

# Sustainable Agriculture and Environment – An Ethical Perspective



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# Philosophy

Attempts to achieve a wide perspective on life.

We study history and philosophy to try to find out what man is.

# Philosophers study ethics

They don't tell us what is right  
and wrong

They show us how to think  
about what is right and wrong

The background of the slide is a solid blue color. In the lower half, there are several sets of concentric, light blue circles that resemble ripples in water. These circles are centered at various points across the bottom of the slide, with some overlapping.

# Our Basic Nature Challenges Civilization every Day

Today **The family has been weakened**

**Religion has been weakened**

Our educational system is discouraged by  
**class and race war**

Public opinion loses force through division,  
fear, apathy, and universal worship of wealth

**Even sex seems to be in chaos**

# Achievements

Cell phone

Computer

Medical advances

Immunization

Travel

Abundant food

# The problems

Global climate change

Pollution

Social inequality

Environmental degradation



# Agricultural problems

Production

Pesticide resistance

Loss of biodiversity

Invasive species

Biotech/GMOs

Sustainability

# Progress and Growth

The good things of life

The future will be

Bigger, Better, Easier, Faster

We can't keep up

The background features several sets of concentric circles in a lighter blue shade, resembling ripples in water, scattered across the bottom half of the slide.




We humans, Earth's dominant species, are not just figures in the landscape we are shapers of the landscape.

We need to think carefully about what we are shaping. We need to think about what we do and undo.

How do you know what to do  
in agriculture and in life?

How do you know what you  
choose to do is the right thing  
to do?

The bottom half of the slide features a decorative background of light blue water ripples on a darker blue background, centered around the second question.

# How do we decide what to do?

Norman Borlaug

Green Revolution

Moral Challenges

Why? Cost



# Quality of Science

Based on regular delivery of  
technological innovations

Which have increased food production  
and kept food cost low

**BUT**

**Externalities**

What could (what has) go wrong?

# Agriculture. . .



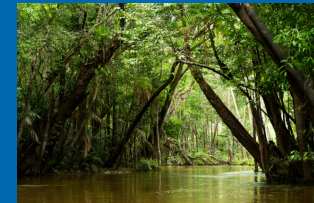
**the largest and most important  
interaction between humans and  
the environment.**

# The Dominant Species

Greenland ice sheet



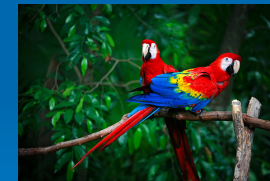
Amazon rain forest



Great barrier reef and Koalas



Macaws



Rhinos



Orangutan



# Concerns About Agriculture

Sustainability

Land

Re-thinking

Water

Limits?



# Concerns About Agriculture

## Pesticides

80% used in agriculture – 40%  
are herbicides

Dangerous, overused, pollute

Herbicides dominate research



# Concerns About Agriculture

Antibiotics

Biodiversity

Losing 0.01 to 0.1%/ year

Biotechnology and GMOs

Technological progress

Nature

# Concerns About Agriculture

Davidson - University of Florida

With publication of R. Carson's Silent Spring the agricultural community loudly and in unison said pesticides do not contaminate the environment. Now we admit they do. We said that nitrates from fertilizer could not reach groundwater in excess of 10 ppm. We now admit they do. We claimed that if pesticides were used in accordance with label directions, agricultural products would be free of pesticides. We now admit they are not.

**Public illiteracy**

# Concerns About Agriculture

The environment

Are these just fringe concerns?

If they are societal  
concerns

Agriculture has  
an  
ethical dilemma

Is production a  
sufficient criterion?

Does it justify  
everything?

# What is the problem?

Is it food production?

Of course it is!

But

Distribution/infrastructure

Waste

Poverty

**Dialog**

**Risks**

**Listening and  
understanding**

# Ethics for agriculture

Agriculture – the essential human activity.

Must have a firm ethical foundation

It's not just about results

# Responsibilities

Sustainability

Pollution

Agricultural  
labor

Water

Harm

Habitat

Diversity

Farms

Agri-  
Business

Animals

GMOs

Nutrition



# Ethical Questions

## Research and teaching

A view of the future we expect, desire, or fear

What is the right thing to do?

# What Can Universities Do

## Few classes


Only 9 US university Colleges of Agriculture offer a class on the ethics of agriculture

In 1999 there were 15

## Why?

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in agriculture and in life?

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choose to do is the right thing  
to do?

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# Paul Gauguin



# Questions

D'où Venons Nous?

Que Sommes Nous?

Où Allons Nous?

Where do we come from?

What are we?

Where are we going?