

YES! Magazine Winter 2007 Issue: Go Local!

:: Successful Strategies Emphasize Accountability

Many "Go Local" campaigns focus on getting people to buy local. Sustainable Connections, in Bellingham, Washington, takes it a step further. They ask businesses to return the support by committing to sustainability—and to the local economy.

"Our approach is based on reciprocity," says Michelle Long, executive director for Sustainable Connections. "We support local businesses that have a strong natural sense of accountability to their community, and in turn we ask our community to support them."

The community is answering the call. In a survey of the impact of the organization's "Think Local First" campaign, almost 60 percent of Bellingham residents said they're now much more deliberate about patronizing local, independently owned businesses when possible.

A key to Sustainable Connections' success is an open membership policy. They decided early on not to make rules about which businesses qualify as "sustainable."

Instead, they welcome any truly local business—defined as privately held, with more than 50 percent local ownership, and able to make independent business decisions.

From there, they work closely with owners to develop a realistic "sustainability commitment" to take their businesses to the next level, no matter where they currently are. Sustainable Connections highlights businesses that do make changes, holding them up as heroes, and encouraging all local business owners to be part of this growing community.

As local farmer John Belisle observed, "Telling people who are interested but not 'there' yet that they can't be members would be like building a church and not letting in any sinners."

Interested? Sustainable Connections, go to www.sconnect.org.

<http://www.yesmagazine.org/article.asp?ID=1599>

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