



# OUR SUSTAINABILITY



## THE SHORTEST STORY

**S**ustainability is something good to strive for, daily, in all that we are. It is the honest, courageous, and exciting journey to create a future in which all people everywhere are able to live peaceful and fulfilling lives, and doing so without blatantly jeopardizing the lives of generations yet to live. It is cherishing that journey each step along the way, and honoring the past as the incredibly unique path that got us all to where we are now. It is the acknowledgment of natural laws and limits that we cannot and will not escape, nor completely conquer, whether they be physical and on a global scale or mental and on individual levels.

It is the realization that we are all inextricably linked to one another, and to the rest of the universe. It is taking action to change what we know cannot be sustained on Earth while remaining forever conscious of the harmful methods we routinely use to bring those changes about. We should not pretend to make sustainability exact, simple, or easy, but now more than ever before it's important to realize that business as usual isn't sustainable, and we can either change our ways or let other forces outside of our control do it for us.

**But if sustainability is all of these things, maybe we should stop using the word so much and develop a better vocabulary for how to live on spaceship Earth, our Pale Blue Dot, our only home.**



# THE SHORT STORY

Story time! You're on a cruise in the south pacific, and the captain points out a small island on the horizon, 30 miles off the starboard side. The island is mountainous, with tropical forests covering the lowlands and hillsides. The water around it is a clear and clean blue-green, and the small beaches you can make out along its shore are pristine. The captain says over the intercom this island has been untouched since its discovery, to preserve an isolated system in nature. She says the island supports a sustainable ecosystem, complete with rare fish, bugs, trees, birds, snakes, and others. What is she saying?

This island has been supporting itself for millennia with only energy absorbed by the sun. This sunlight has been absorbed by the trees and plants, and corals along the shores. Over time, trees die and fall to the forest floor. There, they decompose with the help of bugs, and those bugs in turn feed the larger predators like birds and snakes. These animals live and die over time, some feeding more bugs and trees, while others gradually decay and are buried under the earth with fallen trees and other life.

Let's look at one of these cycles. On one part of the island, the parakeets haven't found as much food as they normally do, and can't feed their young. Their population falls slightly. Then, because the snakes have lost a source of food, their population shrinks. Then, because the snake population is down, the baby parakeets are safer, and their population grows. This then gives the snakes more food again, and the cycle continues. Relationships like these, which can exist between animals, plants, even nonliving parts like the water, help comprise this ecosystem. They balance themselves out, and are naturally stable.

On the other hand, positive (not necessarily good) feedback loops exist too, which feed themselves as they grow to a point where they cannot hold up anymore. Imagine a tropical fruit tree growing on a precarious slope on this island. As the sunlight is absorbed by the tree, the tree

grows, and its branches reach out and up for more sunlight. In turn, the tree collects more sunlight, and grows even more hardy and massive. The slope can't hold the tree forever though, and it gives way when the tree becomes too heavy to support.

These positive feedback loops coupled with the negative ones like the predator-prey example above, comprise the countless relationships that make this island sustainable. It is not an unchanging place, but instead an incredibly complex balance of stability and progression over various timescales.



This island provides us with some insights. First and foremost, sustainability can only be understood by looking at the larger picture. It inherently refers to the entire isolated system, and the limits of that system are critical. The individual parts are not necessarily sustainable or unsustainable; they are merely feedback loops running over time and those feedback loops are governed by natural laws and limits. Just like on the island, our Earth has natural limits, and paying them little respect will result in the collapse, quickly or more slowly, of the positive feedback loops that are approaching their natural limits. Often times these limits are surpassed, but they do eventually stabilize. So thinking globally really is central to approaching the idea of sustainability. Simple stuff, right?

The island metaphor also shows us what we're trying to make sustainable. It isn't necessarily the whole island but our own human civilization, the snake population instead of the entire forest. We're trying to establish the possibility to provide for ourselves now and for future generations to live on after us. But knowing how much the Earth and Sun can provide for us now and into the future has proven to be controversial and difficult, since methods to preserve our civilization have been constantly evolving over time, with new technology and innovations, social arrangements, and so much more.

