



Cultivating Sustainable Communities: Practical Ways to Build Local Economies

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The world is getting smaller. It's possible these days to work with colleagues that we seldom if ever see in person, using electronic means of communication and collaboration. It's far easier today to keep in contact with friends ministering in other countries than it was as little as ten or fifteen years ago. We can even watch history as it's made half a world away. (How many of us watched live news feeds as events unfolded in Tahrir Square in Egypt in January?)

Though increased ease of communication is one benefit of globalization, we must also recognize that globalization has some drawbacks as well, and it should come as no surprise that these have implications for justice issues. As a Congregation, we've been working for a long time on issues of economic justice, pressing for both debt relief and fair trade among nations. We've been particularly concerned with how domestic and international economic policies impact the most vulnerable among us. We've tried to pay attention to where the goods we purchase come from, and to work to ensure that the companies from which we buy act responsibly in the countries where they operate.

How are ecological concerns related to concerns about globalization? Trade is one of the areas where we can see the connection most clearly. Any goods that we purchase must be grown or manufactured somewhere. If it isn't someplace close to where we live, then those goods must be transported—and that requires fuel. The more fuel that's required to transport the goods we buy, the higher the carbon footprint of those goods.

That fact gives us some good reasons to purchase locally produced goods whenever that's reasonably possible. Not only does doing so help reduce our carbon



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footprint, it also helps to provide jobs for the local economy. We might not be able to convince our entire town to try to go carbon-neutral, but buying locally is one small way we can help to lower the carbon footprint where we live.



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Focusing on building and sustaining local resources while promoting fair trade are important steps toward a healthier, more sustainable economy and ecosystem.

What, concretely, can we do?

- ◇ Shop farmer's markets; they're a good place to find locally grown, in-season produce. (There's also little to no packaging of such produce, which further reduces the carbon footprint of what we buy.)
- ◇ Participate in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA group), or start a garden of your own.
- ◇ Read about "transition towns" to get ideas about what others are doing. (Transition towns seek to reduce their carbon footprint, to move toward sustainability, and to foster an ethos of "enough," recognizing that an economy based on "more" isn't sustainable.)
- ◇ When goods simply aren't available locally, look for Fair Trade products. Doing so will ensure that producers are being fairly paid, and producers selling Fair Trade products often seek to use ecologically sustainable production methods.



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For further reading:

- ◇ Faith, Economy, Ecology, Transformation: <https://faitheconomyecology.wordpress.com/>
- ◇ Transition Culture: <http://transitionculture.org/>
- ◇ Transition Network: <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/>
- ◇ The Village of Ashton Hayes (a transition town): <http://www.goingcarbonneutral.co.uk/>
- ◇ Environment | Fair Trade USA: <http://www.transfairusa.org/what-is-fair-trade/impact/environment>
- ◇ *Yes! Magazine*. Issue #55, Fall 2010. <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/a-resilient-community>

DVDs available from the Congregation Justice Office:

- ◇ *The Economics of Happiness*. Director, Helena Norberg-Hodge, Steven Gorelick, and John Page. ISEC, 2011. Film. <http://www.theeconomicsofhappiness.org/>
- ◇ *Fixing the Future: Creating Local Jobs and Building Prosperity*. Ed., David Brancaccio. Dir., Ellen Spiro. PBS, 2011. Film. <http://www.pbs.org/now/fixing-the-future/>

Streaming video:

- ◇ Rob Hopkins. *Climate Change, Peak Oil and Transition Towns*. <http://vimeo.com/11832667>
- ◇ The Post Carbon Institute. *300 Years of Fossil Fuels in 300 Seconds*. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJ-J91SwP8w>



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