

Integrated weed management

Sustainable agriculture

An ethical perspective



Robert L. Zimdahl
Professor Emeritus
Colorado State University

Achievements

Cell phone

Computer

Medical advances

Immunization

Travel

Abundant food

The problems

Climate change

Global warming

Pollution

Social inequality

Environmental degradation

Soil erosion

Weed Science problems

Herbicide resistance

Invasive species

Biotech/GMOs

Sustainability



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 we know what to do?
In agriculture/in life

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

Ethics

What we all have
and practice

Societal principles

Ethics is not

A set of prohibitions

Do not rules

Ideal, but useless

Relative

Subjective

Critical Thinking

Open-minded

Analyzing/evaluating information

It is accurate, consistent, and
based on
sound evidence
and good reasons

A test of the moral
condition of a
discipline is a
willingness to examine
its assumptions

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 scientific truth model

Rational truth

Can be defined mathematically

Literal

Publicly verifiable

Definitive

Precise

Falsifiable

The central norm of agricultural science

Productionism

Producing food and
fiber to benefit
humanity

Is production a
sufficient criterion?

Does it justify
everything?

Responsibilities

Sustainability

Pollution

Soil erosion

Harm

Habitat

Water

We have lived by the assumption that what
was good for us
would be good for the world.

We have been wrong.

For I do not doubt that it is only on the
condition of humility and reverence
before the world

that our species will be able to remain in it.

(Berry and Wirzba 2002)

Ethics for Agriculture

Societal Concerns

Pesticide contamination

Animal treatment – CAFO pollution

Biotech/GMOs

Corporate agriculture

Water mining

Loss of small farms & rural communities

Genetic diversity

Migrant labor

Soil erosion

Ethics for agriculture

Are these just fringe concerns?

If they are societal
concerns

Agriculture has an
ethical dilemma

Agriculture. . .



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

Ethics for agriculture

Agriculture –

the essential human activity.

Must have a firm ethical
foundation

It's not just
about results

Three points about agricultural science

1. Those engaged in agriculture are certain about the moral correctness of what they do.
2. The basis of their moral certainty is not obvious to those who have it.
3. Agriculture's moral certainty is potentially harmful because it is unexamined

The benefits and costs of modern agriculture

The greatest story never told

A productive marvel



Public consent

Risk

Food availability and
exemption

Dialog

Listening and
understanding

What is the problem?

Is it food production?

Of course it is!

But

Distribution

Waste

Poverty

Social goals for agriculture

Sustainable, environmentally
safe production

Contributes to a just social
order



Environmental goals for agriculture

Sustainability

Production

Environmental quality

The land

Values

Science is value laden

Assumptions

Research and teaching

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

What is the right thing to do?

Agricultural scientists

Ethical

Realists

Idealists

I
want
more

Technology
and
purpose

Agriculture's many forms

Productive

Scientific

Environmental

Economic

Social

Political

and **Moral**



Cripple Creek, Colo