One widespread definition of sustainable development came into being through the UN's Brundtland Commission in March of 1987. "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This definition does make clear a few solid ideas, alluded to in the story above. The first of these ideas is that life, humans in this case, need "stuff" to survive, like food, shelter, and water, and we'll always be needing

that stuff. The second of these ideas is that limits exist in obtaining those needs, whether they be environmental, or human constructions like social and economic systems. Stuff can run out, it can be hoarded, or it could be inaccessible by some other way. The third and last piece is that sustainability is understood over time, as a process, and not so much as points frozen in time. However, all this, the story, the definition, are short on how exactly to achieve a sustainable human community.

So what does this all tell us, and where should we go from here? Here is our perspective.

We love and care about this world, but we have not conquered the complexities of all the relationships that exist here. While we all do not look lightly upon our own individual deaths and the uncertainty these cycles in life bring, an end to human civilization as we know it is a fate more awful than nearly all others. We want to sustain it, by living fulfilling lives now while knowing our children and the children of our friends can live on forever after in peace and reverence with that which surrounds them. So the good we are fighting for is in creating a more sustainable world, and we believe respecting the natural laws of our universe and learning to live in concert with them will bring us to a better place. But without really knowing what is sustainable, we've taken a hard look at aspects of our human civilization that we know are not sustainable, ones that are mostly in our control and that we can reverse. These areas depend on environmental limits, as well as human limits to endure conditions like hunger and sickness, oppression and hate, and the vast inequalities in power and wealth.

At Tenleytown Meat Company, we believe our products are working to reverse certain unsustainable patterns in our world. These areas include the dumping of carbon into the atmosphere, the distancing of people from food and the rest of the natural world, unjust working conditions and pay for people upholding an agricultural system that cannot survive indefinitely, and misaligned cash flows, from the government on through to the consumer. However, these claims are terribly difficult to make, so over the coming time, we will do our very best to assure you our products are everything that they stand for. We'll continually update our reading room with resources that expand upon these ideas. Have any more ideas on how we can address these issues and continue these conversations, just let us know!

# THE LONG STORY

Einstein has been quoted as saying "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." Well, after this long, drawn out explanation of what sustainability means to me, I'll stop misleading you, and say that I don't really know for sure. But that isn't for lack of trying. For the time being, Tenleytown Meat Company has one employee, and until the day when that changes, these thoughts on sustainability are my own. They've been collected through years of experience, reading books and articles, watching movies and lectures, traveling around the world in mind and body, thinking, taking classes, listening to music, finding quotes, and having conversations all along the way, in hammocks, in rainstorms, over beer, and in the offices of my mentors and teachers, young and old. I've gathered a list of books and other resources below that have influenced me and that in turn led to the words you trudged through above. These are among the conversations I like having, and I want you all to see some of the places my ideas have evolved out of, some directly, some more gradually. It has been a process,

sometimes fun and full of excitement, sometimes lonely, sometimes maddeningly difficult, but always something to appreciate. While even my most trivial events have had some impact on me, the list below compiles a small but significant collection of easily shareable resources shining light upon how I've been shaped thus far. None are without their shortcomings, but in my humble opinion all have something truly sensational to offer.

