

Day 4: Know yourself.

There are no sustainable cities or counties or regions in New Mexico. There may be a few sustainable households, but if so there are not many. To get from where we are now, to where we want to go, we have to *know* where we are in the journey.

So today's sustainable living recommendation is to keep accurate household records. I recommend financial, water, energy use, and food consumption records.

Regarding energy use, your PNM bill comes with information regarding your energy usage for the past year. Put this information into a spreadsheet. Record the month, the energy used (kilowatt hours or dekatherms), and the bottom line price of the bill.

Every time you fill up with gasoline, get a gas receipt, and enter that information into your gasoline spreadsheet.

Regarding food, for sustainability purposes you should mostly interested in the quantities and types of food you buy. This will be important information to know later in this series. Record what you buy and how much you buy, e.g. hamburger - 10 lbs, chicken - 4, flour - 10 lbs, potatoes - 5 lbs, salad greens - 3 pounds, etc. The easiest way to do this is to save your grocery receipts and make your spreadsheet from that. I suggest to keep these totals by the month.

Financial records are important because economic viability is an integral aspect of household sustainability. And as they say, "Where your treasure is, there also will be your heart." Accurate financial records that show your spending habits help you move towards sustainability.

These records provide you a method of keeping track of your progress towards sustainability. That's important because sustainability is not an instant gratification event. It occurs over time, long periods of time, and we need to know that we are making steady progress if we are to remain psychologically committed to this goal.

For example, looking at our household's energy usage records, we find that comparing the calendar years 2004-2005, our electricity usage declined 28%, and comparing the first seven months of 2006 with the first seven months of 2005, we find a 42% reduction in electricity usage. (That's what passive solar has done for us.) For natural gas, during the years 2004-2005 our usage declined 100% to zero (as of October 2005). For gasoline, however, there has been no real decrease over that period. That tells me that our household, in the coming year, needs to focus on gasoline use, especially since the amount of money we are paying for gasoline has increased more than 50%, 2004-2006.

One of the primary antidotes to mindless consumerism is to pay attention to what you are consuming by keeping records so you know more about yourself and your role in this eco-system. As you come to know more about your consumption patterns and costs, you

can make more informed and effective choices about reducing your impact on the ecology of this region and indeed the entire planet.

For more information check out:

www.bettertimesinfo.org

www.energyconservationinfo.org

www.bobwaldrop.net