

Policy Analysis

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PHIL 122: Environmental Ethics

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3/16/2021

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The Evergreen Action Plan was put forth by Governor Jay Inslee during his 2020 Presidential Campaign. Inspired by “modern-day” climate movements, this plan was created to outline steps to defeat climate change. This plan has twelve environmental goals, from Ending Fossil Fuel Giveaways, Creating High-Quality Union Jobs, to Growing Sustainable Agriculture & Rural Prosperity. This plan is not only to push America towards fighting climate change, but also to recover financially from the effects of the pandemic. Governor Inslee has already taken steps to catapult this plan forward. At the end of his 2020 Presidential Campaign, he made The Evergreen Action Plan “an open-source document for any candidate, or elected leader to use.” (Ricketts, Hendricks, & Thomas, 2020) This plan is meant for the current administration to implement. Out of the twelve environmental goals set forth, I will take a more in-depth look at section 6 "Growing Sustainable Agriculture Rural Prosperity". (Ricketts et al., 2020)

This plan proposes giving incentives to farmers who store carbon in their soil, not only helping keep that carbon level in the atmosphere down, but boosting production of crops grown in this soil. Carbon-rich soil has many benefits, it is not only great for crop yield but it is also key to the soil’s absorption of water. This is a type of symbiotic relationship between the land and humans. In the book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer (2013b) there is also an example of this between the Potawatomi basket weavers and the Black Ash tree. The basket weavers use the Black Ash tree as materials for their baskets, which they sell to make a living. The trees need the basket weavers to cut down old growth and prep the soil for new Black Ash trees. As the Potawatomi stopped passing down this tradition, the population of Black Ash trees declined. Kimmerer did a study that showed the tree population declined due to under harvesting. However, the difference between these two relationships is the Potawatomi look at the Black Ash tree as living beings. To them nature has intrinsic value; they are very careful to not disrupt the delicate balance that land and nature hold for itself. In this policy, the land is being looked at as a means to an end. Even with increasing the funding for Conservation Stewardship Program, and making sure the soil health is

optimal, this isn't being done for the sake of the land. This is being done for the sake of the individual or humans. It is taking into account that vital forests need to be protected, and is stating the importance of the ecosystem services that the land provides to humans. In philosophical terms, this would be called weak anthropocentrism. An example of this is the relationship between responsible logging and the Spotted Owls (Aufrecht, 2018a). This plan recognizes carbon that is being released from tilling or plowing the soil has a substantial impact on the amount of Greenhouse Gasses we already produce (Ricketts et al., 2020). But it also knows we cannot just simply decrease the amount of land we use for farming.

When talking about farming, I always think of the many thousands of immigrants who come to the U.S to work in our fields. These immigrants have no worker protections, this plan requests congress to pass the "Asuncion Valdivia Heat Illness and Fatality Prevention Act" (Ricketts et al., 2020). This policy also mentions the need to end discrimination of women farmers and young farmers. There are plans to expand broadband access to Tribal nations. This policy lists great goals for wanting to bring up to date services and infrastructure to rural areas, while also stating the need to address the institutional discrimination within agriculture. However, this policy does not touch on farmers of color specifically, and therefore does not address the discrimination they face. BIPOC farmers are less likely to get help from government incentives. (Erskine, 2021) Not only does this policy leave a lot of the decision making to politicians and not the actual farmers. But it wants to give more funding and power to the USDA. An investigation done by The Counter uncovered that the USDA had skewed the Census of Agriculture data for 2014 to hide discriminatory practices within the agency. (Rosenberg & Stucki, 2019) From reading the policy there is not a clear picture on how exactly they want to achieve their goals. With this, it is hard to figure out what the harms and risks will be. But some questions come to mind. Who is going to safeguard these policies? How are these agencies going to be held accountable to make sure everyone is treated fairly? How can we make sure that the money will be distributed fairly when the agency responsible has shown a proclivity towards favoring

certain groups? How is the building of broadband infrastructure on Native land going to be respectful to their land? How is this policy going to ensure displacement is not going to be a major issue? How do you guarantee that migrant workers are treated fairly? All of these policies sound good on paper, but there will be challenges implementing them. In the *Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism*, Warren (1990) says “I conclude that any feminist theory and any environmental ethic which fails to take seriously the twin and interconnected dominations of women and nature is at best incomplete and at worst simply inadequate.” This policy is on the right track with including the discrimination against women and BIPOC in agriculture, but it very plainly does not ensure safe guards for these marginalized groups. This policy only seeks to protect farmland from climate change, not the farmers.

