

Solutions for Sustainability:

It is estimated that Americans throw away about 27% of the food that is available for consumption each year. Further, almost 80% of the energy used in the U.S. food system goes toward processing, packaging, transporting, storing and preparing food. Additionally, food in the US travels an average of 1,300-2,000 miles from farm to consumer (National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (NSAIS, 2009). Despite the fact that Americans are not consuming almost 1/3 of the food that is available to them, the health of the nation is cause for increasing concern, especially among the nation's youth. Given this pattern of waste and deteriorating health, it becomes apparent that current modes of consumption are not sustainable with respect to individual health or in terms of the use of environmental resources (United Nations Environment Programme, 2002). This disconnect may be attributed to the commonly implied trade off between personal wellbeing and environmental health. The sustainability lecture was intended to call this tenuous link into question and to demonstrate ways that individual quality of life is actually enhanced and supported by ecologically responsible behavior.

The issue of personal health and global sustainability is complex and often requires individuals to weigh their options with respect to outcomes on a variety of dimensions. Thus, by becoming aware of the complexities of the ecological system, individuals may be in a better position to make informed decisions that will allow them to maintain optimal health while simultaneously acting in ecologically responsible ways. By intentionally cultivating attention to the present moment, individuals may be less amenable to normative social influence that is encouraging irresponsible or unsustainable behaviors. Individuals are encouraged to evaluate their decisions with respect to overall energy consumption as well as the impact on psychological and physical functioning. Essentially, using modes of transportation that involve individual locomotion, reducing need and choosing activities and food products that are sustainable and local are some starting points. All individuals are responsible for constructing a lifestyle that is personally fulfilling yet nested within the larger ecological context. The Myra House holistic living center is an example of a sustainable system that supports both personal health and community wellbeing while simultaneously promoting the welfare of the global environment.