges to natural and human communities from surprising climate change." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.