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**Topic Selected: 1**

Good Afternoon, Judges, Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is Caoimhe Lafferty from Scoil Mhuire Buncrana and I am honoured to be here today. I am going to talk about agroecology, the effect this practice has on farming both locally and abroad today and how this plays a role in women's rights.

First of all, what is agroecology? If we break it down, according to the soil association, ecology is the study of relationships between plants, animals, people, and their environment. Agroecology is the application of ecological concepts and principals in farming.

Although this word seems big and scary it has very simple aims, to mitigate climate change and it hopes to give communities the opportunity to contribute to farming practices in their area.

There's those two words we love to use, climate change. Although we are very familiar with this phrase, what is the real meaning? Climate change defined by the Oxford Dictionary is the changes in the earth's weather, including temperature, wind patterns and rainfall, highlighting the increase in the temperature of the earth's atmosphere which is caused by the increase in particular gases, especially carbon dioxide.

The effects of global warming are astronomical, did you know if we continue with our current habits we are going to need the equivalent of five planets, yes you heard me correctly five planets!

Agroecology aspires to reduce these effects, by encouraging farmers worldwide to adopt these actions we can reduce the effects of global warming and sustain our planet for all generations.

After reading about agroecology I realised there are many ways of carrying it out, for example agroforestry, biodynamic agriculture and agronomy.

Worldwide challenges are faced in farming: natural disaster, soil degradation and biodiversity collapse. Agroecology uses farming techniques which give back to the ecosystem, instead of focusing on short-term gains it looks at long-term sustainability.

As a student growing up in a rural area I am all too familiar with the harvesting of crops and movement of animals. I noticed recently that my local coffee shop displays a sign which reads “Our milk is sourced from a farm only 5 minutes away!” This highlights the co-operations in local communities where we reduce reliance on Multinational Corporations and instead make new relations with those around them. By re-investing we create a positive impact on our community and allow for new thoughts and ideas to surface.

In Ireland, we often face the out-dated stereotype that the oldest son would inherit and farm the land, but Talamh Beo hopes to change this. Their focus is to bring feminism to farming.

According to KPMG 70% of Irish consumers are placing more emphasis on local produce, I believe this has a serious impact in Ireland today. By investing in the Irish economy we are not only increasing profits but we also reduce the need for international imports, reducing our carbon footprint. Although small steps every step counts.

Agroecology not only influences us to give back to the community but also to our environment, by allowing wildlife to naturally repair our ecosystem.

However, in this case underdeveloped countries are leading the way.

Andhra Pradesh, a place most of you would not have heard of. This Indian state has been a leader in the promotion of women through farming. In 2018 their government launched a new initiative to transform the world of farming as we know it, an estimated six million farmers from all over the state began to use the community-managed, natural practice of agroecology.

How did this affect women?

Although women do not hold the same rights as men in relation to land ownership, this is most certainly a stepping stone towards equality. An environment has been created where women can come together to form alliances and support each in spreading their knowledge of natural farming practices. I feel engaging women is crucial as they acquire a better understanding of the purpose of agroecology and they are much better equipped in convincing male farmers to transition to natural farming techniques.

Afterall, Edward Everett Hale once said “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”