

Sustainability Project
Action Statements and Summary
By Calvin Duane Kerr
Due: Sept 29 2011
BIOL1000
Professor: Gina Brennan

The Actions: The actions I have opted to undertake are threefold;

Firstly, I will limit my intake of fresh foods to only those foods that are grown within Ontario; this will include all fresh meats, vegetables, fruits and dairy.

Secondly, I will power off or down all devices that consume electricity for one hour per day during peak periods. This means that only essentials like the fridge, fish tank filters and aerators, and heat will remain on, and all other devices such as TV, computers, printer DVD, Bluray, and all other electronics will be turned off and unplugged. And for that hour I will get out of the apartment and go for a walk. This will be done during the mid/on peak times of 7am through 7 pm.

Finally I have installed a water/energy saver shower head that reduces my water consumption from 5.5L/min to 4.9L/min. The old shower head had only one setting whereas the new one has three so I found a setting that was comfortable for me and measured the L/min of that setting I intend to time my showers each day and calculate the amount of water saved with this new shower head.

From an environmental standpoint I believe that the aforementioned changes will be very positive and am hoping that they will lead to a lifestyle change on my part. Reducing my water usage, even by just a couple of litres per day will have a positive impact, as every litre saved today will be available for us in the future. Powering down all electronic devices during the mid/on peak times will mean that my little act of conservation will help lessen the burden on our power grid during its busiest time. By limiting the geographical area from which I'll consume fresh foods I am lessening my personal carbon footprint by reducing the amount of fuel used to bring my food to me.

From an economic perspective I will be helping my own provincial economy by contributing more directly to it. The downfall to limiting me geographically is that in many cases fresh fruits and vegetables can be produced elsewhere and transported here more economically, than can be produced locally. So, my grocery bill may go up some, but when balancing this against the boost this will provide to local producers, it may well work out. As my utilities are included in my monthly rent, there will be little personal economic impact to powering down during mid/peak times and reducing my water consumption; though, it should be noted that the new shower head cost \$24.99 + HST.

I believe that everyone, especially residents from rich, consumer-driven countries like Canada, who consume considerably more than what is required to live, have a social responsibility to make changes to reduce the burden we place on this planet. It is the North American mindset that more is better, when in fact more now, without a doubt, means less later on. By making the changes previously mentioned, I believe that I am starting to live up to my social and environmental responsibilities.

Summation of the Experience

Calvin Kerr

After completing this sustainability experiment I retook the Ecological Footprint test. By undertaking these three simple changes of buying locally grown or raised food, changing my showerhead, and unplugging for an hour per day I have reduced my ecological footprint from 1.97 to 1.57 Earths. To me, this is an impressive accomplishment, but it begs the question “What else can I do to green my life?” Too many people think that unless they make a radical change to their lifestyle then they are not making a difference, which is very untrue. Every little change to reduce, reuse and recycle is a change in the right direction. Though I challenge people to remember that recycling simply means that they have failed to reduce and reuse.

Throughout the course of the experiment to conserve I had a few thoughts on initiatives I could take on to further lessen my ecologically negative impact. For example, I could leave all appliances unplugged until I actually need to use one of them. And, even with the new showerhead reducing the amount water I used, I can further reduce my consumption by being sure to limit my daily use to 10 minutes or less. There are simple little tricks to saving energy like “putting your computer to sleep and turning off the display when you aren’t using it.” This simple trick can even extend the life of your monitor (Henretig, 2011, July 25). Knowing how my food choices can affect climate is an important step to reducing personal ecological footprint, for example reducing the amount of meat and dairy I consume will have a positive effect.

Producing, transporting and consuming food is responsible for nearly a third of our climate change effects. Some foods have a much bigger impact on the environment than others. For example, food grown in heated greenhouses or transported by air uses a lot of energy. Production of meat and dairy has a much bigger effect on climate change and other environmental impacts than that of most grains, pulses and outdoor fruit and vegetables. (Green Beings, n.d.)

There are, in fact, many ways to “green up”, some you would never even consider. For example, L Wade notes in her article, if you own a new car it is better to run your air conditioner than to open your windows. Open windows create a drag on your car that unnecessarily wastes fuel (as cited on Green Beings, n.d.)

As for my personal experiences in the sustainability experiment I found it, over all, to be a very rewarding experience. Included along with this report is a table that tallies the total water saved with action 1, upgrading my showerhead. I take a great deal of pride in my efforts to better my ecological mindset and really enjoyed the conversations, both with classmates and with other friends about how to improve humankind’s thinking on how to treat the only Earth we have. As mentioned previously I now keep all non-essential electronics unplugged when not in use. Though this does not bear a financial impact on me personally because I do not pay for hydro separately, it is a positive step as it reduces the strain on our power grid during the highest demand periods.

Unfortunately part way through this experiment, I was forced to suspend one of my actions due to financial reasons. A lack of hours at work has forced me to rely on outside help to keep food in the house. Though it is only a temporary measure until my financial situation improves; it is quite a disappointment to me that I was not able to continue to purchase product of Ontario produce and meats. At the moment, due to my financial situation I am dependent on my parents for most of my groceries, and I would not feel comfortable asking them to buy me only product of Ontario foods. Beggars can't be choosers, after all. However, you might open their eyes to the benefits of buying local. Support the local farmer and reduce transportation costs! However, only you can judge their receptiveness to this. I try to tell my friends not to shop at Costco but that is not making any impact so far.....

So, to say that this experiment has further opened my eyes and sparked a greater interest in "doing my part" would be an understatement. I find myself, in what little spare time I have, researching other ways to continue to better myself ecologically. Though not all of the tips that I have mentioned in this summation apply directly to me, those tips that do apply I will be undertaking and those that do not, I will certainly be spreading the word about so that those who could benefit from them can benefit from them.