

Businesses reduce, reuse, recycle

In the movement toward sustainability, the behavior of business and industry is very important.

Businesses tend to be high-volume energy users. Their choices of raw materials, the origin of goods for resale, transportation and shipping modes all count on the sustainability "balance sheet."

Three mainstays of sustainability are represented on the familiar recycling symbol — the curved arrows that represent the principles of waste control: reduce, reuse and recycle.

An extremely successful example of the application of the reduction principle to business is the Ithaca Farmers' Market, where many businesses come together to sell their wares, the Farmers' Market has no vast expanses of blacktop for its customers and no expensive signs.

It doesn't even have walls, let alone artificial lighting and climate control. The goods for sale are delivered by local and regional suppliers, not trucked or flown in from distant places. Most food products at the market are unprocessed and un-packaged.

The cumulative use of non-renewable resources to operate the Farmers' Market is minimal, and far less than conventional businesses. The overall environmental impact of the various businesses is also minimal. And yet the more than 100 local farmers, food vendors, and craftspeople of the Farmers' Market generate over four million dollars in sales each year.

MARTY HILLER/GUEST COLUMNIST



Three mainstays of sustainability are represented on the familiar recycling symbol — the curved arrows that represent the principles of waste control: reduce, reuse and recycle.

Reuse is the second arrow in the symbol. Many local businesses are based on reuse, from the Salvation Army store to outlets like Historic Ithaca's Significant Elements, where remodelers and restorers of older homes can buy an old fashioned clawfoot bathtub or sift through bins of antique doorknobs. Used clothing is a particularly popular commodity, with stores like Trader K's or the Service League in the Women's Community Building.

At the high end of the reuse market are the many posh antique stores scattered throughout Tompkins County. Some of these stores are venerable institutions, long pre-dating and yet vigorously contributing to the sustainability movement.

The third arrow represents recycling. Wallace Industries, a metal scrap yard, is a prime example of a business that rescues non-renewable resources and puts them back into the manufacturing cycle. Another example of recycling as a sustainable business practice is a new local company called

Liquid Solar.

If your car or truck runs on diesel, it can also run on recycled vegetable oil. Liquid Solar will add a second fuel tank to your vehicle and convert your engine.

They also supply the fuel, currently priced at a dollar a gallon. Scott Hannan at Liquid Solar says most of the oil is currently collected from local restaurants, but eventually they hope to obtain as much as several thousand gallons a month from the Frito Lay factory in Binghamton.

Sustainable businesses may also focus on renewable resources. For example, the Black Locust Initiative is a local non-profit business that teaches workshops on sustainable forestry. Dave Gell, its founder, has worked for many years with black locust wood, a non-toxic alternative to pressure-treated lumber that grows rapidly and resists rot.

Another example is Renew Energy of Ithaca, one of the new businesses in our county involved in designing and installing renewable energy systems for residential or com-

mercial use.

The businesses mentioned in this article are small and local to Tompkins County, but multimillion dollar businesses are also pursuing sustainable practices and are showing by example that sustainability is not only affordable, it can save money and increase profits.

Three businesses were showcased this past week at Ithaca College's "Summit on Sustainability."

The pharmaceutical giant, Bristol-Myers Squibb; Harbec Plastics of Ontario, N.Y. and Booth Creek Natural Foods all demonstrated how sustainable energy usage, reducing the distances of the supply chain and shunning toxins contribute to a reduction of costs and liabilities while improving employee morale and the company's reputation.

A community conversation on the many ways sustainability can be applied to our activities as individuals, businesses and institutions is happening now around Tompkins County. You are invited to participate in a discussion of sustainability at a "sustainability salon" near

Sustainability salons

- Rogues Harbor, 2079 E. Shore Drive, Lansing. Today, from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Gimme Coffee, 506 W. State St., Ithaca. Tuesday, April 20 from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Juna's Cafe on The Ithaca Commons. Wednesday, April 21 from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
- WowNet Digital Cafe, 111 N. Aurora St., Ithaca. Thursday, April 22 from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

you.

This week's topic is sustainable business. The discussions will cover local potential to practice "industrial ecology," where one business's waste stream becomes raw material input for another, and management of businesses for the "triple bottom line" of economic stability, ecological integrity and social well-being.

The salons are a project of Sustainable Tompkins, with the support of Ithaca College, Park Foundation, Cornell University, and various local businesses and organizations. For more information click on "Sustainability" at www.ithaca.edu.

Hiller is a writer who recently moved to Ecovillage in Ithaca. Wendy Skinner, of the Sustainable Tompkins Coordinating Committee, also contributed to this column.