

In the United States, pollution contributes to many of the environmental issues we face. The main question at hand is, who should be responsible for polluting our land, air and water. Many individuals think that the polluter should pay for the damages that come as a result of polluting while some individuals think otherwise. Currently the most favorable method to control the effects of pollution are “carrots” such as, subsidies and voluntary use programs of best management practices. I think that we should adopt the polluter pays principle in some form in order to control agricultural pollution. This will make farmers legally responsible for preventing damage to water resources from their activities.

I was raised in a very rural part of Virginia where farming for a majority of residents was a way of life, yet the practices that many farmers follow violates many water sources that surround their properties. It has been said that, “the United States has more than 330 million acres of agricultural land that produce an abundant supply of food and other products.” (EPA, 2015) That is a lot of land that can have an impact on our nations water sources. The main source of pollution that comes from farms is non-point source pollution, meaning that the pollution comes from indirect sources such as runoff from storm water or in this case runoff from agricultural fields.

There are a number of ways that farmers contribute to pollution whether they are aware of it or not. The fertilizers that are applied to their fields can runoff into local waters and eventually influence other water sources by creating algae blooms and reducing oxygen for the fish that reside in the water. This results in water that is not fishable or swimmable. Another issue that farmers create is the problem of sedimentation buildup. Soil is washed off of the fields resulting in a buildup of sediment in local waterways. This buildup can negatively impact the water which prevents necessary sunlight from reaching aquatic plants. Another way farmers contribute to

pollution is the overuse of their fields. When livestock overgraze on a field it exposes the soil which promotes erosion and as mentioned previously leads to a buildup of sediment.

How are we able to prevent these problems? I believe that the, “polluter pays” principle would be an effective way to encourage farmers to solve environmental issues that they directly contribute to. Farmers should be held accountable for the negative externalities they create rather than burdening tax payers. I do not think the government should continue to use carrots because it is simply not an effective way to manage the damages incurred from farmers. The polluter pays principle is a financial incentive to urge farmers to think about what is taking place in their fields. Generally, farmers are seen as being able to do what they please regarding pollution without any real consequences. The polluter pays principle would put farmers at the forefront of solving pollution related issues in the field of agriculture.

While there may be some difficulty regarding measuring the amount of pollution that farmers create I think in some form the polluter pays principle would be most effective in seeing any type of positive change. Pollution that is created today in any fashion ultimately affects the tomorrow of our country. It is important that an industry as large as agriculture in America takes the necessary steps to reducing pollution in order to create a better environment to live in.

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