

MiSustainable Holland

About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

Community & Neighborhood: The places we live and the individuals we interact with support the development of our personalities and perspectives on life. Encouraging vital and effective communities is essential.

Find personal strategies for staying sustainable

By Megan Raisch
Hope Advocates for Sustainability

A few years ago on Earth Day, I decided to stop eating beef. For several years, I'd been examining my life and trying to find new ways to live sustainably.

I've always loved a good hamburger, so I was hesitant to give them up for good. However, I knew that the beef industry was a large contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and that it would be one of the easiest lifestyle changes I could make at the time.

Years later now, still beef-free, I find myself looking around at the state of our natural world and considering the real impact that my sustainable choices have made, if any. I stopped eating beef, but the ocean is still full of trash. Record heat days plague our calendars each year. Biodiversity continually decreases, as do forests, clean water, and breathable air.

When all of this is taken into account, it's easy to ask, "Do my choices and lifestyle really make a difference?"

The feeling of exhaustion and discouragement that many eco-friendly enthusiasts face can be described as "sustainability burnout." This feeling may be elevated as the holiday season approaches, where consumerism and waste is even more evident.

However, if we let the discouragement burn us out for good, then who will be left to advocate, to teach, and to demonstrate the importance of continued sustainability? With this in mind, I'd like to offer a few practical tips that have helped me stay strong in my sustainable efforts, even when the motivation is low.

The first thing I recommend is to surround yourself with a community that shares your goals and your vision. Taking on the monumental task of saving the planet is not to be done alone. Find others in your community, friend groups, or your workplace or college campus that will continue to encourage you in your efforts, as you encourage them, as well.

The next recommendation is to find some good news! Getting bogged down by the losses and negativity quickly leads to burnout. While still being aware of environmental topics and news, look for the successes and achievements that the sustainability community has had. There are many things to celebrate, and surrounding ourselves with this good news can motivate us to keep on pushing.

My last recommendation is to remember the impact that your choices have on your community.

Never underestimate the power of a conversation, an observation, or a word of encouragement. If you look closely, you might find that your choice to bike to work, eat less meat, or limit your water footprint influences the lifestyles of those around you, making them curious and inviting them to practice some sustainability, too.

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