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DEFINING "LOCAL" IN LOCAL FIRST

In Business, March-April, 2005, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 31

BALLE BEAT

Don Shaffer

LET'S START with a key question. I am often asked, "When we talk about "Local Living Economies," how do we define 'local'?" The answer really depends. City people may think of their neighborhood, whereas rural people may think of several counties surrounding their farm.

Right now, many of our BALLE networks are sponsoring Local First campaigns to promote the community benefits of buying from locally-owned and operated businesses. The question often arises, "How do we decide which businesses are 'local'?" To help answer this question (and many others), BALLE has developed a How-To Kit for Local First campaigns. Authored by Michelle and Derek Long from Sustainable Connections, our BALLE network based in Bellingham, Washington, this 90-page manual provides a step-by-step guide for running a successful Local First campaign in your local area - see our website for details: www.livingeconomies.org!!

From the How-To Kit: "Sometimes it can be difficult to determine which businesses are local and independently owned. How about a locally owned McDonalds? Would your committee consider an independent Toyota dealership an obvious participant? How about an insurance agent with a national company and a local office?"

We offer a simple survey for helping you define what it means to be a local business that would participate in a Local First campaign. We assume "you want to work with fellow community members who have full autonomy and local decision making authority."

SURVEY PROVIDES ANSWERS

Participants in a Local First campaign would be able to answer 'yes' to all of the following questions to be eligible:

1. Is your business privately-held (not publicly traded)? yes or no;
2. Do the business owners, totaling greater than 50 percent of the business ownership, live in (your local region)? yes or no;
3. Is your business registered in (your state), with no corporate or national headquarters outside (your region)? yes or no;
4. Can your business make independent decisions regarding the name and look of your business, as well as all business purchasing, practices, and distribution? yes or no;
5. Do you pay all your own marketing, rent, and other business expenses (without assistance from a corporate headquarters)? yes or no.

We are feeling a tremendous sense of momentum with these Local First campaigns. The BALLE network in Portland, Oregon, for example, recently launched a successful Think Local First effort with over 150 businesses participating. Our group in Salt Lake City, Utah is kicking off a Local First Utah campaign this spring. The Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia is piloting a "Buy Local Philly" campaign in May. And we know of many other campaigns starting in Grand Rapids, Michigan, San Francisco and Oakland, California, Vancouver, British Columbia, Baltimore, Maryland, etc.

WHERE PRODUCTS COME FROM, WHERE DOLLARS GO

It seems clear: for many political and economic reasons, a growing number of people are starting to think more about where their products come from and where their dollars are spent. They are hoping to shrink the distance between producer and consumer, and learn more about the story behind product.

We don't pretend to think that every community in North America will have its own semiconductor manufacturing facility or pharmaceutical R&D plant. Some products lend themselves to the scale and capital-investment requirements of large, publicly-traded companies and global supply chains.

However, we envision a sustainable global economy as a network of local living economies. And we believe there are numerous products and services that can be more locally based. Judy Wicks, Founder and Co-Chair of BALLE, has called them the "building blocks" of a Local Living Economy: food, clothing, building materials & design, energy, capital, media, retail, etc.

BALLE is first and foremost a network of entrepreneurs. Our definition of "entrepreneur" includes community leaders of all kinds (private sector, nonprofit, government) who want to shift the needs of wants of consumers. That's what entrepreneurs do.

So "local" can be defined and interpreted in many ways, but we know there are many entrepreneurs out there who are working hard to create more healthy and diversified local economies. We salute you!! Please join us in starting a Local First campaign in your community!

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