

When it comes to sustainability, act locally

What will our local communities look like in 2025?

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» **Published: December 26, 2009**

If peak oil is real, the supply of fossil fuels in the future will be severely limited and supplying it will be cost prohibitive. Cheap oil will be exhausted when the amount we can pump from the ground (or make from tar sands) is less than the amount we consume to run our economy. How will we heat our homes and gas up our cars and trucks in 2015, or 2025? How will we afford food grown thousands of miles away that needs to be refrigerated and shipped here? How can industries reliant on cheap oil continue to manufacture cheap goods and employ America's growing population? How will we get to work?

During the past century the world has seen growth on an unprecedented scale — and this steady, rapid growth coincided with the availability of cheap energy, mostly oil. A decline in the availability of cheap oil will result in the end of economic growth as we have known it. When oil prices topped out at \$147 a barrel last year and gasoline approached \$5 a gallon, the auto and airline industries buckled. Manufacturing costs skyrocketed and the economy shuddered. Food prices spiked. Without jobs based on cheap energy (and combined with Wall Street trickery and greed) we found ourselves in the Great Recession of 2008-2009. Welcome to the future.

Energy may be relatively cheap again in the short run and jobs may return, but a pickup in the world economy will put upward pressure on oil prices and dampen any recovery based on short-term low energy costs. An increase in demand (especially from China, India and other developing countries) matched with a fixed or falling oil supply will result in higher prices, by some estimates \$300 a barrel by 2013.

Add to that climate change, harvests dependent on fossil fuel-based fertilizers, expected recurrent droughts, and the lack of new technologies to replace oil, and things can look pretty bleak. We could wait for technology or government bureaucrats to solve the problem for us (a rather high-risk option) or we could take the matter into our own hands.

Doing it for themselves

Communities around the world are preparing for a transition — one back to a time when local economies were diversified, sustainable and relatively self-sufficient. Downtowns thrived, food was grown locally and varied skill sets were abundant.

Smart communities have begun inventorying their public lands for planting of nut and fruit trees. They have begun expanding their composting facilities in anticipation of needing a supply of fertile soil for local crops. They have begun planning greenhouses on public lands for year-round production of food and investigating hydroponic methods of growing. They are restoring regional food networks and investing in local agriculture. They plan mushroom-growing facilities and look for open space for grain and seed oil crops.

They plan for facilities to produce solar and wind power and geothermal heat sources to serve their communities and immunize them against anticipated failures to the national grid. They secure clean and safe sources of drinking water by protecting their aquifers, and by changing their building codes

to mandate permeable surfaces, rainwater harvesting systems, green roofs and vegetative swales. They are mapping out bike lanes, central heating plants for downtowns, planning covered walkways, and considering a return to electric trolleys and streetcars.

Communities have revisited the curriculum in their school systems to make sure future generations have the skills to develop and maintain sustainable systems, to make sure that the next generation knows how bricks are made, how lumber is milled, how electrons flow from solar grids, and how UV lights kill waterborne pathogens.

Smart communities are not waiting for miracles or for vested interests to save them. They are planning for a future that will look very different from what we now have, enjoy and take for granted. Groups of interested citizens are forming committees and working with municipal governments to take affirmative steps toward ensuring their communities' continued survival and existence.

Source: LoHud.com