

Sustainability is born of common sense

DEAR MR. ENERGY,

Could you explain what sustainability is? I hear it all the time in connection with things most people think are good, like farms and jobs and saving energy and local businesses. But some people seem to think it's a bad word, and I don't really get why.

Stymied in Siler City

DEAR STYMIED,

If you want someone to tell you why sustainability might be considered a bad thing, you're asking the wrong person! Mr. Energy is just as confused as you are about why some people — let's face it, of a certain political bent — think the concept of sustainability is a bad thing. If you look up the word in the dictionary the definition states that it means using resources in such a way so they aren't depleted. That, or living your life following the philosophy of sustainability. Some people also think of it as leaving the world to our children in as good, or better, shape than we received it. To Mr. Energy that's a common sense way of living life, running a business, or operating a government, no matter what political party or ideology you follow. Heck, it's a family value! It's also a good business practice. And it's also a conservative fiscal policy. Here's what Mr.

ASK MR. ENERGY



Energy means:

Mr. Energy has children. He thinks everyone agrees that we parents have certain responsibilities towards our children: we need to give them food, shelter, warmth, and clothing. They need to be educated. We need to keep them safe. And we need to raise them in a way so they will grow to be productive members of society. That might not mean they all become doctors and lawyers or billionaires, but they will grow up, get jobs, and support themselves and their families. If we accomplish that as parents, we've raised our family sustainably.

Mr. Energy has owned four businesses in his lifetime: two arts-based businesses, one retail/service shop, and his current main business, which focuses on energy efficiency. All four of these businesses had

to be run sustainably to survive. Mr. Energy needed to take in more than he spent. He needed to price his goods and services so that he could pay his employees a fair wage. He needed to treat people fairly, and expect fair treatment from them as well. Even though only one of the four businesses Mr. Energy has owned has been "green," all have been sustainable.

In his home life Mr. Energy also tries to be sustainable. First, with his budget. Mr. Energy tries not to spend more than he makes. He tries to be fiscally conservative. This is a very sustainable point-of-view! He also tries to take care of what he has so he won't have to spend unnecessarily, but he recognizes the value of putting forth money (like for quality food, for example) if it ensures health...thus sustaining his own body as well as those of his family. We can easily make the leap from the family's finances to the government's finances. Mr. Energy wagers to guess that no matter which way you lean politically, you want government to save money where it can, and spend on worthwhile, quality investments. It'll probably depend on your politics as to what "worthwhile, quality investments," means, but still — the basic premise is there. That's sustainability. Fiscal responsibility.

Finally, Mr. Energy tries to keep in mind his impact on the environment in

everything that he does. This means things like teaching his children to recycle or to preserve energy or to try (oh, how he tries) to get them to be consumers of less "stuff." It means often choosing food that's produced locally and grown in a way that's not harmful to the environment. In his business this means thinking about gas consumption, lead paint safety, health and safety in his clients' homes, and disposal of waste products. Some of these things are required by law, but Mr. Energy also tries to think beyond them. Professionally and personally, Mr. Energy tries to live a sustainable life as much as he can. And he's willing to bet that if you met Mr. Energy, he'd seem a lot like you! Because he bets that most people are trying to live as sustainable a life as possible. It's just common sense.

Stymied, I hope this isn't too strange of a response, and that these examples make sense to you. Mr. Energy truly does not understand why sustainability is a bad word to some people. It seems like it should be a good thing for all.

Mr. Energy is the combined effort of Adrienne and Mark Bashista, co-owners of Home Performance NC, an energy auditing, energy rating, and home weatherization contracting company. They can be reached on the web: www.homeperformancenc.com and by phone: 919.360.1570.

CREATIVE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The next day we found a Chatham real estate agent who showed us a run-down, ram-shackled farm at the end of the Johnny Burke Road, a few miles east of town. It was a mess. We put \$100 down, and bought the place. Cheap. No heat, no AC, just us and the termites. But it

had a handsome hay barn, several sheds, and an old chicken barn that would do for a roomy (albeit drafty) pottery workshop. Today Mark and his apprentices produce five to six thousand pots there each year, and we're happy with our choice.

Wendy and Jacques DuFour have a similar story that ends with the creation of French Connections on the north end of downtown Pittsboro. Their delightful shop is filled with French antiques, African art and jewelry, and imported

fabrics. He is French, born in South Africa, she's American, and they met in Senegal. Yet in 2000, they chose Pittsboro for their hometown and we are the lucky benefactors.

Times have changed. Now with just a laptop, or an even smaller iPad, an online connection, and preferably a pretty view out the window, a growing number of folks can run their business from anywhere.

If the creative economy is key to our economic recovery, which is what we heard repeatedly at the Summit from economists, entrepreneurs, journalists, folks in state government and local business leaders, then how do we nurture that in Chatham County?

We create those reasons, and we also protect them.

A few days ago, I had lunch with Elizabeth Lassuy and "Destination Chatham" came full circle. Just as our reasons for choosing Pittsboro had been my cousin Beth, local clays, wood to fire in the kiln, a nearby market for hand thrown pottery, and a rural farm with potential, now Slow Money NC, a program I co-launched less than a year ago captured Elizabeth's interest. Elizabeth, with graduate studies in architecture, sustainable agriculture, and permaculture, came through town last May to hear Woody Tasch, author of *Inquiries Into the Nature of Slow Money*, speak at the community college in Pittsboro. Mike Ortosky and Tony Kleese, of Earthwise hosted the event, which

became the catalyst for the launching of Slow Money NC.

Elizabeth has worked for the last 15 years in the "green" building field as a construction manager and designer creating green and natural buildings in Arizona. With a deep interest in local economics and particularly local food issues; and, seeing we had already launched an active Slow Money group, matching investors/lenders of low-interest loans to borrowers in the local food economy, she came back. And offered to help, and to stay — we hope. By the end of our lunch she had been introduced to a local green builder who was in need of a construction manager. That's networking at its best.

Elizabeth is also helping out at Plowgirl Farm, a small local market farm. Slow Money NC and sustainable farming are comfortable bedfellows with a community of creative individuals and businesses.

It is these informal networks that grow our creative economy — adding jobs, strengthening our local food economy, and bringing interesting, creative individuals and their businesses into our community, into our lives.

There are innumerable reasons to enjoy Chatham County. This splendid local newspaper, for one!

Carol Peppe Hewitt can be found shepherding Slow Money NC (www.theabundancefoundation.org/slow-money), at the Hewitt Pottery, or Shakori Hills, and often on her laptop at the General Store Café or the Chatham Marketplace.

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