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## SUSTAINABILITY IS PARAMOUNT

By J. Morris Hicks

In the future, things that we value most like family, health, freedom, peace, wealth, friends and happiness--will not exist without sustainability. In other words, if we don't learn how to live in harmony with nature, life will be nothing more than a hell on Earth for those few of us who manage to survive.

Many scientists now agree that Mother Nature cannot sustain the way we are living for very much longer. One of those scientists is Marcelo Gleiser, PhD, professor of natural philosophy, physics and astronomy at Dartmouth. Shortly before this book was published in the summer of 2015, his article entitled, "The High Price of What We Eat," was posted on npr.org. His conclusion:

"Yes, meat tastes good. But we have to start asking ourselves how long we are going to ignore what is obvious--that our meat-eating culture is not environmentally sustainable. We've moved far from our Paleolithic ancestors. It's time our diet follows our cultural advances."

In addition to the way we eat, there are three other primary elements of our grossly unsustainable lifestyle. Let's recap all four:

- 1. Overpopulation.** Having exploded from one billion to over seven billion in just 200 years, we continue to add almost a million people every four days.
- 2. Overconsumption.** Our entire global economy is based on maximizing the consumption of “stuff” in a world of finite resources.
- 3. Our dependence on fossil fuels.** One of the leading drivers of global warming, it is a direct result of the first two problems on this list.
- 4. The way we eat.** Requiring over ten times as much land, water and energy (per calorie) than plant-based foods, our wildly popular Typical Western Diet is grossly unsustainable and **MUST** be changed.

Since it will take many decades, if not centuries, to address the first three issues, our only remaining option is to change the way we eat. Switching from the Typical Western Diet to one consisting of mostly whole, plant-based foods offers us a HUGE opportunity to begin solving our overall sustainability nightmare.

As people everywhere begin to learn the whole truth about their food choices, millions will start replacing most, if not all, of their animal-based calories with healthier and “greener,” plant-based alternatives.

Some might ask, “What would happen to the billions of “food animals” alive today and would there be enough plant-based foods to go around if everyone tried to make

the change too quickly?” The simple answer is that as demand drops for animal-based foods, there will be fewer animals produced each year. In the ensuing years, the entire population of “food animals” will continue to dwindle—as the era of the widespread suffering of billions of animals for our dinner plates gradually comes to an end.

What about having enough plant-based foods to go around if hundreds of millions of people tried to make the change too quickly? The short answer is that major behavior change never happens that rapidly for large populations. And, as a business man, I am totally confident that our free-market system will respond as quickly as necessary to meet the rapidly growing demand for more health promoting, world-changing, plant-based foods.

As we begin replacing most of our animal-based calories with whole, plant-based alternatives, many wonderful things will happen. As we become healthier and the cost of healthcare plummets, we’ll also be taking the best possible action for our environment. Is it any surprise that Mother Nature designed it that way?

### **What else can YOU do?**

**Eat organically when you can.** Currently, non-organic farming uses huge amounts of pesticides, known to be harmful to humans as well as insects and weeds. Particularly concerning are genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which are designed to either generate their own pesticides within the plant or withstand massive external application of pesticide--not healthy for us or the planet. The safety data of GMOs is extremely limited, despite being a multi-billion dollar business.

Eating organically grown food significantly reduces the amount of pesticide you ingest, although it doesn’t

completely eliminate exposure. Even organic foods can have some residual pesticide from contaminated water or land or from adjacent farms that do not use organic farming techniques. Do yourself and the planet a favor, buy organic when you can.

**Eat locally grown produce if possible.** Strawberries in January are a treat, but shipping them thousands of miles generates a lot of greenhouse gases. You will have much less environmental impact if you eat what is grown in your own backyard--literally! Growing food yourself is a wonderful way to really connect with what you eat and is a particularly effective way to get kids enthusiastic about eating vegetables.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is another great way to eat locally grown food. When you join a CSA, you are buying a “share” of the farmer’s crop for the season. Each week, you will get an assortment of just-picked fruits and vegetables for an affordable price. You will likely get some vegetables you have never heard of before—providing an opportunity to learn how to prepare something new.

Farmer’s markets are another great option. Compared to a CSA, a farmer’s market will give you more choice over what you buy and how often.

**The Bottom Line.** The future of our civilization and our species lies in our hands, and the positive actions of every single individual can help. Sadly, the citizens of Easter Island didn’t realize that their lifestyle was unsustainable until it was too late. Hopefully, their story, covered in the next chapter, will help motivate us to take swift action to save our ecosystem NOW.