

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission Template

ID number: 731

Summary:

The world is running out of fossil fuel energy, and this means that we risk running out of sufficient food to sustain our global society.

Our current globalised system already fails one sixth of the world's population. They starve while developed countries waste immense amounts of food. This current system cannot be relied on to solve the looming food and energy crisis. We need a fundamentally different set of priorities.

The world's leaders must rise to the challenge of leading our global society through an urgently needed social transition if we are to sustain and improve society's well-being.

(98 words)

Essay:

In 2008 protests over food prices broke out around the world. The United Nations called for a 50% increase in food production by 2030 to address the newly predicted rising rates of malnourishment. The USDA now predicts that 1.2 billion of the world's population will be malnourished by 2017.

As we face a new magnitude of food and energy crisis, it is clear that even maintaining global levels of well-being will be a significant challenge. Improving well-being will be even harder, and allowing the world's poorest citizens to reach an equitable level of sustenance must become a true priority.

In the last 150 years the well-being of humanity has surged ahead at unprecedented speed. Our population has boomed with the 'Age of Oil', increasing more than six-fold upon waves of technology and innovation supported by cheap fossil fuels.

However, this support is about to get pulled out from under us. Fossil energy supplies are peaking and will not be able to supply increased demand. This has many enormous implications for the global society's lifestyle, but we now feed the world on oil and this is our most critically vulnerability.

The IPCC has clearly proven that the rapid consumption of fossilised energy has driven the earth's climate to the brink of catastrophic change. This makes it even more essential that the world detaches from carbon fuel sources of energy as rapidly as possible. Peak oil will force our hand, but we must act even faster.

Modern food 'embodies' large amounts of fossilised energy. Industrialised modern agriculture is powered by fossil fuels for machinery, synthetic fertiliser production and

globalised transport systems. The Californian Centre for Ecoliteracy shows that the food Americans eat annually contains about the same amount of fossil energy as they burn in their cars.

As oil supply ceases to meet demand, rising embodied oil prices will inevitably constrain food production and increase its cost. We face a future of static or decreasing food supply and more people. This presents a challenge to our society's well-being that requires an entirely new and common global response.

Societies that produce food locally will face mounting challenges from climate change, land degradation and constrained water supplies, but are more resilient to peak oil. Most at risk are the societies that are already starving and rely on food imports and aid for survival, they have no remaining buffer. In developed countries food is produced by a tiny fraction of the population and large amounts are imported. Rising oil and food prices will challenge current perceptions of lifestyle and well-being, and exacerbate inequality.

The current globalised marketplace system offers little hope of providing a solution. The Food and Agriculture Organisation has shown that the world already produces enough food to feed everyone. Yet more than 800 million people starve now, while the developed world wastes massive amounts of food and fights obesity 'epidemics'. The Waste and Resource Action Programme has shown that the UK throws away nearly one third of all food purchased every year, while even more is wasted in production, transport, distribution and retailing.

We must urgently reframe our priorities. The goal must be a global food production system that ensures an equitable supply of food to meet everyone's basic needs and minimises the embodied fossil energy in food. Ultimately we must completely detach food production from fossil energy, replacing essential energy inputs with renewable electricity. The impacts of the food crisis will be increasingly global, so addressing this challenge requires a global response.

This means a revolutionised energy generation and food production system that eliminates wastage and fossil energy. The challenge is to plan and transition to such a new system while sustaining and improving society's well-being at the same time. Markets, technology and innovation have important roles to play, but they must be guided towards this goal.

However we imagine this future, it looks radically different to our current system. In the developed world some level of 'deurbanisation' and restoring human energy inputs to food production is inevitable. While such a social transition may be a daunting prospect, it has the potential to generate a measurable improvement in well-being.

Well-being is a measure of quality-of-life and the concept of a Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) is gaining increasing recognition as a measure of real social progress. A recent study of the Australian state of Victoria showed how the much applauded

economic growth of recent decades has failed to result in equivalent improvements in well-being. Reconnecting the lifestyles of people in developed countries with low-energy food production can be expected to strengthen communities and restore the value of food quality, resulting in enhanced in well-being.

Addressing well-being in areas of the world where natural resources seem unable to sustain current populations will be a different challenge. The international community is going to need an innovative and unified approach to restoring self-sufficient food security in these complex regions.

We have a built a globalised food and energy system that already fails nearly a sixth of the global society and is becoming increasingly vulnerable. Visionary leadership is required to motivate and guide society through a social transformation of priorities and lifestyle towards a new sustainable system. This future system must be founded on priorities of sustaining and improving our well-being with equitable, low-energy food production that is no longer dependent on fossil fuel energy inputs.

It is often said that humans perform their best in times of crisis. The world's leaders must recognise and react to the scale of the looming food and energy crisis and the transformation that they must lead. The recent inauguration of American President Barrack Obama has proven that completely changing the public dialogue of a country is possible. Our leaders must follow this example and take it further.

The transition of our global society towards a sustainable food and energy future is a challenge. Successfully overcoming it will result in sustained and improved well being for our global society.

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