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## Dilemmas

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## Economy or Ecology

John's family owns a small farm in the Midwest. After graduating from high school, John decides to gain experience working on a larger farm.

He has always hoped to work with Mr. Riley, owner of the largest breeding farm in the area. Riley is well respected by everybody and known to be open and straightforward, with a genuine concern for the people he hires. John is very pleased when Mr. Riley offers him a job. The two develop a friendship quickly, and John finds his admiration for Mr. Riley growing each day.

John learns about many aspects of farming that hadn't entered into the picture in the management of his family's much smaller operation. While John is familiar with the agricultural considerations involved in animal husbandry, Mr. Riley's job also includes the challenge of projecting the amount of money he would have to bring in to cover employee salaries and benefits, as well as liability insurance. On top of that, there are more EPA regulations to consider than on John's smaller farm, and federal, state, and local ordinances with which to comply.

In the fall, John decides to enroll in a night class at the local community college. The course covers just the kind of red tape that Mr. Riley deals with every day. Mr. Riley indicates that John could take on some new responsibilities as soon as he completes the course.

One requirement of the course is to study waste disposal on large farms. The Riley farm has an efficient system in which animal waste is stored in large lagoons and then is sprayed as fertilizer on the crops, which in turn feeds the livestock. John knows waste disposal is a controversial issue in their community. He has read about recent lagoon spills into aquatic systems that have caused economic hardships to other businesses.

One day, as part of his class work, John takes a water sample from a river running near the waste storage area of Riley's farm. The results indicate that trace amounts of waste are leaking from the lagoons into the river. Significant environmental damage could occur as a result.

John immediately approaches Mr. Riley with his concerns; quite excited about the research he has done, John feels sure that Mr. Riley will thank him for bringing such an important problem to his attention. But John has a bewildering surprise in store for himself: Mr. Riley offers no action to address the issue. Instead, he describes the rising costs and smaller profit margins under which the farm is increasingly forced to operate. John leaves the discussion feeling he has done something wrong by taking that water sample. He finds himself wishing he'd never signed up for the class.

Mr. Riley does not volunteer to fix the leakage problem, and makes it clear that such repairs would create a financial hardship for the farm. John knows his own job depends on the farm's financial success. Should John keep quiet about the problem or take the next step and inform the local EPA inspector?

Note: This and other dilemmas on this site come to you without their real-life resolutions. We encourage you to think for yourself about how you might resolve them, since the nature of each dilemma is highly individualistic. In sharing these dilemmas, we do not endorse them in any way, but rather offer them for your consideration.

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