This policy looks at climate change as a destructive force against humans. It does not consider the land as its own entity, for example this policy never mentions the land itself, only in reference to what it is worth for humans. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer (2013a) says, “The dishonorable harvest has become a way of life—we take what doesn’t belong to us and destroy it beyond repair...” She goes on to say these are gifts that we take without asking. In this policy, is modifying the soil for our own gain considered an Honorable Harvest? This policy looks at the relationship between land and humans as “it” and “us.” Kimmerer (2013a) says we lose our disconnect when we stop thinking of the land and its many gifts as human. Why mess with a cycle that does not need any help from us, but given a chance to do what it was designed to do. (Aufrecht, 2018b) This policy recognizes different stakeholders on the climate. It sees humans engaged in a fight to figure out what competing groups want, rather than looking at the bigger picture of the same species trying to save the planet. It never considers the land as a stakeholder in this, even though it is most affected by the changes humans are making.

This policy does not address some of the major problems North American agriculture faces. Corporations are probably the biggest threat to the American farmer. If we do not keep these massive conglomerates in check, the modern-day farmer will be

no more. In Hawken's *Declaration of Sustainability* his first strategy is taking back the charter. This makes the executives accountable for the harms they do. As Hawken (1993) says "This is not merely a deterrent to corporate abuse but a critical element of an ecological society because it creates feedback loops that prompt accountability, citizen involvement, and learning." Corporations should be accountable to the people, not the other way around and the same goes for this policy. (Hawken, 1993) This policy blames the Trump administration for this big push towards corporate farms when it has been an ongoing concern by farmers since the early days of the United States. Farmers and the land in this policy are used as political pawns for an agenda to "Stick it to Trump." More needs to be done to reach global sustainability than just the United States of America being the beacon of hope. As population is predicted to rise, our agriculture will become more and more dependent on fossil fuels. (Swan, 2012) This policy does have a plan to help rural areas transition away from fossil fuels but does not specify any concrete steps on achieving the goals it sets out to do. The policy does mention a plethora of good mitigations such as the use of cover crops, stop mono-cropping, stormwater retention, sod saver, and water filtration. However, this policy fails to mention the huge food waste problem plaguing the world. As much as [U+2153] of the world's food goes to waste. (Chainey, 2015) With that said, some of these goals are worth accomplishing. Working towards soil health is optimal for crop production, and will help reduce the amount of carbon we release yearly. But with the amount of food waste we produce, do we really need to be producing even more?

This policy's goals success depends upon the current president and congress. Without persuading them enough, this policy will fall short of everything it hopes to accomplish. It also depends on approval of increased funding for many agencies and building upon current legislation. The list of legislation needed is not exhaustive for all the proposed solutions. This policy is very vague on how it plans to make agriculture sustainable, let alone solve climate change. In order for this policy to succeed, we need to move away from pesticides, look at our food waste, and bring back the connection between people and their food. As LaDuke (1994) said in *Traditional Ecological*

Knowledge and Environmental Futures, "To be secure that one will be able to harvest enough involves more than skill; it also involves careful observation of the ecosystem and careful behavior determined by social values and cultural practices." There is a cultural problem in America, we depend upon going to the store and getting a product off the shelf. But not thinking about the overall ecological cost of it. Our current system consists of extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and finally disposal. (Leonard, Fox, & Sachs, 2007) This system requires infinite resources. If we want to ensure that future generations can enjoy the same level of comfort, we have to stop thinking in linear terms. We need to change to a system that is self-sustainable and that can work more as a cycle. Taking existing products and reusing them indefinitely. This policy does not look at this fundamental issue, and as such fails to address the root-cause of making agriculture sustainable.

As someone who lives in Washington and knows, not only how diverse the people are but also how diverse the land is, I expected the goals from our governor to be explained better. There are many systematic issues within agriculture and it is a much broader issue than what I previously thought. I grew up in rural North Carolina, I've seen firsthand what the problems rural areas face. I had hoped that there would be more solutions provided to revitalize these areas. Generations of farmlands are being sold off to developers. People in these areas are losing their livelihoods with no other education to help them find work somewhere else. Fast internet is not going to solve the issues going on in rural neighborhoods. I have seen countless families sell their farms because there are no protections for them anymore. Just on the road I grew up on, only one cow farmer remains out of eight. Even with this proposal, there are not enough protections listed for farmers, let alone BIPOC farmers. Not once are African American farmers mentioned, who are less likely to receive tax incentives. Corporate farming needs to be put in check, and the small farmer needs more help. I think being able to have the knowledge to take a very in-depth analysis of a policy and share my thoughts was a very rewarding experience. Being someone who would like to go into the Food Systems field, I am very excited to see if this policy will influence change.

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