

Why Buy Local?

Every Dollar Is an Investment in Your Community

BY KAREN MARZLOFF



New England is a small spot on the map, and NH a smaller dot than that. But we think big. We are home of the town meeting, Henry David Thoreau, free public education and the Free State Project. We love our local inventions, from the Segway (NH) to basketball (Massachusetts) to Moxie (Maine).

Now "Buy Local"—a blend of economic stimulus, community effort and environmental sustainability—is sweeping across the region. It's not unique to New England, but it has gained a unique foothold here. From Boston to Portland and everywhere in between, including Portsmouth and the Lakes Region, local business networks are collaborating on the "10% Shift," a campaign to encourage everyone to make a few small changes in purchasing behavior in 2009. Commit at least 10 percent of your spending to locally owned, independent businesses, and watch the local multiplier go to work.

"If just 10 percent of us shifted 10 percent of our budget, that would mean millions of dollars invested in New England right now, today," says Sue Bullerwell of All My Life Jewelers in Laconia and founding member of the Belknap Independent Business Alliance. "This is not about guilt; we understand the convenience of big box and Internet shopping. This is about awareness. The more you make local choices, the more local choices there will be."

The buy local movement certainly references a simpler time—it prizes self-reliance, neighborly interactions and local character—but it's not nostalgic. It's about retooling our lives to reduce carbon emissions and meet the challenges of peak oil, while taking advantage of global connections and a global perspective.

"At a time when new ideas are needed, this is an immediate and measurable way to strengthen the economic outlook for everyone who lives in New England. It's a strategy that localizes economic development around a sustainable and just economy, real job creation, and the emerging green economy," says Laury Hammel, co-chair of the "10% Shift" campaign and owner of the Longfellow Clubs in Massachusetts.

Several studies have found that every \$100 spent at a local, independent business keeps around \$68 in the community, compared to only \$43 when it's spent elsewhere. A new study by Civic Economics in Grand Rapids finds that if the 600,000 area residents were to redirect 10 percent of their total spending from chains to local businesses, it would create nearly \$140 million in new economic activity for the region and 1,600 new jobs.

Closer to home, economist Doug Hoffer found that if Vermonters substituted local products for only 10 percent of the food they import, it would result in \$376 million in new economic output, including \$69 million in personal earnings from 3,616 jobs.

So what does "local" mean? Think of it like a bull's eye. "It's great if you can buy your groceries or light bulbs, gifts or books from a locally owned, independent business. It's even better if they were grown or made by businesses based in your town, from raw materials here in New England," says Tom Holbrook, owner of RiverRun Bookstore in Portsmouth and founding president of Seacoast Local.

The Web site, www.10PercentShift.org, can help you break down your budget into categories like food, housing and transportation costs. Adjusting the

calculations will show how much of your spending is already done locally and reveal areas where you can shift your purchases to local businesses.

On top of the economic returns, you'll reduce miles driven for shopping. With the rise of big-box stores in the 1990s, retail space in this country doubled from 19 to 38 square feet per capita, and shopping-related driving for the country as a whole rose by almost 95 billion miles between 1990 and 2001.

And there's much more to it than retail. In Epping, voters recently passed an energy efficiency standard for new construction. Among the menu of options for builders is to use materials produced close to home. "The foundation of our effort is really quite simple; using less fuel and less energy results in less pollution and therefore less costs," says Robert Graham, then chair of the Epping Planning Board.

This modern twist on local self-reliance has proven its merit. In the 1970s, Denmark leveraged local investment to develop the world's premiere wind power industry. In Spain, the locally-based, worker-owned manufacturing, financial and retail giant Mondragón Cooperative is the country's seventh largest corporation.

Our region already has a strong identity, cultural and economic heritage, and tradition of grassroots leadership. Those resources position us to do well under the initiative. On the Seacoast, residents already enjoy busy farmers' markets year round, local food on restaurant menus, and a new initiative to deliver more seafood from local boats to local plates. Local energy committees have sprung up in nearly every town, saving money in town buildings and helping neighbors be more energy efficient. And two years ago, local business owners founded Seacoast Local to foster more of these efforts.

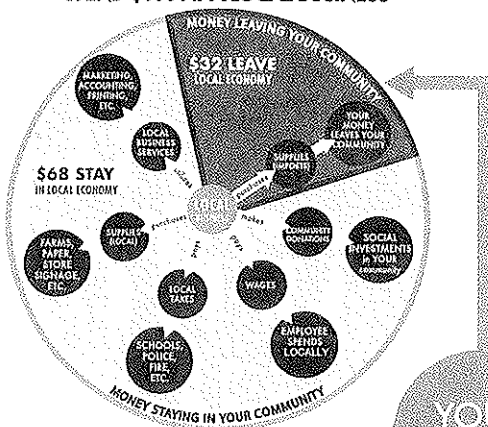
"We formed Seacoast Local in 2006 because we realized Portsmouth's unique character is its greatest asset, but it's also fragile and requires our active participation. And now, in really difficult times where we know some of our local businesses are really hurting, we find our choices of more consequence than ever," adds Holbrook.

In a difficult economy, in which you may have less to spend than you did last year, it's even more important to consider how you spend. In a sense, every dollar is a vote—a tiny, you-powered referendum on building our local economic vitality, vibrant neighborhoods and a healthy environment. This is how we will keep our region strong in the new economy.

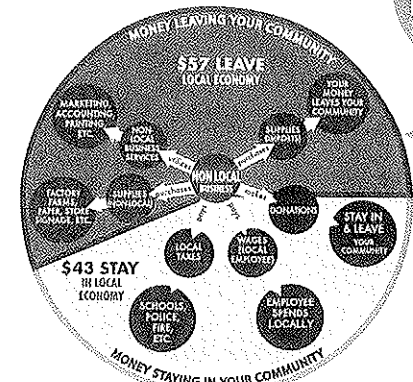
Karen Marzloff is a founding board member of Seacoast Local, online at www.seacoastlocal.org. Pledge to make the 10% Shift at 10percentshift.org.

LOCALLY OWNED BUSINESS

SPEND \$100 AT A LOCAL BUSINESS



YOUR DOLLARS



NON-LOCALLY OWNED BUSINESS

SPEND \$100 AT A NON-LOCAL BUSINESS