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chemicals (mainly "polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons"). A daily diet of such seafood could pose potentially about the same risk as smoking two packs of cigarettes a day.

Farrington stresses that the optimistic conclusion of the NRC's 1985 report does not justify continued dumping of petroleum products into the ocean. Rather, the council has assessed the pollution damage done so far—prior to urging more sophisticated precautions in the future.

The Price of Poor Farming

"Environmental Limits: The New Constraints"
by Sandra S. Batie, in *Issues in Science and
Technology* (Fall 1985), 2101 Constitution
Ave., Washington, D.C. 20418.

The Great Farm Shakeout, as the newspapers call the current agricultural crisis, has awakened America to the financial mismanagement of many of the nation's farms. Yet money troubles are only half the story, contends Batie, an agricultural economist at Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

Batie argues that sloppy, shortsighted farming practices have damaged untold acres and increased the pollution of air, land, and water. Such adverse environmental effects, in turn, have made the public far less sympathetic to the farmers' plight than it was a decade ago.

Take, for example, some of modern agriculture's side effects. Excessive farming of wheat, corn, soybeans, and cotton has led to extensive topsoil erosion—almost three billion tons per year—and has reduced the value of agricultural output by some \$40 million annually. It is especially shameful, Batie adds, since "effective techniques to combat erosion are available." Conservation tillage, contour planting, strip cropping, and terracing are measures known to reduce erosion rates by 60 to 90 percent.

Pesticide, herbicide, and fertilizer residues have contaminated, according to a U.S. Geological Survey study, an estimated 20 percent of U.S. wells with nitrates, which are potent carcinogens. Iowa and Florida are among the states hardest hit: The Iowa Geological Survey found residues of pesticides such as Atrazine, Sencor, and Bladex in more than two-thirds of the wells in northeastern Iowa. And in Florida's citrus growing regions, pesticides such as ethylene dibromide (EDB) have turned up in the drinking water.

Poorly managed irrigation has led to ground water pollution in California and several High Plains states—Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, and Texas. Runoff water from croplands can accumulate not only pesticide residues but also toxic levels of salts and minerals. Witness the debacle in California's San Joaquin Valley, says Batie. There, agricultural drainage carried salts, heavy metals, and selenium into the reservoir at the Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge. By February 1985, the pollution had become so bad that the "refuge" was declared a "toxic dump." In 1980, high levels of salinity in the Colorado River cost regional taxpayers more than \$100 million from tainted soil, killed crops, and water treatment costs.

For rural pollution, Batie does not hold America's farmers wholly responsible. The government, she contends, has done its bit to encourage environ-

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mentally hazardous farming practices—from subsidizing the overproduction of corn and wheat crops to promoting the destruction of wetlands. Yet as the word spreads, farmers are rapidly losing their old reputation as “stewards of the environment.”

ARTS & LETTERS

Forster's Passage

“One Cheer for E. M. Forster” by Joseph Epstein, in *Commentary* (Sept. 1985), 165 East 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

Few modern writers have achieved such universal acclaim as Britain's novelist E. M. Forster (1879–1970). *A Passage to India* (1924), his last novel, is a 20th-century classic. His reputation as a literary hero stands nearly unblemished.

Ironically, notes Epstein, editor of the *American Scholar*, a recent friendly biography of the author (*E. M. Forster, A Life*, by P. N. Furbank) actually deflates Forster's heroic image. The new portrait reveals facts that show him to be not a paragon of virtue but a mollicoddled “prig” who was bullied at school and unable to get along with his peers.

At Cambridge University he finally came into his own, Epstein says. Forster read Classics and fell in with an elite coterie of intellectuals, including philosopher Bertrand Russell and economist John Maynard Keynes. He sought to establish his independence. He shed his Christian upbringing and experimented with homosexuality. Yet he returned home after graduation to live with his mother. In his diary, Forster wrote that his life was “straightening into something rather sad & dull.” He resolved to do “more exercise,” not to “shrink from self-analysis,” to “get a less superficial idea of women,” and not “to be afraid to go into strange places or company, & be a fool more frequently.”

Although Forster did not have to work (he inherited £8,000, then a tidy sum), he took jobs anyway as a cataloguer at the British National Gallery, secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas, and “searcher” for the Red Cross Wounded and Missing Bureau in Egypt during World War I. This period between Cambridge and the war was his most prolific. Between 1905 and 1914, he completed five novels. But commercial and critical success were not central to Forster's life. Rather, he was motivated by a vain effort to overcome a “relentless yearning, and the haunting feeling of missing out on life.” Epstein suggests that Forster's longing for a young man in India may have played as great a role as his humanitarian convictions in his writing of *A Passage to India*. The book has an explicitly political theme—the brutality of British rule in India. Yet Forster thought of himself as “above politics.” In 1939 he wrote: “I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to chose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.”