

# Building tomorrow, today: Earth Day event inspires a better future

**Activities, panels and a documentary spotlight shared solutions for a thriving planet**

By Alicia Barrón, ASU News  
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The annual Earth Day celebration hosted by the [Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory](#) at Arizona State University gathered the community for activities centered around the theme of “the future we build.”

The April 22 event featured discussions about how we can all work toward enjoying a thriving planet. Attendees engaged in interactive exhibits, panel discussions and lunch, including cups of strawberries provided from different farms across the Valley via [Plant Futures](#), harvested using sustainable farming practices.

Visitors spun a wheel and answered trivia, such as when the first Earth Day was celebrated (April 22, 1970), or how long it takes for a single plastic bottle to degrade in a landfill (between 450 and 1,000 years).

Other interactive exhibits included popular virtual reality experiences. Participants of [Dreamscape Learn](#)’s “The Arctic Experience” virtually “dove” into the Arctic, gathered scientific data and took a peek into the future as they witnessed what it will take to protect it.

More than a dozen booths showcased organizations that work on sustainability practices while others presented pathways to a more sustainable future. All the schools under the Global Futures umbrella — including the new [Rob Walton School of Conservation Futures](#), the [School of Ocean Futures](#) and the [School of Sustainability](#) — were on hand to show what they’re working on.

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## Global Futures Futurecast spring 2026

The latest edition of [Global Futures Futurecast](#) is out now. Futurecast is a twice-a-year guide to

A panel of [Rob Walton College of Global Futures](#) students shared what inspired them to pursue degrees in sustainability and ocean conservation. The students also talked about the faculty member or mentor who inspired them to select their majors.

what's new in critical systems like water, air, energy, heat and food, with stories that are actionable and future-focused.

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Ocean futures major Makena Krause said she was originally a business student with no science background.

When she told [Eric Hochberg](#), a senior global futures scientist in the School of Ocean Futures who now serves as her mentor, that she wanted to change the world, she said, "He took that and acknowledged that and said there is space for you, and I will help you get there."

The student panelists explained some of their current sustainability-related projects.

One panelist, geographic information science and ocean futures major Miguel Arteaga, is helping map the environmental impacts of shrimp farms in Mexico with the [Kino Bay Center](#) in Sonora, Mexico. He also runs the social media accounts for the [Plant Futures Initiative](#) at ASU, which promotes sustainable, plant-based food systems.

"We've really done a great job in encouraging students to garden more, to eat more vegan products or eat more sustainably," Arteaga said.

[Peter Schlosser](#), vice president and vice provost of Global Futures, led a panel of experts in a conversation about living in times of accelerated global change and what opportunities these challenges present.

"We are rewriting the world order at a pace that we have not seen in a long time," Schlosser said. "Our role as academics is not operating in an isolated space but connecting back to what our mandate actually is, which is to provide society with the knowledge that it needs to safely move into the future."

Panelist [Gary Dirks](#), a former BP executive who leads Global Futures' [Energy Forward](#), said the energy system is more complicated than what people think. Geopolitical conflicts and the rapid expansion of AI and data systems make the big picture of energy demand complex. At the same time, humanity has more knowledge than it is using to address challenges like this.

"The system is already demonstrating that it can't keep up with all of this, so reconfiguring supply routes and at the same time meeting all of this new demand is going to create the opportunity to step back and more thoughtfully address some of the complexity," Dirks said.

Schlosser said the current situation calls for an "intergenerational contract," where older scholars actively mentor younger generations and share their knowledge instead of only offloading problems. This will require interdisciplinary work that includes the humanities alongside science and policy.

[Joni Adamson](#), director of humanities for the environment, echoed Schlosser. She said scholars are passing on a great responsibility to the next generation — and they shouldn't take this complex and daunting prospect lightly.

“We are saying, ‘Here's what we know, and you are the ones who are going to have to take this on,’” Adamson said. “But we can't just say, ‘Oh, the world is in this terrible space and you guys have to take it on. We have to be the mentors.’”

The Earth Day festivities ended with a screening of "[Common Ground](#)," a 2023 documentary that shows the critical need for farm and food system regeneration.

(Video: {<https://youtu.be/6-M4Hq0MKFA?si=Q3J7BN-2J13Qc4pr>})

Narrated by celebrities, including Woody Harrelson, Rosario Dawson and Jason Momoa, the documentary shows how practices that restore soil are critical to healthy farm fields. This is done mainly through planting [cover crops](#), composting and reduced tilling.

The film demonstrates how regenerative agriculture promotes a valuable living network of soil organisms. This network cycles nutrients and improves soil structure by helping it retain water and carbon. The main message is that the key to saving our planet may be in the soil.

Bringing together forward-thinking people to celebrate Earth Day with the Global Futures Laboratory year after year shows ASU's dedication to a sustainable future. It reflects a commitment to ensuring we are all working collaboratively to create the kind of world we would be proud to leave to future generations.

*Earth Day was first established back in 1970 as a way to bring awareness to pressing environmental issues. Since then it has become a global event, with people gathering to participate in rallies and community events all across the world.*

*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



Peter Schlosser, vice president and vice provost of Global Futures, leads the Earth Day celebration hosted by the Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory at Arizona State University on April 22. Through panels, interactive exhibits and a documentary screening, the event highlighted the importance of collective action as we build a more sustainable future. Photo by Quinton Kendall/ASU

**Text image(s)**



The virtual reality experiences were one of the most popular exhibits. A Dreamscape Learn experience put participants in the Arctic to gather scientific data and learn how to protect the ecosystem there. Photo by Quinton Kendall/ASU





From left: Moderator Katie Spreitzer and students Caitlin Clark, Miguel Arteaga and Makena Krause. The student panelists discussed how they chose to pursue degrees in the Rob Walton College of Global Futures and their sustainability projects. Photo by Quinton Kendall/ASU