

Making the Community Better...(a guest post...)

Posted by Prof. Goose on June 2, 2005 - 1:40am

A while back, when I first started to post about Peak Oil over on my old blog, Ianqui was one of the first people to discuss and think about it with me (along with the venerable HO, of course...) without thinking I was silly. She's posted some on peak oil over on her blog and has posted in the comments here a few times as well.

Tonight, she's put together a post along the lines of another area I would like to take this blog every once in a while: things to think about regarding community and personal development in preparation for peak oil. This post is a nice beginning to going down that road. These are small things she talks about, but imagine if everyone did them for a week...or a month...

In a post a couple of days back, one of my main points was that norms, attitudes, and behaviors have to change, whether by choice or by force. Sure, it may be too late to make a huge difference, but is it too late to soften the blow?

So, without further ado, here's Ianqui...

I first learned about Peak Oil through Prof Goose's original posts on his personal blog. Then I started reading the super-alarmist websites, like Life After the Oil Crash, and then James Howard Kunstler's Rolling Stone article, among others. But I found myself a little less fascinated by the dry facts of why this is happening, and more interested in reading about what's going to happen to us. More importantly, I realized I personally can't do much to force open the government's eyes, but I can do little things that maybe will make my community better, and my own life easier later on.

This stuff is nothing new, but I'm hoping that by posting it here on TOD, other people will take it seriously too. If you already know, you can send this to other people who may not. We can't practically move to Vermont and start organic farming, nor can we all buy a Prius. But there are easy, painless things that will hopefully be a start. Here you go.

1. Buy organic.

Most commercial fertilizers are made of oil, pure and simple. According to this article by Bruce Thompson (of Running on Empty), 4% of the US energy budget is used to grow food, and 10-13% 'is needed to put it on our plates'. When oil runs out, we're going to have to look for other ways of producing enough food for the country. Fortunately, organic farmers already know how to do this.

If you're interested, you can find the USDA standards for organic production and handling here. For example, for fertilizers, farmers must use composted plant and animal materials, not synthetic fertilizers. To control weeds and bugs, farmers may develop habitats for natural enemies of the pests or use non-synthetic traps or repellents. The Oil Drum | Making the Continut//iwwweettheoil@auguestrm@dstass)c/2005/06/making-community-bettera-guest-post.html I realize that buying organic can be expensive, so you may want to take it one product at a time. However, I've found that quite a lot of organic foods, especially processed things like cereal or tomato sauce, are often cheaper than their conventional counterparts. (I mean it--compare the price of Kashi cereals to Total Corn Flakes, for example.) Perhaps you can't buy all of your veggies at Whole Foods, but perhaps you have a farmer's market near you. Local farmers may not always use organic standards, but in this case, you're supporting a small-scale farmer who has important knowledge that will need to be passed down.

If you're interested in more ambitious measures, consider becoming vegetarian. As Thompson points out:

- Bread, 1 Kg = 6 miles = is one slice per 422 yards; equivalent to human doing heavy labor 1 hour
- Beef, 1 Kg = consumed by driving 76.2 miles; equivalent to human doing heavy labor 300 hr.
- Canned corn = consumed by driving 5.4 miles; equivalent to human doing heavy labor 20 hr.

1 kg of beef requires 15x more energy than eating canned corn! Thompson (<u>and others</u>) also notes that any quantity of grain will feed 5x as many people as if it were used to feed livestock and then comsumed by humans as meat.

2. Reduce waste by refusing packaging when possible.

About 2 months ago, I decided to stop accepting plastic bags at grocery stores. This is a truly easy thing to do, especially if you drive to your shopping locations. Carry around cloth or canvas bags. You can leave them in your car, or grab them on the way out of the home or the office. If you come home with 5 bags of groceries, in most cases you're really getting 10 bags, since people usually double-bag. Cloth bags are sturdier, and bigger. And if you're putting it in your car anyway, it shouldn't be a problem. This should go not just for grocery stores, but for Target, Wal-Mart, CVS, etc. Some stores, like Whole Foods, even give you 5 cents back for every bag you bring in.

Buy in bulk from bins when possible. Places will often let you bring your own plastic or glass containers to fill, and will deduct the weight of the container if you ask them to weigh it first. Same goes for salad bars. Likewise, carry around a set of silverware, or leave it in your office. You don't need to throw out plasticware every day. A sturdy plastic cup in your office is better than taking a cup from the dispenser next to the water cooler.

3. Drive the speed limit and inflate your tires properly.

Seriously. This is an extremely difficult one for me to advocate for, since I always hated driving slower than 75. (Now I don't really drive since I live in NYC, but that's beside the point.) You all know that driving the speed limit saves oil, but you may not know specifically why.

Assuming you're driving on the highway (since all bets are off in stop-and-go traffic), your gas consumption is related to your road load. <u>Road load is calculated</u> by factoring in several

The Oil Drum | Making the Cdmbnu///iww@etheoil@auguestnp/dstass)c/2005/06/making-community-bettera-guest-post.html components, such as the rolling resistance of tires, friction in different parts of the car (like the brake pads or wheel bearings), the power of various pumps in the car, and aspects that affect aerodynamic drag. The important part is that if you increase your speed, the power required to keep the car running increases exponentially. Furthermore, since the factors contributing to road load are related to the shape and size of the car, it turns out that smaller, more aerodynamic vehicles (like cars) get better mileage at higher speeds, whereas larger vehicles get better mileage at lower speeds. By higher speeds, though, they really mean somewhere in the "sweet spot" of 40-60mph.

Also, don't forget to inflate your tires. According to Consumer Reports, more energy is needed to make underinflated tires roll. Furthermore, if the tire is underinflated by as little as 2 psi, it will cause a 1% increase in fuel consumption.

One last thought. Though people might try to argue that the cars made today are more fuel efficient, the truth seems to be that there are a lot of SUVs out there too, and by virtue of their size, it cannot be the case that they're most efficient at 70-80mph.

For more information on your particular car, you may want to check out fueleconomy.gov. At least parts of it, like this section on Oil Dependence and Energy Security, seem to be fairly realistic.

In short, there are many small things you can do to start the ball rolling. If we (as a nation, ideally) can just prolong the plateau by cutting out our most frivolous uses of oil-based products, we'll have many more years to enjoy the industrial lifestyle that we're accustomed to.

Go to the postings for today

Technorati Tags: peak oil, oil

Some RIGHTS RESERVED This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 United States License.