

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition

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Summary:

Situation all around the world is becoming critical and calling for reformation. It is not easy to find the beginning of all the problems while all of them are linked with direct or roundabout connection. Energy and food crisis are complicated topics with no easy solution. Whether we like it or not, if we want to solve those problems, food-sufrited citizens of developed world will have to sacrifice part of their well-being.

Essay:

Crisis is a word that is moving the world in last few months and it is one of the most used words nowadays. How is it defined in dictionaries? It is an unstable or crucial condition in which decisive or abrupt change is impending. If searching for related words to „crisis“, you will find words as emergency, disaster, catastrophe, point of no return, confrontation or moment of truth. You will not find words as easy or fast solution and you will not find any word as „happy end“. Does it mean that there is really no return? Nature is based on reversible actions and something that goes one way has to go also other way. Evolution and revolution are the way of the world. Unfortunately the way back is often not so easy. Let us focus now a bit on facts around energy and food crisis, respectively.

Prognosis of the International Energy Agency is that the world's energy needs will be 50 percent higher in 2030 than they are nowadays. 80 percent of all sources are used by 30 percent of population. Nearly two-thirds of Africa's population had no access to electricity in 2005. Mohamed ElBaradei, Director General of the IAEA, says about energy demands: „Nearly every aspect of development requires reliable access to modern energy services.“ Energy needed by common people might be divided into electricity, fuels and heat. Electricity can be produced from many different sources but bigger problem is fuel, when most engines are not constructed for alternative fuels and there is also no real globally directed movement in the technology development.

The world depends on fossil fuels which are limited and far from environmentally friendly. Most of crude oil, which is the main fossil fuel, has been found or uneconomical to extract and there is growing gap between production and demand. Annual drilling amount is in billions of tonnes and reserves have been counted for about 40 years. Somewhat better prediction is for natural gas and coal, another types of fossil fuels.

Renewable energy resources, as solar, wind, geothermal, water and biomass, are much more appealing, but only some of them are market ready and due to their nature, many of them are fairly local resources. Hydrogen power is yet not well solved and until now this type of energy source is facing problems with storage, transportation, its properties and other.

Nuclear power is being rediscovered. It is considered reliable, large-scale electricity and relatively environmentally friendly, without direct environmental effect from production. The disposing of nuclear wastes is yet to be solved. Current fission reactors might be replaced in further future by fusion, which would be safer, „cleaner“ and produce more energy. Unfortunately there is no chance for use of fusion reactions in near future.

It is unlikely that there will be any major breakthroughs in energy production in following decades. Hence the solutions have to be found from current technologies and

willingness to act. Replacement of environment-loading fossil fuels with combination of other types of energy sources seems the most reasonable. In addition, progress toward vehicles using natural gas, hybrid cars and support development of electrical cars. Efficiency and protection of environment should be placed on all pieces of chain, from car producers to fuel distribution. Common intention should be an engine with low consumption, optimal combustion, high energy usage and maximum catalysator efficiency.

„Energy is blood of the world, so if oil goes up then other commodities follow,“ Claus Sauter, CEO Verbio. Dramatic food price increase has numerous reasons starting with sky-rocketing oil prices. This has raised the price of every stage of food production. Worldwide reserves are at their lowest in 35 years due to years-long low harvest of major grain exporters, probably caused by climate changes. At the same time, demand for grain has never been higher due to population quantity that is starting to outrun man’s capacity to produce food. Last but not least, farmers are switching to grow biofuel crops. As result of the crisis have several countries erected export barriers that intensified friction around globe.

US throws away 96 billion pounds of food each year, based on US.News. Americans eat around 5 pounds of grain in form of grain-fed beef, pork and chicken. That is much more then nutritionally necessary. Brasil’s and China’s meat consumption is 197 and 109 pounds per year per capita, respectively. But the wealthy world does not want to hear about cutting back on meat consumption. No one is starving in rich countries.

One in six people in the world does not have enough to eat, according to the World Food Programme. In poor countries grain consumption is barely one pound daily per capita in form of bread or gruel. The world’s food production is probably not flexible enough to save the millions of potencial starvation victims. Another paradox is that food aid overwhelmed local markets in poor countries and kept down prices, which caused local farmers less likely to expand production. There are several foundations training and empowering poor farmers and native researchers which helps the people to be self-sustaining.

Possibilities are to cut down the support on biofuels, reduce meat consumption and wastes, orientate on the environment friendly policy, support aid in form of raising farmers in poor countries. Also genetically modified plants might help in this difficult situation. Unfortunately the effects of these plants are not known yet, which raises the hesitation on using them.

Food, energy, climate and economy are parts of one big system that lost its equilibrium and it is very unlikely that changing one piece of the chain will return the balance. If people want to solve this global cumulating crisis, they should provide plans to „heal the wounds“, not just „cover wound with plaster and wait if something happens“. By making a stand now and beginning to solve the problems, we might be able to pass on our children a planet with many unfinished problems, but also a planet with hope for future.