

2008: Change is happening

If 2007 was about convincing the world that climate change is really happening, and making commitments to do something about our part in it, then hopefully 2008 will be about action in order to mitigate and prepare for climate change. The pledges of 2007 were significant: at Bali, the international community came together to make a commitment to action. Nationally, our government has worked out a compromise Energy bill which is at least a step in the right direction. Nationally, the mayors of over 754 cities and towns have now signed the Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement, representing more than three-quarters of the population of the United States. States are taking significant action. The leaders of over 465 colleges and universities around the U.S. have signed the Presidents Climate Commitment, pledging to achieve climate neutrality. Major businesses are making strides. Internationally, nationally, and as a community, we've made the pledges; now it's time to roll up our sleeves.

According to some climate experts, we have already passed a tipping point at which accelerated climate change is inevitable, so it is essential that we ready ourselves to adapt. "Adaptation" will mean at least preparing for rising fuel and food costs as well as rising temperatures and changes in precipitation. But "mitigation" is still necessary: reducing our carbon emissions in order to reduce the likelihood of the most dangerous global warming...there's no need to turn up the heat... We are entering a time when mitigation and adaptation are becoming equally important. Fortunately, the two goals often require the same actions.

So what action do we take here in 2008?

We've heard plenty about what can be done to reduce emissions, however thinking about adaptation puts a slightly different spin on things. With the cost of oil surging, and cropland increasingly used for ethanol, we need to find the changes and actions that will be most effective at both reducing emissions in a hurry, and preparing our community for increased energy and food costs. Energy efficiency and local food production have been identified as two areas that provide both mitigation and adaptation.

Energy efficiency: in homes, businesses, cities, industries, institutions, and vehicles there's still room for improvement in energy efficiency. Lighting, insulation, windows, behavioral changes, energy and heat recovery – all can make a significant difference. A study which came out at the end of 2007, "Reducing US Greenhouse Gases: How Much at What Cost?" by McKinsey & Company, and sponsored by major energy companies and environmental groups, found that the most cost-effective first steps have to do with energy efficiency in homes, businesses and industry. Look for seminars and forums here in Alliance in the coming months where we can learn from other NE Ohio businesses and industries about efficiency successes. Energy efficiency means greater profits, and lowered risks (including lower peak-load costs). Increased efficiency also makes the use of renewable energy sources more feasible. For homeowners, grants for alternative energy are available only after you've reduced your electricity use to under 650 kwh per month (so think insulation and energy star before you price solar panels).

Local food production: this is another significant way to reduce carbon emissions while making our community more resilient in the face of uncertain fuel and food costs. We can buy local produce, grow our own food, re-learn how to can and freeze produce, support restaurants that serve local fare, and find out how to be involved in supporting and developing our local food sources by joining community discussions on the topic. The authors of the local foods book “Plenty” (Alliance’s “One Book One Community” selection this year) will be speaking at the Mount Union Theatre on Wednesday, April 2 at 7 p.m. For all you foodies out there: they are featured in the latest issue of Bon Appetit magazine, or look for “the 100-mile diet” online. Don’t have time to read? Dr. Charles McClaugherty, professor of Biology at Mt. Union, and Director of the Brumbaugh Center, will be reviewing the book at 7 pm on January 15th, at the Rodman Library. A subcommittee of the Mayors’ Green Task Force is meeting to discuss the development of a Saturday farmers market in Alliance, to bring together local farmers and their produce for one-stop local shopping. This would not replace our existing local farm markets, but rather highlight and supplement them, giving them the strength in numbers and location that could help them to better compete with the larger grocery chains.

Alliance is poised for positive change. Mitigation and adaptation for climate change means creating a healthier and more sustainable community in general. More efficient homes and businesses mean greater profits, and healthier household finances. A strong local food community means resources stay in the Alliance area, local farmers have more options, and people have access to food without the added travel costs. This crisis could actually be an opportunity for us; let’s embrace this change.

Check it out:

“Reducing US Greenhouse Gases: How Much at What Cost?” McKinsey & Company, in association with DTE Energy, Environmental Defense, Honeywell, National Grid, Natural Resources Defense Council, PG&E and Shell: <http://www.mckinsey.com>

“Getting Ahead of the Curve: Corporate Strategies That Address Climate Change” Prepared for the Pew Center on Global Climate Change: http://www.pewclimate.org/global-warming-in-depth/all_reports/corporate_strategies/

“Regional Impacts of Climate Change: Four Case Studies in the United States” (December 4, 2007) <http://www.pewclimate.org/>

“Adaptation Planning: What U.S. States and Localities are Doing” <http://www.pewclimate.org/>

“Preparing for Climate Change: A Guidebook for Local, Regional and State Governments,” authored by the Climate Impacts Group and King County, Washington. <http://www.iclei.org/>

“Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally” by Alisa Smith & J.B. MacKinnon, creators of “The 100-mile diet.” <http://www.100milediet.org/getting-started-guide/>