

# NUTRIGRAM

January 2007

## The Sustainability Buzz

### What Does Sustainability Mean?

When we examine the word “sustainability,” we immediately notice that its root word is “sustain,” which in this context means to “maintain” or “keep going.” Sustainability is considered a concept regarding the best outcomes for the human and natural environments— now and into the indefinite future. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines sustainability more specifically as the ability to achieve continuing economic prosperity while protecting the natural systems of the planet and providing a high quality of life for its people. In this country, the public generally associates sustainability with maintaining the environment and our ecological resources.

### Sustainability and Food

There is an increasingly emerging movement (even reaching mainstream agriculture) called “sustainable agriculture,” regarding how the practices of growing and raising our food affect sustainability. Even though our current food system has achieved success in various aspects of farming, especially in minimizing farming risks, it has also contributed to problems that must be addressed, such as topsoil depletion, groundwater contamination, the decline of family farms, continued neglect of the living/working conditions for farm laborers, increasing costs of production, and the disintegration of economic and social conditions in rural communities. While both supporters and non-supporters of sustainable agriculture feel that it is a philosophy or way of life rather than a set of rules, the main concerns of sustainable agriculture are as follows:

- ▶ Conservation and preservation – Resources (soil, water, even air) are replenished within the farming system. The waste is recycled and doesn't cause pollution. Transportation costs and fossil fuel use are minimal and is as locally-based as possible.
- ▶ Biodiversity – A variety of plants are grown and a variety of animals are raised and are rotated around the land to preserve and enrich soil and to prevent disease and pest outbreaks. Chemicals are used minimally or not at all.
- ▶ Animal Welfare – Animals are treated humanely, permitted to live as they would in the natural environment, fed an appropriate diet and are respected.
- ▶ Economic Viability – Farmers help build and strengthen local communities/economies and are paid fairly without dependence on government subsidies.
- ▶ Social Justice – Workers feel safe and are treated fairly and paid wages/ give benefits competitive with the market.

### What Can You Do to Contribute to Sustainability?

Buy food (especially fruits and vegetables) from local farmers markets or farm stands! The quality of local, fresh foods is extremely high and they happen to taste delicious as well!

Prepared by Susan Cooper, Dietetic Intern



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Jennifer M. Ignacio, MS, RD, CDN  
Nutrition Specialist  
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