



Going Green with Co-op America's Green Business Conference

Visit to annual green business networking event and green festival inspires hobby farmers and ecopreneurs or sustainable business owners alike.

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By John Ivanko

Photo by Nathan Royko Maurer/with permission) from Free Market Organics
Get Involved ...

The next Green Business Conference will be held Nov. 12-14, 2008, in San Francisco. The Conference returns to Chicago, May 12-14, 2009. More information

Read more by John Ivanko and Lisa Kivirist

- Plan a Farm Potluck
- Savor Summer Abundance
- Build a Straw Bale Greenhouse

About the Authors

Lisa Kivirist and John Ivanko are co-authors of *ECOpreneuring*, *Rural Renaissance* and *Edible Earth*. They run the award-winning Inn Serendipity in Browntown, Wis.

It's no surprise to most hobby farmers that there's more "green" by going green, whether you sell pastured poultry or manage an enterprise from a farmhouse office powered by the wind.

One of the Largest "Green" Events

The Co-op America Business Network – the nation's largest green business network – recently held its two day, 2008 Green Business Conference held in Chicago at Navy Pier.

The event explored all aspects of operating more sustainable businesses and featured inspiring examples of ecopreneurs like organic farmer Erin Ford, also manager of the Farmer Renewables and Energy Program for Organic Valley Family of Farms.

Over 250 business owners, both in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, joined the high-energy pace of the conference.

The Green Business Conference was followed by the Green Festival, the nation's largest with over 35,000 in attendance.

Hobby Farms Contributors Gain Insight

We walked away with more than just the latest trends supporting our sustainable enterprise, Inn Serendipity Bed & Breakfast and Farm, but a plethora of contacts and practical insights on how to make our business better. According to ad agency BBMG's latest research, (look under "News + Insights") four main trends are emerging for the LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) industry:

Cluttering of labels, reports and mushrooming growth of non-profit organizations, leading to some confusion among potential customers; Convergence of for-profit and nonprofit organizations into hybrid organizations or "B corporations" (benefit corporations); Co-ownership of brand, where customers are increasingly generating the content related to a brand (facebook, myspace, YouTube); Exploding consciousness of marketplace, where people want to know how, where, and in what ways products or services were created.

The Internet offers the ability to work from anywhere to offer a product or service. For example, World of Good uses the market to solve problems, especially related to economic equity and environmental justice. Its strategy encompasses innovation, the growing demand for fair trade products, and the establishment of transparent and replicable standards. Now fairly traded products that support communities anywhere in the world (including revitalized rural communities that foster fair trade practices) can soon be featured on a joint eBay - World of Good storefront that will reach millions of potential customers.

Explore ways to operate in the harvest or reuse economy, where resources are either renewable (as in a timber stand



used for firewood and wind turbine used to power the farm) or drawing resources from a waste stream that would otherwise end up in a landfill, like Better World Books, a business with the mission to promote literacy. Better World Books receives used books from campuses or libraries and resells them on the Internet and at other venues.

Conference Sessions Get You Involved

Not a conference where you sit around as a passive observer, one of the sessions brought a team of participants together to help solve pressing issues facing ecopreneurs who volunteered to share issues facing their business.

One attendee, Amelia Royko Maurer of Free Market Organics based in rural Wisconsin attended the conference to learn more about the next steps in the organization of her business, its management, and innovation.

“A group of experienced folks in all walks of the sustainable business industry (often called Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) gave me about \$5,000 worth of information in about fifteen minutes,” exclaims Maurer about one of the networking sessions.

A Few Online Resources

EcoSector.com

A unique conduit for growing the green economy, the site offers opportunities to share video clips, feature photographs of products or services, and display blogs. You can find possible funding support, announce new products or services, or inspire other ecopreneurs.

Renewing the Countryside

Strengthens rural areas by championing and supporting rural communities, farmers, artists, entrepreneurs, educators, activists and other people who are renewing the countryside through sustainable and innovative initiatives, businesses and projects.

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