Environmental Justice

Key Takeaways

- The environmental justice movement has become a large topic of activism in the United States.
- The definition of environmental justice entails many different scenarios and complex situations.
- Environmental justice groups are focusing on many areas of policy implementation.

Questions

1. How aware are farmers in your community of environmental justice activism?
2. Have you witnessed the effects of environmental justice activism? If so, how?
3. How should Farm Bureau policy address environmental justice?

Background

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Environmental Justice is defined as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. In other words, your health should not suffer because of the environment where you live, work, play or learn." Environmental justice aims to ensure government policies distribute the burden of environmental impacts among all groups equally such as where to locate landfills. Environmental justice, often called EJ, is both a set of principles and policies and a social movement seeking to eliminate the disproportionate impacts of environmental health hazards on communities of color, indigenous communities, and low-income communities, including foreign-born populations.

The terms "environmental justice," "environmental equity," and "environmental racism" are used to describe and explain key aspects of the environmental justice movement centering on the differing effects of environmental pollution sites and other distressed areas which are home to significant minority and low-income populations. The definition of environmental justice and injustice has varied throughout time and can vary significantly since the concepts and situations connected to each of these categories are intricate and complex.

To address the interconnectedness between environmental challenges and social justice, environmental justice comprises distributive and political justice. Local communities caring about preserving the spaces where people live, work, play, and

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worship may face a wide range of challenges related to environmental justice. **The environmental costs of contemporary industrial civilization are a key concern, including but not limited to problems with hazardous waste, pollution, occupational risks, and unequal environmental protection.** Equal political representation of various groups in environmental values and decision-making processes is a further area of focus.

Advocates for environmental justice believe no population should be unfairly burdened with the detrimental environmental effects of commercial, municipal, and industrial operations or the implementation of federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and policies. Effective access to decision-makers and the capacity for all communities to take knowledgeable decisions and productive action to achieve environmental justice are necessary for meaningful involvement.

Looking to the future, environmental justice groups are expected to further address many of the following issues:

- Improving health and safety inspections for subsidized housing,
- Safeguarding against toxins such as lead and radon which could cause lifelong harm to children's brain development,
- Preparing communities for climate change issues, such as flood disaster preparedness,
- Including energy enhancements in new subsidized housing,
- Financing home utility retrofits for low-income housing in preparation for weather conditions, and
- Tighter oversight of oil and gas facilities emitting large amounts of methane, a greenhouse gas.

Prospective civil rights regulations demanding greater accountability for environmental injustice are being promoted by numerous environmental organizations at the federal and state levels. They contend these regulations should provide activists more opportunity to gather and share data demonstrating the collective impacts of air pollution in their local areas. **The potential of climate change will continue to be a focus of U.S. environmental justice groups and national environmental groups in years to come.**

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