

Reflective Essay – Environmental Sustainability

I grew up on a family owned and operated ranch in the interior of British Columbia. Environmental sustainability is one of the core values of the way I was raised. From a young age I was involved in doing the work: irrigation, animal feed production, animal husbandry, and range management. This meant I could be doing anything from operating heavy equipment to spending my day on the back of a horse. We lived off grid with gravity water, wood heat, and no phone. We always had a large garden where we grew a lot of our own veggies, and we ate home-grown beef, pork, lamb, and chicken.

As a young person I remember having a conversation in elementary school in which one of my peers informed me that milk came from the store. I couldn't believe the ignorance, I remember thinking "is this really the type of beliefs people hold?" I remember I felt "other"; with a lifestyle and understanding that, as far as I could see, few had. I thought it was sad that more people couldn't/wouldn't expand themselves or embrace what I had been taught. In hindsight this was an arrogant and entitled view.

As I matured, I came to realize that it was on me to promote the things I believed in. My time at University of Manitoba opened my eyes to extension type work and I was able to use the skills I learned in 4-H to promote my knowledge and viewpoints. However, I became aware of the limitation in this as a person can talk until they are blue in the face, but it will only go as far as a willing ear. People must be willing to listen and be open to learning new, or maybe old, ideas. I realized I needed to become more than just a messenger.

From a very young age my dad always told me "There are a million different ways to do any one thing." I believe he meant that I didn't always have to muscle my way through daily tasks; that there would come a time when I found I wasn't physically strong enough and then what? Well, work smarter not harder kid. Think about the task and figure out an easier way, one that isn't as physically demanding. However, that statement came to mean more to me when I learnt the word "diversity". Diversity is something I believe is a major component to environmental sustainability. At the time I didn't know that (I think I learnt the word diversity before I learnt the word sustainability). I didn't have the words to describe it, but I could see the scope of it in my daily life. In literally, every aspect of it if I paid attention from: the people in my life, the clothes that I saw and wore, the food that I enjoyed from all kinds of areas and cultures to the benefits seen in cross bred cattle and a diversified investment portfolio (so I hired a banker), and diverse agricultural growing system verses monocultures.

Reflective Essay – Environmental Sustainability

Steve Milano writes that sustainability is a social responsibility and includes business practices that promote fairness including diversity in hiring and promoting employees and selecting vendors and suppliers. It wasn't until recently, while researching circular economies in building practices, that I read that and had a full circle moment of my own. Other people are writing about beliefs that I have come to on my own and gained from my own experiences. Experiences that I can only imagine are very different from, in this case, Steve's. What's that saying? All roads lead to Rome, I mean home...

Let's talk about some bigger debates for a minute such as fossil fuels vs renewable energy. There is a belief, among some, that we should only drive electric cars and that diesel trucks are harmful. But what are the components of that electric car and infrastructure that allows it to be charged? It doesn't matter which side of the coin your opinion lies on, both sides make the coin. I think we need it all, but we have a responsibility to do the best we can at whatever it is that we are doing with the knowledge that we have available to us.

I believe environmental sustainability should be a responsibility in every industry and have come to the realization that it shows up in my life in whatever I happen to be doing. I have spent time working in primary industries such as agriculture and forestry and now I am learning about the building industry in the Architecture and Engineering Technology program at Thompson Rivers University and working towards environmental sustainability is a prominent theme in them all.

The BC energy step code is an example of a legislative change brought about through the shift in public opinion towards more environmentally sustainable practices. The goal is to meet the province's mandate that all new buildings be net zero energy ready by 2032. This type of legislation causes a need for change in the building industry. Within my lifetime, I will see new technologies, procedures, and products utilized in this industry and I believe that to be successful it will require a steep learning curve to stay relevant.

When it comes to looking after our environment, I believe there are very few people out there that can create long lasting change within their lifetime. I also believe that as individuals we have a great ability to influence those around us. If we want to create change it's not just the physical act of doing a thing differently than it's been done before, but rather a thought process, a way of thinking, the "how" a situation is approached, or a problem solved that will initiate this change. This kind of change is a

Reflective Essay – Environmental Sustainability

process. It takes time because it needs to come at all levels, from consumers to business to upper-level government policy.

We live in an economic society. That will never change. I also think it is the reason that throughout certain eras in history we have lost sight of the environment. I think we have been here before. We can view a population's environmental consciousness (popular opinion) as a cycle. An increase in economically focused consciousness causes a decrease in environmental consciousness until a point is reached when the environment falters and then there is a shift to a more environmentally focused consciousness until the economy falters, repeat. I think that if we want to create lasting change, we need to educate people, in particular young people, about sustainability, what that means for our environment and most importantly how to approach these kinds of problems within the context of an economic society. We need to teach young people how to problem solve in way that allows them to be fluid and forward thinking. How do we create this ideology of environmental sustainability so that changes are fluid and happening as they are needed? My answer is that harmony through diversity and valuing families need to be underlying themes in an economic framework. Teach our young people so they in turn teach their young people. I need to be able to trust that other people can carry on my work because there is no way for me to foresee the specific challenges that future generations will face. Therefore, I will endeavor to pass on the teaching, the values, and the ideology.

How will I improve environmental sustainability in the future by keeping diversity a focus in my daily life, by continuing to learn new things, and by bringing my knowledge to industry (building and ranching) and by showing up for young people to set examples and impart knowledge. For now, reach circle is small, my daughter and my nieces and my nephews but in the future, I would like to expand my range by doing more extension work to youth organizations such as 4-H.

Environmental sustainability is a core value that I want to pass on to my children.