

## Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission Template

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### **Summary:**

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Understanding our food and energy crises must lead us to first understand that they stem from the perpetual inefficient usage of resources. With that established, it is then imperative upon us to devise a way to grow out of such usage. Crucially though, it takes two to tango: how we step out of this age of reliance on unsustainable sources and processes depends on the twin play between governments making sound policy decisions and spearheading massive change while we as citizens take on the challenge to change our lifestyles in making responsible choices.

### **Essay:**

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The first step in solving any problem is identifying its root cause. In the face of unprecedented challenges in supporting an ever increasing world population, recognizing how mankind's hand in vastly depleting resources in a highly inefficient manner is crucial to our even being able to tackle them. The fact that we have landed ourselves in a sustainability quandary unmistakably testifies to the pressing need to firstly halt whatever actions dug a crisis that deep, and then no less urgently attempt to reverse them while searching for other viable alternatives.

In a world that sustains itself on fragile food chains and very finite energy sources, society faces peril if bold, radical changes are not made to the way it functions. The way the systems and institutions of our world have developed as a result of industrialization's philosophy of "high productivity, low costs" has resulted in a bevy of highly developed processes that we have grown painfully reliant on – but now also realize to lack another dimension of weighty importance: sustainability. While this is not a novel concept, its indispensability in today's situation can no longer allow it to continue languishing as subsidiary priority on national agendas. Its stinging absence in our energy and food cycles underpins the essence of the crises at hand. It is time for it to be elevated to an urgent necessity rather than a sidelined goal that too often gives way to cheap productivity.

"Sustainability" as a catchword is often bandied liberally around in popular culture, its true meaning often obfuscated by an array of commercial "eco-friendly" products. Yet sustainability does not spring from the additional purchase of "green" products, but calls for a whole reorganization of our lifestyles: to make decisions that can enjoy longevity and continuity.

We are all defined by the choices we make in life. Who we are, what we do, where we are: life is a platter of choices, what life entails is a result of the choices we make. Similarly, the world functions as a summation of what we have chosen collectively as a species. Yet, some of us make choices that have the potential to influence events with far wider impacts than others. This disparity in power does not symbolize intolerable equality as much as it does the need for exercising responsibility in wielding it. The fact is that most decisions of how energy and food are supplied and made available to people are controlled by the nation-state. Policies in energy and food have the power to

change scores of fates: many a great food disasters have occurred not due to natural calamities but the tragic mishandling of affairs by ruling governments. The importance of sound policies prioritizing sustainability can hardly be understated yet is too often undermined by the shortsightedness in many politicized decisions. In fact, this calls for a paradigm shift in the way world leaders need to approach these issues.

The issue with living in a globalized world is that no problem is ever confined within strict territorial boundaries anymore. A problem with Thailand's capacity to grow rice would send ripples, if not seismic waves, throughout rice-dependent nations everywhere; Brazil's inability to produce enough coffee to provide sufficient caffeine for many a blurry-eyed urbanites would certainly cause an uproar. Indeed, in a world where many developing nations' fields feed developed nations' mouths, the food crisis is one that is truly global in nature.

With a predicted 8.3 billion people by 2030 and 30% more grain output than current levels needed then<sup>1</sup>, the rapidly decreasing area of arable land due to human-induced erosion and deforestation presents a problem that will indeed morph into a full-blown state of emergency if not immediately tackled. Sheltered by the illusion of unending supplies and limitless choices perpetuated by the advent of supermarkets have conditioned urban minds that the problem may not be as pressing it sounds. The ease of obtainment and relative cheapness of food obscures to most of the developed world the urgency of reform needed. This is where the role of good governance comes in.

Similarly, the energy crisis that currently stems from reliance on environmentally harmful sources subject to unsustainable finiteness must be tackled globally. Finding a viable alternative to our gas-guzzling ways is as pressing a need as it is; yet realistically it would take decades to develop renewable energy technology to a level as sophisticated and cheap as widespread consumption would allow, and years more to incorporate it into our infrastructure and processes. Making this a priority for governments in supporting such research has to happen not as a matter of morality or conscience easing, but of urgent and sheer necessity.

Citizens may try hard as they may to choose products and methods of living that reduce their "carbon footprint", yet the problem is that the other choice still exists. As much as we would like to think of people being able to make environmentally responsible lifestyle choices, in reality the average person is usually more preoccupied with his own private costs. Ultimately it is the government that possesses the ability to bring about extensive changes through providing full support for research activity that can realistically bring sustainable change in a system far too reliant on carbon-heavy energy sources and enacting policies that will slowly wean people off their fuel-rich diets. This is not to imply that as the public we are rendered helpless; on the contrary our capacity as citizens indicate the opportunity we have to influence our governments and keeping them accountable to their decisions made.

Rethinking our lifestyles and reshaping them to fit today's climate is a responsibility of all citizens of the world; yet such a change cannot realistically come about through a mere 'moral' impetus. Where society is headed the wrong way and lacks a strong enough naturally occurring propulsion to push it back on the right tracks, the onus lies squarely on the leaders of nations to pave the way for change.

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<sup>1</sup> National Geographic September 2008 issue pg 104