

Go green and profit

Time-tested practices show environmental sense is good business

By Dean Poeth

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A lot of hot air has been created by discussions of global warming and protecting the environment. Whether or not you believe that the Earth's rise in temperature is caused by man, there is one thing we all believe; the days of \$100-plus per barrel of oil are just around the corner. Skyrocketing energy costs are continuing to squeeze New York businesses that already have their backs to the wall. So could green be good for business? Perhaps green deserves a closer look.

When I grew up, protecting the environment consisted of neighborhood parents admonishing us kids, "Don't dump stuff in the crick." To those in business today, however, the message is more serious. Increasing environmental regulation, energy costs, waste disposal fees and litigation are a fact of life. So being green is no longer an option, it has become a necessary ingredient for survival.

Let's face it. Passing higher environmental and energy costs on to your customers results in lost market share. Likewise, repeatedly threatening suppliers to lower their costs is unsustainable. Therefore the only remaining option is to reduce those costs by reducing energy usage, reducing waste, and improving productivity.

LEARNING FROM THE AMISH

I know several Amish farmers who are green, not just because they love the land, (which they do) but because it saves money. We "English" (as they call us) are energy gluttons by comparison. Because their religion prohibits them from using many modern conveniences, they must creatively find alternative ways to remain productive in the competitive business of agriculture.

One Amish farmer is both a businessman and a manufacturer. His raw materials are seed and fertilizer, and when combined with sunlight, good soil and rain, produce his manufactured goods: milk and meat.

He is also something of a self-taught engineer. He needed and found an inventive way to keep his cows cool in the summer by devising a system that combines natural convection with dozens of giant roll-up curtains on both sides of the barn. No need for energy-guzzling electric fans to cool his cows. He lets the laws of physics and the wind do it for free.

Even gravity is put to work, from storing feed above the cows so it can be dropped to the Holsteins below (no electricity required), to the gravity pipeline that moves the manure out of the barn and into the holding tank. All for free. The manure is also recycled by using it (instead of expensive chemicals) to help fertilize the fields for next year's crop.

Another Amish man I know owns a large retail store that operates entirely without AC power. How does he accomplish this modern miracle? To start, he uses a ceiling full of skylights to light the store. He has no need for energy-guzzling electric lights that eventually burn out, and the light from

the sun is cheaper than even the most efficient compact fluorescent. By closing his store before dark, he eliminates the need for any supplemental lighting.

... AND HENRY FORD

Using green principles to save money is not just for farmers. Henry Ford, the founder of the Ford Motor Co., employed these same principles to reduce the manufacturing costs of the Model T automobile. Nearly 100 years before "reduce, reuse, recycle" entered our vocabulary, Ford employed the principles of conservation to help improve productivity and drive down the price of the Model T from \$950 in 1909 to an incredible \$355 in 1921.

For example, Ford engineers found a way to turn wood scraps and sawdust from his factory into charcoal briquettes. The briquettes were sold as Kingsford Charcoal, a brand that is still on the market today.

ADDS TO THE BOTTOM LINE

Ford also claimed that by recycling scrap he added an additional \$600,000 a year to the bottom line. In another instance, Ford engineers noticed that a stamping operation created six-inch-diameter circles of waste steel. These would normally have been scrapped, but instead Ford found a way to convert them into radiator caps.

Ford once said, "Picking up and reclaiming the scrap left over after production is a public service, but planning so that there will be no scrap is a higher public service." He was right.

The fact is, in most cases it is easier to save money than to earn it, and cheaper to prevent scrap than to dispose of it.

With New York businesses pushed to the limit, we must use every idea available to reduce costs and stay competitive. Saving energy, improving productivity, and eliminating scrap aren't just green, they're good for the bottom line.

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