

Deep Sustainability **A Vision For The Global Villager In Us All**

By Roar Ramesh Bjornnes

It's shopping day at your local natural foods market. You are looking for yogurt as usual. But today is different. You are not only shopping for health and taste. You are shopping for quality. Deeper qualities. You want to know which brand is better for both the cows and the earth. You want to know which brand is the most sustainable. Should you buy Horizon, Stonyfield or Nancy's?

If you talk to marketing representatives from each company, they will likely tell you that their farming methods are very sustainable. But, in reality, one is prone to be more sustainable than the others. Which brand? And why?

Horizon, a \$127 million public corporation from Colorado recently bought Organic Cow from Vermont and specializes in "ultra-pasteurized" milk. This process—which "kills the milk," destroying its enzymes and many of its vitamins—is applied so that they can sell milk over long distances. Horizon is known for its factory farms. Thousands of cows that never encounter a blade of grass spend their lives confined to a fenced dry lot. Horizon controls 70 percent of the organic milk retail market, thus writer Michael Polan calls the company "the Microsoft of organic milk." Does it sound sustainable to you?

What about Stonyfield Farms? The New Hampshire-based yogurt maker claims that when you buy a cup of their organic yogurt, you're helping save family farms, prevent ecological degradation, and improve human health. All in one tasteful cup! While all of that may be true, if don't live in New Hampshire but in Oregon, why support the shipping of that yogurt container across a whole continent of gas-guzzling highways?

Maybe the most important sustainability criteria, and one that is often overlooked, is that products should be locally produced. The closer to home the better. Thus Nancy's yogurt starts to look like a favorite. Because Nancy's organic milk products fits all of these criteria, and more. Famed for its delicious yogurt and kefir products, Nancy's hails from our own bio-region, more precisely in Springfield, Oregon. Moreover, if you read the label carefully, Nancy's organic yogurt is made from milk produced by the family farm members of Organic Valley Cooperative. So, if you live in Oregon, this sounds like a winner to me. But if you live in Asheville, North Carolina, I'd choose Seven Stars.

Cascadian Farm—started in 1971 by Gene Kahn as a food collective—is a sustainable company, right? Maybe not. Now owned and operated by General Mills, and with Kahn as a controversial millionaire, many organic farmers and activists believe Cascadian Farm is a symbol of a disturbing trend: the gradual takeover of the sustainability movement by corporate agribusiness. What a confusing world we live in. You buy a jar of Cascadian Farm organic strawberry jam at the local coop, visualizing you are supporting Kahn's original dream. In reality you are buying a corporate showcase.

You may recently have noticed that your local supermarket is selling organic Dole bananas, and you may think the world has changed overnight. But has it? Dole is still a \$5.1 billion company, and the world's largest producer and marketer of conventional fruit and vegetables. Just imagine how many tons of pesticides and chemical fertilizers this company consumes every year! But if you talk to Sharon Hayes, director of environmental affairs for Dole Food Co, she will simply tell you that Dole has a "commitment to environmental leadership and consumer choice." So, has Dole gone completely pastoral, or is this just marketing and business as usual? Confusing times indeed.

When shopping for sustainability, we must therefore look beyond the wholesome brands and the organic labels. We must ask deeper questions. We must distinguish between shallow sustainability and deep sustainability. So, how can we better support a sustainable economy, culture, and worldview? How can we cultivate sustainability in our own lives? Below are some suggestions:

Sustainable Vision. What should the underlying values of a sustainable economy be based upon? Author David C. Korten claims that "a sustainable society needs a spiritual foundation." Why? Because spirituality, not materialism, is the ultimate foundation of life. The late British economist E. F. Schumacher concurs. "No system or machinery or economic doctrine or theory," Schumacher wrote, "stands on its own two feet: it is variably built on a metaphysical foundation, that is to say, upon our basic outlook on life, its meaning and its purpose."

What can we do? Open our inner vision through study of both spirituality and science. Learn how the world of matter and spirit complement each other. Embrace the alchemical truth: As above, so below.

Sustainable Spiritual Practice. Philosopher Ken Wilber believes that we cannot achieve a sustainable society without leaders and activists rooted in sustainable spiritual practice. Our mutual agreement on how to solve our environmental and economic problems, he says, "depends absolutely upon individuals who can transcend their egoic and selfish perspectives and rise to a more world-centric, global consciousness." And the best way to achieve this, he thinks, is through an inner process of spiritual transformation. To truly be able to understand and serve Gaia, we must also understand and serve our higher Self. What can we do? Start a daily meditation or contemplative prayer practice. Combine that with a more body-oriented practice such as yoga and tai chi. As within, so without.

Local Economics. From sustainable development theorists to environmental activists, from bio-regionalists to natural capitalists, from Thomas Jefferson to the Indian sage-philosopher P. R. Sarkar, economic decentralization is seen as the only panacea for the economic exploitation caused by centralized economies. Paul Hawken's natural capitalism speaks of the need to "replace nationally and internationally produced items with products created locally and regionally."

What can we do? Vote with our dollars by supporting local enterprises, especially small

businesses, artisans, cooperatives, and their products. The more local, the better. Boycott multinational franchises such as Wal-Mart, McDonald's, etc.

