

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission Template

ID number: 500

Summary:

If a future of energy scarcity and food shortages is to be avoided, society must be reshaped into one that is more conducive to an improvement in well-being. Proposed is a single piece of legislation which allocates land for food production to every citizen. The population becomes self-sufficient. The law can increase society's well-being in terms of food, energy and fulfilment. It would increase food production and improve the nutritional intake of the population. It would significantly cut energy usage and improve energy equity, and it would result in a more rewarding existence based on interpersonal relationships.

Essay:

Society's relentless consumption of resources and short-term outlook mean we are nearing an irreversible predicament. It is widely accepted that the next few decades hold fossil energy shortages and food production difficulties in store. For society to see an improvement in its well-being, radical changes will need to be made. Proposed here is a change radical enough to see an increase in the well-being of not only this society but successive societies' far into the future.

The solution is executed through a law or piece of legislation that entitles every citizen of a nation to arable and farming land on which to produce food for themselves. Groups and families register for land, and a massive education program would assist the inexperienced farmers in becoming self-sufficient. This act would see a transformation of society from one where people work for a wage to one where people work for themselves. Before discussing why this law, hereby called the "Land Allocation Act" (or LAA), would see any improvement in society's well-being, it will first be argued why this type of change is necessary over alternative types of solutions.

The legislation proposed is top-down and centralised. This is because bottom-up or grassroots solutions risk being disparate and varied, lacking a cohesive outlook that ultimately achieves no overall improvement. This top-down, centralised action is far more appropriate. Owing to the magnitude of the situation, the change must be large and significant; technological fixes or policy tweaks will not suffice. For the change to be effective it must be mandatory, not voluntary; ensuring maximum compliance and impact. Thus, a law or a piece of legislation is the best option. Because calamitous economic breakdowns and societal collapse are real possibilities in the future, the law must be enacted proactively, exploiting the social systems still in place before turmoil threatens order; society must jump off our runaway train before it derails. The legislation will then be able to reshape society into a form that is most conducive for an improvement in well-being.

We now turn to the ways that the Land Allocation Act can improve the well-being of society. Well-being is here regarded to have three main elements, health and nutrition, access to energy for subsistence and other needs, and lastly in terms of personal fulfilment and happiness. First to be addressed is how the act improves the diets and nutrition of society.

The entire population of a nation engaged in food production is likely to produce a greater quantity of food than the current centralised system. Biological farming and organic approaches are often found to boost yields, and this helps reverse malnutrition, particularly if coupled with a thorough aid system for surplus food. Society would be producing nutritious food that is not

over processed (such as the case today, where food is processed to such an extent that vitamins and minerals are added to restore nutrition). The agrarian system proposed here would be a far more labour intensive process. This manual labour would contribute to an improvement in health by reversing the obesity trend and improving cardiovascular health. Citizens would be eating fresh, organic fruit and vegetables that are far more beneficial for health than our current diets.

Access to energy is essential for well-being, both for rudimentary needs (lighting) and lifestyle needs (entertainment). The act would see a significant reduction in energy being used in three main areas. First, high-input energy intensive agriculture would be abandoned in favour of small-scale, more organic methods. Second, transportation, both of food and people travelling to their often distant places of work and shopping, would be significantly eliminated, as people would be working where they live, whilst food-miles would be almost zero. The third area would be from a cut in the production and manufacture of many of the typically unnecessary products that people would no longer be preoccupied with buying, their lives instead being more fulfilling. The act would be switching society to an agrarian lifestyle which is, by nature, a low-power one. Therefore, in terms of energy availability for the future, the act could help contribute to an improvement in well-being, whilst minimising the harmful effects of greenhouse gas profligacy.

The final dimension of well-being to be investigated is that of emotional fulfilment and happiness. The act proposed could see a radical improvement in this aspect of well-being. The agrarian society argued for here would see people engaged in rewarding and worthwhile work; feeding themselves and their families. This way of life is far more conducive to fulfilment than the arrangement we have today, with monotonous and dissatisfying work done only for a wage with which to buy products. The arrangement created by the LAA contributes to fulfilment by moving away from product-derived identities and towards real identities built on independence, self-sufficiency, craftsmanship and skills. The individualism and competitiveness that typifies today's world would be replaced by teamwork and the cooperation of people in order to achieve common goals of producing food and living in a sustainable way.

This solution to our looming oil scarcity and food-production problems is unquestionably bold, but so too are the issues society will face should we not take action, or merely rely on policy band-aids or technological fixes which are umbrellas in a hurricane. Such measures are simply inadequate because they promise to continue society's current and unsustainable arrangement indefinitely. If society is to see an improvement in its well-being then radical change is needed. Changes to the way people live their lives is needed. Action is needed. The system we have will not deliver and improvement in well-being in the future, because the system we have is flawed. Our society is unsustainable, so we must change it into one that is, and one that improves the well-being of every one of its members. This, I feel, is achievable through the act proposed here.