

The Tragedy of the Commons Overview

-Funded GK-12 Project

sustainability
science for
sustainable
schools

NSF-Funded GK-12 Project



What is a commons?

- A resource used by many interested parties.
- A freely available resource which is not owned by one entity or person.

What is a tragedy of the commons?

- Dilemma where individuals acting in their own self interest will deplete a resource
- The tragedy of the commons is a metaphor for anything held in common

QUESTION:

Do you think humans always act in this manner?

Answer yes or no and give a reason as to why you think that way.

Problems with no technical solution

- Some problems cannot be solved with science or technology
- Competition for resources can be this type of problem
- Since there is no technical solution, the solution must be political or societal

Traditional Commons

Example



*Common land available to
all for grazing animals*

Every farmer will try to use the grassland to exhaustion even though he KNOWS it will mean NOT having it for use in the future if everyone does it.

The Modern Commons

- Most commons are now regulated because individuals tend to maximize their own benefit to the detriment of the whole.

Modern “commons” include:

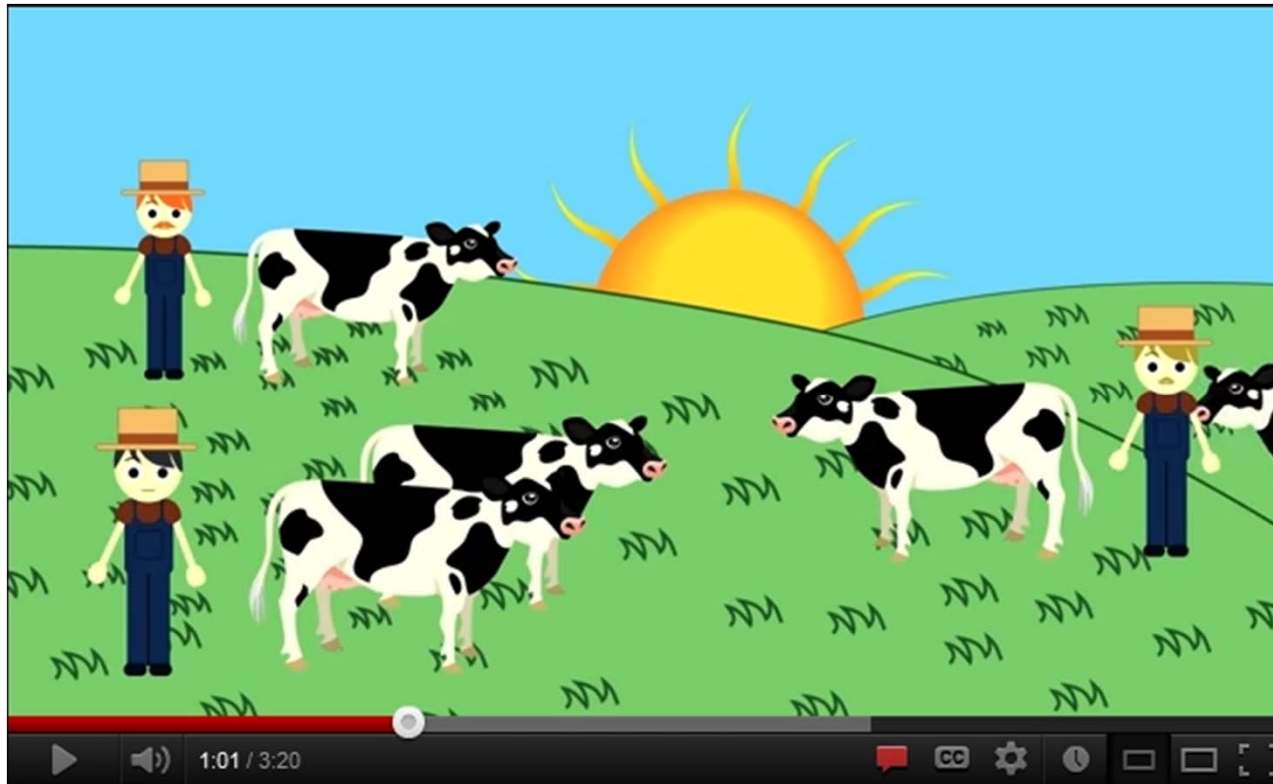
- **The sea** – overfishing
- **The air, the land, rivers** – pollution
- **The public noise level** -- sound pollution
- **National parks** – overuse
- **The earth itself** (energy, food supply, living standards) – overpopulation



Some Possible Solutions

- **Make it private property** - enclose the commons as private property.
- **Limit usage** of the commons.
- **Restrict rights and freedoms** for the good of everyone.
- **Use local/community governance.**

Video on the Tragedy of the Commons



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLirNeu-A8I>