Production for consumption, not profit. A consumption economy is an integral aspect of a decentralized economy and should not be confused with a profit-oriented consumer economy. A consumption economy is an economy where goods are produced as per people's needs. A consumer economy is an economy where goods are produced and sold solely for profit. Since the consumption economy's main goal is to satisfy basic human needs, it also provides the economic security needed for people's non-material sources of fulfillment—family, community, culture, and spirituality.

What can we do? Reduce our material consumption. Support local businesses that produce basic human needs, such as bakeries, farms, agricultural coops, community gardens, farmer's markets, etc.

Cooperative enterprises. The Darwinian notion that competition promoted the evolutionary survival of the fittest individual is outdated. New research reveals that evolutionary success had more to do with the survival of the fittest community through interwoven cooperation. Thus cooperation, not competition, must be the cornerstone of a more equitable and sustainable economy.

What can we do? Support our local food coop, farmer's coop, etc. Purchase products made by coops rather than by corporations.

Small-scale private enterprises. Proponents of today's free market capitalism seem to have forgotten that their mentor, Adam Smith, proposed a market structure in which there were no corporate businesses with mono-polistic powers. Similarly, P.R. Sarkar claims that excessive inequities can best be avoided if private enterprise consists mainly of small businesses such as restaurants, stores, artisan shops, service and cottage industries with only a few employees. Small-scale, private capitalism stimulates the entrepreneurial spirit and purchasing power of individuals and families, yet avoids the gross disparity and poverty so often caused by unbridled concentration of wealth in the hands of corporate monopolies. Large corporations can in turn be transformed into cooperatives.

What can we do? Support your local bookstore, clothing store, artisan, and other local merchants. If possible, boycott large corporations.

Eco-villages. While most eco-villages are located in the affluent countries of the North, some also focus on helping poor, rural communities in the South achieve self-sufficiency. One such project is the Future Vision Ecological Park in the interior of Sao Paulo state, Brazil. According to its founder, Didi Anandamitra, the goal of this project is "to provide a practical model for social and economic life that can be replicated in communities, especially rural communities, anywhere." (www.sustainablevillages.org)

What can we do? Start an eco-village, a co-housing project, a community garden, or sim-

ply visit such a project for learning and inspiration. Create community by starting or joining a discussion group.

Economic democracy. Concentration of wealth and economic power corrupts the political process. In Third World countries, especially, money buys votes outright, and the moguls of capital maintain the ultimate veto power of capital flight. Money must not be allowed to rule politics, and power must be extended beyond the political sphere and into the economic sphere.

What can we do? Support Living Wage initiatives as well as measures that redistribute wealth from the top down.

Self-sufficient, regional economies. People can best collaborate in social and economic development if they work together within regional socio-economic units that are defined on the basis of common economic potentials, common economic problems, similar geographic features, ethnic similarity, and common sentimental legacy. Regional economies need to control their resources and capital and be totally free from any kind of domination by outside economic forces.

What can we do? Seek out and support local, organic farmers and other businesses that utilize local resources. Support Native American causes. Boycott “foreign companies” that exploit local resources and labor.

Deep ecological ethic. The ultimate solution to all environmental problems lies in a deep spiritual understanding of what nature is and how it operates. From this deep understanding of human psychology and spirituality, on the one hand, and the natural world, on the other, humanity can develop genuine environmental ethics. In other words, develop a balanced socio-economic philosophy based on the dynamic interrelationship between the fields of ecology, economy and spirituality. At this point in history, this is one of humanity’s most urgent tasks.

What can we do? Meditate and study. Learn from science, from nature, from local elders, and from indigenous cultures.

Free and fair trade. The giant globalization efforts by the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank is promoting “free trade” and “free markets” as a panacea for creating prosperity and sustainability. Yet, today’s so-called free trade between rich and poor nations, between the North and the South, is neither free nor fair. It favors large corporations over small scale enterprises, it has widened the gap between the rich and the poor, and it has increased environmental degradation.

What can we do? Shop locally, think globally. If you can’t shop locally, support “fair trade” businesses.

Cultural vitality. The irony of material development is that it has created what Paul Wac-

tel calls “the poverty of affluence.” While consumerism has enticed people in the Western world into gorging on material things, it has failed to provide a sense of inner fulfillment. Restoring a community’s non-material treasures and cultural roots is an integral part of overcoming the inner poverty of affluence.

What can we do? Support local music, arts, theater and crafts. Support your local church, mosque, ashram, or temple.

Sustainable globalism. Decentralization, self-sufficiency, and smaller scale industries does not mean neglecting a global agenda. We need a global movement with at least three separate, yet integrated, goals. 1) A strengthening of the global polity through the UN, combined with a gradual movement toward a global federation, or world-government that can safeguard the needs and rights of people and the environment. 2) The formation of self-sufficient, socio-economic regions of free and fair trade zones – that is, a global grid of sustainable and self-sufficient trading partners. 3) The development of a global movement rooted in a life-affirming vision of spirituality and oneness with all of creation.

What can we do? Protest against the current globalization efforts by the IMF and the World Bank. Donate money or your labor to activist groups. Cultivate a global, sustainable vision of oneness with Spirit and of cooperation with Gaia.

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