## *Peace be the Journey*

Will Mitchell  
Founder ~ Tenleytown Meat Company

## BOOKS

### **The Nature of Economies**

Jane Jacobs



### **Confessions of an Economic Hitman**

John Perkins



### **The Omnivore's Dilemma A Natural History of Four Meals**

Michael Pollan



### **Collapse How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed**

Jared Diamond



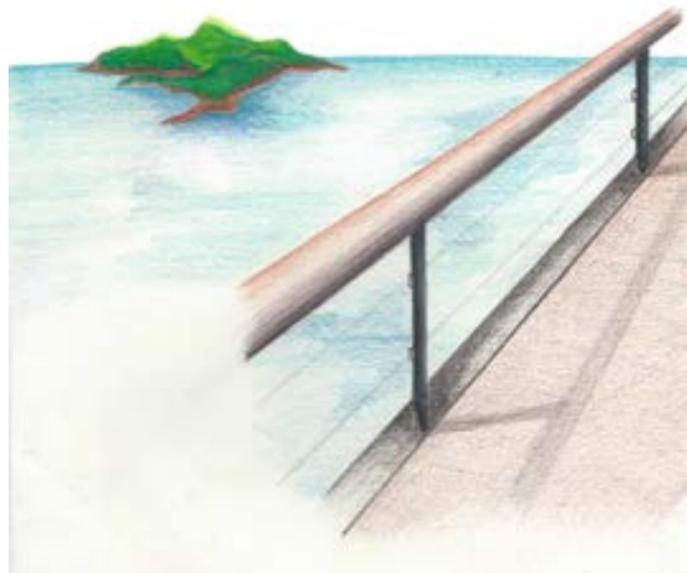
### **Getting Green Done Hard Truths from the Front Lines of the Sustainability Revolution**

Auden Schendler



### **The Lord of the Rings Trilogy**

J.R.R Tolkien



# MOVING PICTURES ~ WEBSITES ~ SHORT STORIES

## Food, Inc.

<http://www.takepart.com/foodinc>

## The Breakfast Club

The Breakfast Club Ending - HD

## How I Fell in Love with a Fish

Dan Barber

## Story of Stuff

Annie Leonard

## Why I Am Opposed to the War in Vietnam

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## A Radical Experiment in Empathy

Sam Richards

## Context Institute

<http://www.context.org/>

## Grist

<http://grist.org/>

## New Economics Foundation

<http://www.neweconomics.org/>

## What If We Change

<http://www.whatifwechange.org/magazine/>

## The Trouble with Wilderness

Bill Cronon

## The Flood Next Time

Alyssa Battistoni

## The State of the Species

Charles C. Mann

## The Weather Up There

McKay Jenkins

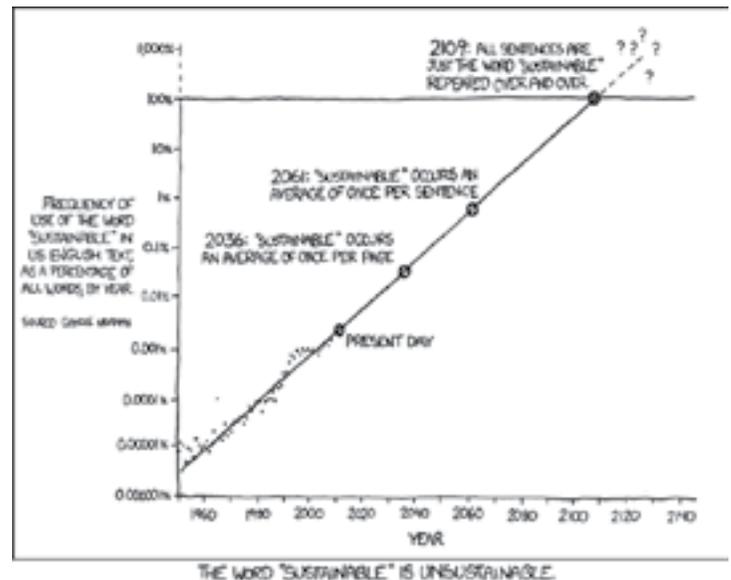
## Cookie Jar

Jack Johnson

## She is always Seventeen

Harry Chapin

The term sustainability has become a ubiquitous expression of a hazy concept (see right). Tenley Meat Co has acknowledged this reality, and while we will not claim the above words to be the world's answer to this dilemma, we thought it fitting to address the conversation in our own way. Whenever the term pops up on our website or in our materials, we urge you to reference this (lengthy, even lifelong, apologies, we just can't figure a way to make it shorter) conversation. We are honored you are taking a moment to check out our philosophy on the subject and we do hope these words will shine light on where we are coming from. For current updates on news and research within the nexus of sustainability and meat production, please check out the reading room, below the resources tab.



PEOPLE



PLANET



COMMUNITY



COMPANY

[www.tenleytownmeatcompany.com](http://www.tenleytownmeatcompany.com)

Washington, DC