

Building a Local Green Economy in Greater Philadelphia

Lets face it – we’ve got to change or die! If our civilization doesn’t stop destroying the natural systems on which life depends, sooner or later, our existence on planet Earth will come to an end. Our economy and life-styles consume and pollute beyond Earth’s capacity to sustain us. Confronting global warming, the end of oil, and the depletion of all natural resources is complex and overwhelming, but we can gain clarity and direction by focusing right here at home. By working together, local government, entrepreneurs, farmers, artisans, educators and citizens can build a local economy that works in harmony with natural systems to serve the needs of our region. At the same time, we can inspire a community-wide commitment to reducing overall consumption and waste.

Why local? Local production of basic needs – food, housing, clothing, energy and culture - builds community wealth, increases our regional self-reliance and security, and eliminates the carbon emissions caused by long distant transport – a major contributor to global warming. Just as we now measure “food miles,” the distance from farm to table, we need to become conscious of the miles all goods travel. Our dependence on remote corporations to ship basic needs long distance leaves us vulnerable to the instability of climate change and rising oil prices. Local production allows direct relationships with producers and transparency of production practices, with the opportunity to teach, share and incentivize sustainable business practices - from organic agriculture, to zero waste manufacturing, to green building and renewable energy.

Though our federal government has largely become a vehicle for protecting corporate interests, local governments have the opportunity to design economic development strategies based on local business ownership, replacing corporate imports with local production. Rather than attracting multi-national corporations and chain stores, let’s line our commercial corridors with locally owned retailers selling locally made clothes, food, handicrafts and other locally manufactured products. While we are building a local green economy, let’s also make it fair. The prevailing economy not only puts us at risk by being at odds with nature, but as a profit-driven, competition-based system, it also puts us at odds with each other, leaving many disenfranchised. The increase in violence globally and in our own streets is a manifestation of the despair and anger of those who feel left out. In a cooperative-based economy, driven by a desire to serve the common good and bring long-term prosperity to our region, we can develop a

strategy that provides ownership opportunities in the local green economy for those who have been left out of the corporate global economy.

Through local leadership and citizen support, our region has made great progress in building a local food system to provide fresh, healthy food to our communities. Let's continue to build our marketplace for local sustainable agriculture that maintains healthy soil and water quality in our region. Now we need to develop local food processing businesses to increase our food security, and more neighborhood grocery stores selling local food products. We need local companies to manufacture and install solar energy systems and energy efficient windows, and use sustainably harvested local timber and other indigenous building materials. How about a revived garment industry using sustainable fibers harvested in our region? We need manufacturers committed to finding productive use of waste materials, and more retailers selling recycled and reused products. Our state ranks high in wind energy production, and recycled biodiesel projects are sprouting up throughout the region. Much innovation is underway on which to build. Many local green businesses can be found in the Sustainable Business Network www.sbnPhiladelphia.org.

Let Philadelphia be known as a fertile marketplace for green businesses with a growing creative class of designers, inventors, and entrepreneurs, artists and musicians, dress and furniture makers, supported by consumers with a high demand for all things local. And best of all, this is fun! Building a sustainable local economy is not only about our responsibility to future generations, but also about reconnecting with place and with each other, building community and local culture and identity, and increasing happiness and collective joy that come from working collaboratively toward a shared vision. As we say at SBN, we're building a merry mecca! And one that will provide for our survival in a changing world.

Here's how you can help:

Buy local food: www.localfoodphilly.org

Support local retailers: www.buylocalphilly.org

Buy local, renewable energy: www.theenergy.coop

Invest locally: www.trfund.com

Join with other green local businesses, learn to start a business, or find a local business to buy from: www.sbnPhiladelphia.org

