

Teaching Tips/Notes



Use of Structured Debate to Analyze Agricultural Issues: Large Scale Dairy Operation Simulation Exercise

Instructions for Teacher

This exercise is designed to highlight various perspectives in current agricultural issues. A structured debate provides an opportunity for students to explore various viewpoints and practice effective communication and conflict management techniques. It is suggested that students be assigned their respective role (in teams) within this activity and be given adequate time to research the assigned viewpoint to debate effectively. The students, in this exercise, will be presenting their viewpoints (arguments) to the “Legislative Committee.” The “Legislative Committee” (which can be represented by the facilitating teacher or other individual), will give feedback on the effectiveness of their presentations in this hypothetical situation. Explain to the students that they will be presenting their arguments to a “neutral Legislative Committee” with limited direct knowledge of agricultural production. Distribute the “Purpose, Background Information, Situation, and Format” to students in advance of debate time. Approximate time to conduct the activity and concluding discussion: 1.5 to 2 hours. This activity can be reformulated for use in evaluating a number of current issues.

Purpose

This exercise is designed to increase our awareness and understanding of the diverse perspectives and dimensions of a political agricultural issue. You will be challenged to research and advocate a particular position focused on the possibility of a large scale dairy operation entering “Harmony County.”

Background Information

Participants will be assigned to one of four groups. Each group will play an active role in the simulation.

1. PETA: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. This group is actively opposed to the use of animals in production agricultural settings. They are vigorously opposed to large scale livestock operations.
2. Non-Farm Neighbors: The proposed location of the dairy operation has a diverse set of non-farm neighbors. A number are working professionals with limited understanding and exposure to agriculture. A number of newer high-dollar residential homes have been built in the vicinity of the proposed operation.
3. Harmony County Farm Bureau: This group represents Harmony County Farm Bureau. Farm Bureau is a grassroots farm advocacy group that supports diverse agricultural interests.
4. Milky Meadows Dairy Incorporation: You are the group of operators working to plan, construct, and operate the large-scale dairy operation.

Situation

Milky Meadows Dairy Incorporation is seeking the approval from the “Legislative Committee” to construct and build a 3,000 cow dairy operation in “Harmony County.”

Format

Each of the four special interest groups will have the opportunity to “lobby” three times during the simulation exercise. Naturally, your goal is to ensure your “voice is heard,” and impacts the decision of the Legislative Committee (instructors). Each group will need to present the strongest possible case to

the Legislative Committee and to, perhaps, respond to arguments presented by other constituency groups.

First Round Debate (5 minutes for each group)

PETA
Farm Bureau
Milky Meadows Dairy Incorporation
Non-Farm Neighbors

5 Minute Break (Preparation for Second Round)

Second Round Debate (4 minutes for each group)

Milky Meadows Dairy Incorporation
Non-Farm Neighbors
Farm Bureau
PETA

5 Minute Break (Preparation for Third Round)

Third Round Debate (3 minutes for each group)

Non-Farm Neighbors
Farm Bureau
PETA
Milky Meadows Dairy Incorporation

Discussion/Application Questions for Students

- Was it hard representing your particular group in the debate?
- What teams/groups presented the most powerful statements/arguments in the debate?
- What were those statements/arguments influential?
- How do you think the non-farming public would view this situation and the information presented?
- How can we best present the viewpoints of agricultural production to a “non-farming” public?

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