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AP English Language 1B

Argument Essay

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**Natural Priorities**

As the demand for food and other agricultural products grows, it follows that the amount of land used to produce these products also will increase. This expansion of agriculture is a concern worldwide, both in advanced and not-so-advanced areas. Farming, ranching, and other agricultural pursuits have an impact on the environment, and that impact is negative. The environment needs to be protected, and if protection means that concerns for lost benefits are ignored, so be it: the well-being of the future undeniably lies on the environment, and therefore concerns for that should rank above those of agriculture.

Major issues of conflict between the interests of agriculture and the environment exist in the ever-increasing amounts of land used. This in turn destroys habitat and endangers many species, which often leads to unhealthy ecosystems and land. One extreme example of this, most often in less advanced and tropical areas like the Amazon, is slash-and-burn as it is commonly practiced today. Most of the people who practice this method do not really know the best ways to clear and use this land, and therefore what could be sustainable and profitable isn’t so, and instead contributes to rapid losses of the forest. This stems from the sheer number of people doing this, as well as the lack of necessary relevant knowledge often felt by these people: they don’t know what they need to keep the soil in a sustainable state, and therefore lose productivity much more quickly than should be. Therefore more land is needed, and there is just not enough time for land recovery, so there is just not enough land to stand up to this use. This is an example of how just so much land being consumed for farming and such pursuits is just so bad for the environment.

Some argue that agriculture and the environment can coexist on the same land. They contend that preventing the creation of new farms from natural environment isn’t as important as ensuring that such coexistence is maintained. Such arguments are major in cases of modern agriculture. One such argument is that “farming creates the right conditions for some wildlife to persist in the landscape” (Dover). After all, Scottish National Heritage has reported that “farmland is essential for the survival of a third of Scotland's vulnerable wildlife and more than half of its bird species” (Davies), and “in the mid-20th century, the state conservation organization in the United Kingdom took over land that contained an endangered species of butterfly and stopped all farming on it. They lost the butterfly.” (Dover). However, such an argument cannot be considered to be fully truthful: while there is evidence of it, there is just as much evidence to the contrary. A study conducted in Ghana and India (Phalan, Onial and Balmford) showed that trying to farm had a detrimental effect on tree and bird species in the area, even while trying to keep biodiversity. However, leaving areas uncultivated—land sparing—did not have nearly the negative effect that sharing did.

While there have been a few programs to encourage farmers to use their land for the improvement of the environment, such programs should not always be readily counted on to provide necessary conservation. One such program is the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), in which farmers are paid a rate per acre to leave some of their land unplanted to serve the

ecosystem. This has been very successful, for not only has that soil erosion been reduced, but the set aside acres provide habitat for wildlife (Kamler, Ballard, and Lemons; Ribic, Guzy, and Sample). However, the system is soon to encounter problems: “CRP saved both soil and farmers when grain prices were low, but higher commodity prices and a sluggish response to market conditions has resulted in the wholesale loss of acres enrolled in the program.” (McCombie). Contracts for CRP land expire, so when using the land for crops can bring in a better profit than the rates of the CRP, thus giving more weight to the benefits of agriculture, farmers use the land, dealing a huge blow to the environment. A better policy would be to look at the environmental benefits, as with one wetland restoration program in Texas: when a ranch gives land to be restored to the wetland state, it is required to be kept as wetlands forever (Wray).

Another land sharing argument is that with the rise in awareness about organic and other sustainable forms of agriculture, farming will not have the impact that conventional agriculture has. After all, the whole point of organic agriculture is that it doesn’t use the chemicals and such that can cause so many problems, and other sustainable methods, while perhaps not quite so chemical-free, attempt to lower negative impact by preventing the spread of farms to new land, using resources more efficiently, increasing yield and reducing waste. However, some research suggests that one method of measuring impact, biodiversity, doesn’t show much difference between conventional and organic farming, with some organic having more biodiversity as conventional and some conventional having more diversity than organic (WildCRU). So, in some very important respects it seems that these methods aren’t really that much more environmentally friendly than ‘conventional’ farming.

There are many issues that arise between the health of agriculture and the environment. Unfortunately it seems that one must take some sort of a fall, for farming can not continue as it has been and keep the environment at a healthy level that can sustain itself for the future of the planet. Since natural systems of an area keep the land more healthy, it is common sense that the environmental concerns take precedence.

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