

# Are farmlands in danger? essay

[Business](#), [Management](#)



Are Farmlands in Danger?            The rate of progress and development experienced by modern man is something that came unexpectedly even as one looks at the time before the Industrial revolution. So when the reality of industrialized states came, many were caught unguarded and most governments were not prepared for the consequence of exploiting the environment without any active management plan to ensure sustainability.            This study will look into the phenomenon of shrinking farmlands and the factors that contribute to such negative development. The latter part of the paper will look into the possible solutions to the said dilemma faced today by 21st century Americans.

Modern Man            Modernization of American lives brings lifestyle changes into whole new levels never before seen in human history. Diets are changing as well as the choice of housing and even clothing. These are the basic needs and present reality is redefining how people see such needs and how they tried to respond to it.            Thus, since the latter part of the 20th century up to the present day, Americans have learned and assimilated into their way of thinking concepts such as fastfood restaurants, fast cars, suburbs and highways.

These are just part of the modern lifestyle and these contribute to the chain reaction of events that exerts enormous pressure on natural resources – exploiting and depleting it in the process. Losing the Farm  
Environmental experts can give a plethora of effects but there is one result of modern living that can spell disaster if policymakers will not intervene. One of the major results of rampaging growth is the conversion of farmlands into something not even remotely related to agriculture.            Tim Lehman

in his book – advocating for a more favorable policy concerning farmland conversion – enumerated the black hole into which farmlands are sucked into – reappearing as either covered in cement or steel and he said that farmlands are being converted into the following: · private housing · industrial and commercial uses · airports · highways · defense plants (1995: 55). Lehman added that behind this propensity for building man-made structures are forces that are very difficult to combat and these are: 1) population growth; 2) expanding industrial economy; 3) the developers' preference for level, arable land; 4) rising property taxes; and 5) declining farm profitability. Farmland Preservation Before going any further it is imperative to first get an idea on what a farmland is in the context of expanding suburbia and the corresponding commercial and industrial structures built nearby as a result of a vicious cycle. The cycle is easy to understand.

People are attracted to the higher wages in the city as opposed to what they could get in the farms. The influx of new migrants increases population inside the urban center and this forces development in the outskirts of the city. More houses are built to accommodate the rising number of people. New malls are opened as new suburbs are created and the cycle goes on and on. In the study made by Pfeffer, Francis and Ross regarding fifty years of farmland change in the U. S.

, they made the following remarks, “ With the spread of non-farm residences across the countryside, land use has become more diversified, and farmland and related habitats have become fragmented. By 1970s, rapidly expanding

urban areas [...] were encroaching on agriculture..." (2006: 104).

Today, there exists a conflict with regards to the desire to retain the beauty of the landscape and at the same time the need to destroy part of the natural environment in order to create new dwellings. Most of the time those who are presently residing in such areas protest the construction of new subdivisions and new structures because they felt short changed knowing that part of the attraction in purchasing a home in these parts is the natural vistas that could be seen in many directions. Aesthetics is not only the reason why Americans should learn how to conserve their farmlands rather than offer it to the highest bidder for conversion. In a 1993 study by the American Farmland Trust, they found out that fifty percent of America's food production takes place in metropolitan counties, in counties adjacent to major cities, and in counties with both high population growth and higher than state average agricultural production (Daniels and Bowers 1997: 3). Here is another aspect to farms that has to be highlighted here.

Highly successful farmlands are not situated very far from cities. In fact as the American Farmland Trust study has shown these farms are near cities and therefore the same are under the threat of developers very eager to turn them into more lucrative pieces of property. The developers are aided with an economic principle and that is as economic growth spreads outward the value of the farms rises. This lead to the appreciation of a farmland's value and at the same time means more taxes to be paid for square foot of property. Thus, if production costs are steep and the income does not justify the continued operation of the farm, there is very little stopping the farmers

from selling the land. The Sprawl All of the above can be described in one word, “ sprawling”.

It is a term given to the present day phenomenon of stretching the boundaries of cities and suburbs to create more space for workers and employees who would love to have bigger properties at a cheaper price. For this to work suburbs must be located much farther and for this happen highways must be constructed so that people can commute from home to work and back again and at the same time transport them to places of recreation during weekends. The Natural Resources Defense Council puts it this way, “ Sprawling development eats up farms, meadows, and forests, turning them into strip malls and subdivisions that serve cars better than people” (as qtd. in Gillham 2002: 4). Gillham in his study on the seemingly limitless city boundary traced the development of sprawling way back into the mid-nineteenth century and he wrote, “ The onset of the industrial revolution brought about a great shift in population, drawing people from farms into burgeoning cities.

By 1920, more Americans dwelled in cities than on farms” (2002: 25).

Counterargument Not everyone believes in the dire predictions about the significant loss of farmlands to developers and various industries raring to convert them into profit generating instruments. One of them is Julian Simon who in his book exposed the exaggerations made by researchers and interest groups who according to him have much to gain if farmland conversion will be significantly lowered through new legislation.

Simon believes that the truth was never spoken out and therefore the result

was that false news and other stories were merely created out of thin air.

Simon asserts that, “ The crisis was created for the benefit of environmentalists and people who own homes that abut areas that might be developed into housing development, and whose vistas and ambience might thereby be affected” (1999: 17).

Granting that Simon is right with his view that there is no immediate threat, the fact still remains that population and economic progress is fueling the construction boom. A casual observation of human behavior also dictates that man will desire for more and therefore continue to spread outward gobbling up more space in the process. Even if Simon is correct there is still a need to regulate progress and the direction of growth. It is imperative to find ways to curb sprawling.

Developers and real estate speculators must be monitored as to how they intent to shape what is left of the natural environment. Conclusion A Chinese proverb was able to capture in just a few words what this study is trying to convey and it goes, “ The well-being of a people is like a tree. Agriculture is its root, manufacture and commerce are its branches and its leaves. If the root is injured the leaves fall, the branches break away, and the tree dies” (as qtd. in Daniels and Bowers 1997: 1). The conversion of farmlands into non-agricultural use is a problem that will haunt Americans in the future. The rate at which developers and titans of industries are putting up housing and factories, soon there will be a huge land mass that will be buried under cement and steel. The consequence of course is easy to predict.

The natural environment will be the first to be affected. The first level of cause and effect will not be felt significantly and as discussed the mindset of policymakers and businessmen are also predictable – they reason out that there are still plenty more out there. But looking at the big picture and the interrelatedness of the environment one can almost see the disaster that can very well happen if proper management of land usage will not be put in place as soon as possible.

Experts agrees that aesthetics is just one of the factor to consider why farmlands must be protected from aggressive “ sprawling” and other non-agricultural development plans that will continue to eat up more space and more terrain altering activities. Even if the counterargument that was put forward by Julia Simon is correct, time can only tell as to the accuracy of his views. Even if she is right the Federal government could not afford to let progress run its course. Economic growth with its corresponding after effects must be guided in order to prevent a total reshaping of the landscape which is as many know is detrimental to everyone concern. Farmlands give more than food; there are other non-agricultural benefits that it can give to the people such as natural beauty that enhances American landscapes, clean air and water, deterrent to flooding etc. If farmlands disappear one can be assured that food shortages is just one of the resulting problems.

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