**Agriculture’s Biggest Impacts**

**Class activity for Chapter 6**

***Food, Farms and Community***

**Material Requirements: None**

**Time Requirement: 30-40 minutes**

This activity invites students to think about agriculture’s impact on earth’s landscapes as well as human society. Break students into small groups of three-to-five, and invite them to develop a list of the top five negative impacts of agriculture. These could range widely, from physical impacts like erosion to ecological impacts like the loss of biodiversity to social impacts like poor labor conditions. Walk around the classroom as students are making their lists to get a sense of which sorts of impacts they may be favoring.

Once students have had 10-15 minutes to come up with lists, invite them to articulate what underlying values drove their rankings. Do they value human wellbeing or fairness above ecological integrity, or visa versa? Implicit in their rankings are tradeoffs they’ve made among different values, and it can be a powerful learning experience for students to see what sorts of tradeoffs they make unconsciously. Their lists may also represent a lack of knowledge about certain impacts. How have the lists been influenced by the circumstances of students’ earlier lives, for instance urban versus rural childhoods; farming versus professional parents, etc.? For students in natural science programs, social impacts of agriculture like low wages or challenges faced by migrant workers can remain obscure, while for students who focus more on the social side of food systems the more measurable impacts like soil degradation and loss of natural habitat can be less apparent.

Once students have completed their lists and explored the value tradeoffs that underlie them, invite each group to write their list on the board so that the class can see all of the lists. Once all lists have been written on the board, bring class back together to discuss their rankings and the tradeoffs that lead to them. Questions you might pose to students include: Does seeing other groups’ lists inspire you to change yours? If so, how, and why? What amount of diversity is evident among students with respect to their values and how those values translate into their rankings of agriculture’s impacts? How might agricultural policy and activism be affected by the diverse array of values that people hold surrounding agriculture’s negative effects?