

Green With Envy: Visiting an old way of life could help economy

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Cathy Wilson / Columnist / cw224805@ohiou.edu



A fresh jar of salsa is great. Without dirtying a bowl, you can dip chips right in and get lots of hearty and tomato-y goodness. Of course, eventually the amount of salsa decreases, and you get to the point where you are trying to maneuver your hand through the mouth of the jar to get to the good stuff. Although there is some salsa left, all the easy-to-get stuff is now in your stomach.

So is the deal with oil. While with salsa you can tip the jar to the side to get the salsa out or put it into a bowl, the earth is a little more difficult to deal with. We have gotten all the cheap and easy-to-get oil, but our appetite continues to be insatiable.

Oil (as of Friday) costs \$126 per barrel, more than double what it cost at this same time last year, and \$3.61 (on average) per gallon of gasoline according to the Energy Information Administration. Although these prices for oil immediately make the trip to the gas station dreadful, personal drivers aren't the only ones suffering behind the wheel. Farms also rely on oil to power tractors and other farm equipment to harvest their crops more efficiently.

A solution is to rid ourselves of some of these burdensome devices and opt for a more hands-on approach — literally. We rely on these machines to do the job efficiently, yet these machines have displaced people for decades whose jobs were lost to technology. Perhaps it's time to put the fancy gizmos away and get our hands dirty again.

By hiring people to do the work of machines, jobs are created and money is saved, considering the U.S. Department of Agriculture predicts an increase in fuel and oil expenses of \$1.6 billion in 2008 for farms. Although industrialization eases the process of taking care of crops, it also puts a burden on the environment by relying on diesel fuel-powered machines, pesticides and fertilizer (both use oil to be produced) to get the job done.

According to *The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, going back to using horses instead of machines could save farmers with a 160-acre farm anywhere between \$10,000 and \$50,000 on fuel costs. Whether horses or humans, replacing machines could prove beneficial for many of the 77,000 average-sized farms in Ohio, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Of course, the use of pesticides and fertilizers is questionable around people and animals alike if they have chemicals that could pose a hazard. All the more reason to research natural alternatives because the benefit would be two-fold: Save oil by not using pesticides, fertilizer or a lot of farm equipment, plus create jobs for people with safer work environments.

Reduce the use of oil, reduce the *dependence* on it and invest those funds in workers. Instead of giving money to the oil companies that just get richer and richer, give it to people who need it and will circulate it back into the economy. If every one of those farms cut oil use and saved \$10,000 each year, that would amount to more than \$770 million in savings that could be allocated elsewhere.

The U.S. Department of Labor reported its fourth consecutive month of job losses for April, and getting people to work on local farms to take the space of these gas-guzzling machines hits two birds with one stone. Farmers need an incentive to grow a variety of crops that would limit how much we import (another oil saving technique) instead of growing simply one cash-yielding crop like wheat or corn (which have uses besides just feeding people).

Drastic cuts in oil use need to be made, and it's unreasonable to expect that a society so reliant on this fossil fuel can simply switch its way of life overnight. However, immediate action should be taken wherever possible, even if it means abandoning the technology we have worked to perfect in exchange for good ol' manual labor. For a country with about 4.5 percent of the world's population, consuming one-quarter of the oil produced in the world is just a tad extensive — and now we're seeing the consequences.

Unemployment is up, food and oil prices are rising — our economy is strained and being stretched in every direction, trying to maintain some kind of balance. Instead of working within the oil-powered system, we need to think outside of the box, which just might include revisiting an old way of life for a little bit. Perhaps scraping for the last bit of tomatoes and peppers isn't worth it; either find some guacamole or cheese or just enjoy the classic, plain old crispy chip by itself while leaving the salsa behind.

Cathy Wilson is a junior journalism major and a copy editor for The Post. Send her an e-mail at cw224805@ohiou.edu.