

## SUSTAINABLE LIVING

### *First in a Series by Elizabeth Landsberg*

A project to encourage "sustainable living" was one of three social action projects that emerged from the Social Action Shabbaton held at B'nai Israel in October. What, you may well ask, is sustainable living and what does it have to do with Judaism or with me?

#### **What is sustainable living?**

Simply put this philosophy encourages practices that preserve our world – its environment and many ecosystems. It is based on the premise that we are live within these ecosystems and have a responsibility to protect the earth. Sustainable living practices include:

- Decreasing the use of nonrenewable energy to reduce global warming and other harmful effects. More than 95% of the electricity we use has at its source fossil fuels or nuclear energy. We can reduce the use of these harmful energy sources by:
  - Conserving energy
  - Increasing energy efficiency
  - Using renewable energy
- Driving less and driving climate-friendly cars. Vehicles generate more than one-quarter of global warming pollution.
- Reducing the waste we produce by reducing, reusing, recycling, and composting.
- Encouraging sustainable agriculture, including:
  - Buying local, organic food
  - Buying Fair Trade coffee, tea and chocolate
  - Adopting eco-kashrut practices
  - Supporting and planing edible landscapes, e.g. growing some of your own food
- Reducing our use of toxics in everything from fertilizers to pesticides to cleaning products. These products can have immediate harmful effects in our synagogue and home environments and later in our water supply.

#### **What is Jewish about sustainable living?**

Jewish teachings clearly direct us to care about and take action to protect our world. "God placed the human in the Garden of Eden to serve and to guard." Genesis 2:15. God spoke to Adam: "See my works, how fine and excellent they are! Now all that I created, for you I created. Think upon this, and do not corrupt and desolate my world; for if you corrupt it, there is no one to set it right after you." Ecclesiastes Rabbah. 7:28. The Reform movement has taken numerous stands in support of protecting our environment and adopting sustainable living practices. For example, in 1991, the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) passed a resolution calling upon our congregations and congregants to consciously modify their behavior in order to preserve our planet, as well as to ensure that the economic and health costs of environmental hazards do not disproportionately fall on poor and minority communities.

There are numerous Jewish resources supporting sustainable living practices such as:

- The Religious Action Center's A Climate Change Resource Page (<http://rac.org/advocacy/issues/issuecc/challenge/>).
- The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) (<http://www.coejl.org>)

#### **What does this have to do with me?**

B'nai Israel's Sustainable Living Group is now in the process of deciding what areas to work on in 2007. Because sustainable living encompasses a broad spectrum of issues we plan to focus on a few specific areas. One thing we know we want to do is to help educate our community about what each of us can do to fulfill God's command that we act as stewards of the earth. So, look to this sustainable living column each month for a new area to learn about and concrete actions you can take. If you want to join our Sustainable Living Group, contact Elizabeth Landsberg at [deanberg@sbcglobal.net](mailto:deanberg@sbcglobal.net) or 916-456-1229 or Susan Rosenberg at [rsroshill@aol.com](mailto:rsroshill@aol.com) or 916- 451-3932. Stay tuned!

### *Second in the "Sustainable Living" Series by Elizabeth Landsberg*

#### **Sustainable Living: The Food We Eat**

B'nai Israel's Sustainable Living Committee encourages practices that preserve our world. This month's sustainable living column is on the all-important and all-Jewish topic of **food!**

One critical component of sustainable living is sustainable agriculture – farming practices that limit pollution, maintain soil fertility, and use renewable resources. One certified system of sustainable agriculture is the organic label. To qualify as organic

food must be grown without the use of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides and without the use of genetically modified organisms or irradiation. Organic farming practices include positive soil building, conservation and crop rotation. To be considered organic livestock must have outdoor access, be fed organic feed, and not be fed antibiotics or hormones. These farming methods help nurture the earth by reducing the use of toxic pesticides and keeping our soil, water, and air healthier. The organic movement encourages buying locally-grown foods. This reduces fossil fuel consumption and supports our local communities.

Jewish law places great import on food as evidenced by the system of *kashrut* which prescribes what Jews may and may not eat. While many Reform Jews do not keep kosher, examining these rules illustrates the importance of food in Judaism. As Rabbi Samuel Weintraub wrote in *The Spiritual Ecology of Kashrut*, “we keep kosher to be holy, as God is holy.” He explains that through *kashrut* the Israelites developed an awareness of “the order and wholeness in the natural world, and joined in the holiness of that world’s Creator. *Kashrut*, then, is a kind of spiritual ecology.” Rabbi Weintraub explains that *kashrut* creates a greater awareness of what we eat and argues we should look beyond the original rules of *kashrut*, to the question of which foods protect the earth and how the foods were produced. The movement of “eco-kashrut” urges us to ask these questions and to think about sustainable farming practices, treatment of farm workers, and the impact of the food we eat on the environment.

**What Can I Do to Support Sustainable Agricultural Practices?** Learn about your food and where and how it was grown and buy locally grown organic food.

- **Shop at farmer’s markets** to meet the people growing our food, learn what is in season when, and stay more connected to the food we are eating. The closer the food was grown the less fossil fuels used to transport it.
- **Buy organic food and other products** to support environmentally sustainable farming techniques and protect our environment.
- **Buy a “share” in a local farm through the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project.** Some local farms that have CSAs serving the Sacramento area are Capay Fruits and Vegetables, Full Belly Farm, Good Humus Produce, Riverdog Farm, and Terra Firma Farm. All have websites with more information

To find out more or join the Sustainable Living Committee, contact Elizabeth Landsberg at [deanberg@sbcglobal.net](mailto:deanberg@sbcglobal.net) or 916-456-1229.