***DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY:***

In your group discuss and decide on a definition using the whiteboard provided, then write your groups definition below:

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***Instructions***: Below are two related definitions of sustainability. Read these definition and answer the questions listed below. Be prepared to explain your argumentation with the rest of the class

1: US legal definition of **Sustainable Agriculture** as cited in [von Keyserlingk et al., (2013)](https://kb.wisc.edu/images/group235/shared/Class-5-Sustainability/Sustainability-US-Dairy.pdf): *An integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will over the long-term: satisfy human food and fiber needs, enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agriculture economy depends, make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls, sustain the economic viability of farm operations, and enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole*.

2: United Nation definition of **Sustainable Development** as per the original [Brundtland Commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brundtland_Commission%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) and its [Report](http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf) of 1987, (see also [2007 document](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd15/media/backgrounder_brundtland.pdf)): *Sustainable development as defined by the Brundtland Commission is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*.

***Questions***
1. What do you see in each of these definitions?

2. What do they imply?

3. Discuss the strength and weaknesses of each

Watch: Sustainability definition: scientific & simple: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beidaN3SNdA

**Sustainability:**

• Is the activity sustainable today?

• Can it be done without causing damage in the 3 areas (economics, environment, and society?)

• Can this activity be done so that people in the future will have the same opportunities to do this activity as people today? Environment:

• How many resources does the activity use?

• Does the activity cause damage to plants or animals?

• Is biodiversity protected?

• Does it cause air pollution, water pollution, or soil erosion?

• Does it use resources at a rate that allows the resource to be renewed or regenerated?

• What happens to the waste created by the activity?

• Does the activity generate excessive waste?



**Society:**

• Does it contribute to people’s quality of life?

• How does it affect culture(s)?

• Are individuals and communities involved in making decisions about the activity, and is the decision-making process fair and democratic?

• Is it an equitable activity; does it offer more options and opportunities to certain groups of people than others?

 **Economy:**

• What is the economic impact of the activity?

• Does it create meaningful and satisfying work for individuals?

• Does it contribute to a community’s economic development?

• Does the activity rely on products or services that have negative effects on the environment or society? • Do some people benefit economically from this activity at the expense of others?

• Will this activity contribute to the conservation of natural resources?

DISCUSSION:

• If someone asked you what sustainability meant, how would you respond?

• Explain whether it is easy or hard to decide whether an activity is sustainable.

• Can everything we do be measured against the standards of sustainability? What are some examples of activities that would be especially difficult to measure and especially easy to measure?

• Can something that is unsustainable be altered to become more sustainable?

• Choose an unsustainable activity from the Venn Diagram and explain how it could be made more sustainable.

• Why do you think people use the standards of sustainability to assess human activities? How and where could this process be useful?

• If you were a business owner or a government decision-maker, what would you think about sustainability?

• Ask whose needs should be met when there are trade-offs involved (e.g. between economic and environmental priorities) and how these contradictions can be resolved. This discussion will underscore the idea that working toward sustainability is a balancing act that requires long-term creative thinking and the ability to compromise and see through the eyes of others. Issues of choice and responsibility are also highlighted – students will learn that they have the ability to make choices that bring about positive change, and understand that their choices (e.g. whether or not to eat fast food or buy a brand of clothing that is manufactured in sweatshops) have concrete economic, environmental, and social impacts, even if these impacts are out of sight and felt far away.

• Discuss the difference between “economic development” and “economic growth” and the relationship between economic growth and consumption. What is the role of economic growth in fostering sustainable development?

• Does economic development help nations focus more on conserving their resources or does it contribute to overconsumption? In some cases, economic development includes commitments to eradicating poverty and changing unsustainable patterns of consumption.