

Case Study: *Endless Summer Harvest* and the Common Good

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ABSTRACT

Faculty need good case studies to show how the principles of Catholic Social Doctrine can be applied in real life business situations. The purpose of this contribution is to detail a case study exercise for undergraduate business students that helps them understand the common good principle and its significance to the operation of a business.

The case involves a Loudoun County-based hydroponic farming business named *Endless Summer Harvest* (ESH). *ESH* originally began with a firm commitment to help improve the common good by producing lettuce that was free of the human health-degrading herbicides and pesticides that are prevalent in the typical produce offered by mass-production farming. But from the beginning, customers seemed to be motivated more by freshness, taste, and year-round availability, than by health benefits. This shaped the business, and today, most of the company's production is sold not to consumers, but to exclusive restaurants where famous chefs create gourmet salads that the average person can't afford. The *ESH* brand commands price levels that are triple the price of mass-produced lettuce. This begs the question: Can a premium brand that supplies a small segment of the market really be focused on the common good?

Students are assigned to read a case overview prior to class that contains information about ESH's founder, her motivation, hydroponic farming methods, the company's development, and the development of the market in which the company competes. The day of the case discussion begins with a lecture on the common good principle, the definition of common good, and an introductory video featuring *ESH* founder and president, Mary Ellen Taylor. Students are then assigned to discussion groups and tasked with developing tests of the common good, and how these tests might apply to *ESH*. Each student group is asked to present their findings and afterward, a group discussion ensues. As a result of the case and discussion, students understand the idea of the common good, and its real-world application becomes more understandable and meaningful.