

# Sustainability Institute

## 2002 Annual Report

The Sustainability Institute was founded in 1996 by Donella (Dana) Meadows to apply systems thinking and organizational learning to economic, environmental and social challenges.

Dana Meadows' formal training was in chemistry and biophysics (Ph.D., Harvard University), followed by a research fellowship at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she worked with Jay Forrester, the inventor of system dynamics. While at MIT, Dana worked on the team that produced the global computer model "World3" for the Club of Rome and provided the basis for *The Limits to Growth* (1972). The book began a debate about the limits of the Earth's capacity to support human economic expansion, a debate that continues to this day. Twenty years later, Dana was the principal author of the follow-up study, *Beyond the Limits* (1992). She authored six other books on global modeling and environmental issues and for 15 years she wrote a weekly column, "The Global Citizen," reflecting on the complex connections in the world.

In 1991, Dana was recognized as a Pew Scholar in Conservation and the Environment, and in 1994 she received a MacArthur Fellow's award. From 1972 until her death in 2001, Dana taught in the Environmental Studies Program of Dartmouth College.

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## PHILOSOPHY

We believe that unsustainability does not arise out of ignorance, irrationality or greed. It is largely the collective consequence of rational, well-intended decisions made by people caught up in systems — ranging from families and communities to corporations, governments and economies — that make it difficult or impossible to act in ways that are fully responsible to all those affected in the present and to future generations.

## MISSION

- Shift mindsets — values, attitudes, and beliefs — when they are out of step with the realities of a finite planet and a globally powerful human race.
- Restructure systems when the rewards and incentives of the system are inconsistent with long term social, environmental, and economic goals.
- Build the capability to manage and learn in complex environmental, social, and economic systems.

## ROLE

The Sustainability Institute works for change in three ways:

- Through workshops, leadership development, and consulting, we provide tools of systems thinking and organizational learning to clients and partners working on issues of sustainability, helping them to be more strategic, engage multiple stakeholders, and learn continuously.
- We target specific systems and issues, including natural resource economies, climate change, energy, and regional development, where our tools and research can help with the transition to sustainability.
- We draw insights from our consulting, workshops, and research to develop conceptual frameworks for large-scale change toward sustainable systems.

## STAFF

- HAL HAMILTON Executive Director. Hal is a project leader on the Global Sustainable Food Systems collaboration. He is also a Kellogg Food and Society Policy Fellow and a farmer. Before joining SI, Hal was director of a Kentucky Integrated Farming Systems project, and coordinator of a multi-university and NGO research project on the structure of agriculture in the southern United States. M.A. American Studies, State University of New York.
- DREW JONES Project Leader: climate change, regional air quality, land use. Drew consults with organizations, leads workshops, and writes columns and articles. He focuses on helping individuals and teams solve problems by applying systems approaches. He works out of SI's southeast office, in Asheville, North Carolina. M.S. Technology & Policy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, concentration in system dynamics.
- DON SEVILLE Project Leader: climate change, agriculture, energy, organizational strategy. Don uses the disciplines of systems thinking, organizational learning, and simulation modeling to help groups to develop strategies around sustainability. M.S. Technology & Policy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, concentration in system dynamics.
- EDIE FARWELL Program Director: Donella Meadows Leadership Fellows program. Edie focuses on co-creating and managing the Fellows program. Previously she was director of the Association for Progressive Communications and co-authored *The Tibetan Art of Parenting*. M. A. Cultural and Social Anthropology, California Institute of Integral Studies, concentration in cross-cultural communication and organizational development.
- PHIL RICE Project Leader: Smarter Systems. Phil develops curricula and leads systems thinking workshops. He brings to SI many years of experience in grassroots education and teaching people to teach others. Before joining SI, he was a director of gene-sequencing projects in a biotech firm. Ph.D. Biology, University of Wisconsin.
- BETH SAWIN Project Leader: Smarter Systems. Beth is a mother, a biologist and a systems analyst. She leads workshops and writes a monthly column. Ph.D. Biology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- SUSAN SWEITZER Editor of SI's *Dear Folks* newsletter. Susie was the Construction Liaison for the development of Cobb Hill Co-Housing and is compiling the green building lessons from that project. She also organizes workshops and has developed community health programs. B.A., Earlham College.
- DIANA WRIGHT Publications Manager. Diana is a researcher at SI and manages the publications and archives of the Institute. Diana has taught adult education courses in environmental studies. M.S. Forest Ecology, University of Michigan.

## BOARD

- WILLIAM BITTINGER Community Developer, Bittinger Associates, Hanover, NH.
- JAY BRAGDON Socially Responsible Investing Consultant, Woodstock, VT.
- JEANNE BRAGDON Environmental Law Consultant, Woodstock, VT.
- HAL HAMILTON Executive Director, Sustainability Institute, Hartland, VT.
- JAMES HORNIG Professor, Chemistry & Environmental Studies, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH.
- DAVID PEART Professor, Biology, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH.
- DON SEVILLE Sustainability Institute, Hartland, VT.
- VICKI SMITH Town Planner, Hanover, NH.

## 2002 — THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Over its seven years of operations, the Sustainability Institute (SI) has grown from a collection of computer modelers to a team of writers, modelers, facilitators, and researchers. We have transformed, from a virtual institute to one with a real home in a real place — Hartland, Vermont. We work with many different systems and a wide variety of stakeholders grappling with some of the thorniest barriers to sustainability.

In 2002 the Sustainability Institute accomplished the following:

- Completed the first phase of research on commodity economies, drawing together insights from Northern Forest and Midwestern agriculture systems.
- Designed and delivered workshops on systems thinking and sustainability, including the development of a curriculum for LEAD International.
- Launched the Donella Meadows Leadership Fellows program. Fifteen Fellows will join us in June 2003 for the first of four program workshops.
- Provided consulting and educational services to many groups, networks, and institutions.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO 2003

Major new projects in 2003 will be:

- Smarter Systems Project — communicating key insights from ecological economics and systems modeling to people working on social and environmental problems.
- Global Sustainable Food System Leadership Laboratory — a dialogue-and-action process with leaders in sustainable agriculture.

In addition, we have several projects under development:

- Fostering new approaches to community action on local air quality issues.
- Promoting a better public discourse on climate change. We are developing workshops and learning tools that focus on the science and policy issues. Our partner is the New England Science Center Collaborative, representing 26 research institutions and science centers in five New England states.
- Helping non-profits such as The Nature Conservancy and the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee build partnerships with local leaders for land conservation.

The following pages contain details of many of these projects.

## SUSTAINABLE COMMODITY SYSTEMS

Commodity systems are natural resource economies based on products extracted directly from the planet; the raw materials come from forests, agricultural soils, oceans, and mines. Commodity systems tend to keep producer communities — the loggers, farmers, fishers, and miners — on both the ecological and the economic edge of survival. Our goal is to see these systems become stable, sustainable, and profitable to all.

For the last few years SI has worked with people in two commodity economies, the Northern Forest and the Midwest Corn Belt, developing dynamic tools to explore critical issues and policy alternatives. This kind of collaborative work is often referred to as "action-research." Insights that have emerged are relevant to a many other commodity systems.

The Sustainability Institute's project on commodity systems has been generously supported over the years by the Henry Luce Foundation, the R.A. Hunt Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the Turner Foundation, the Switzer Foundation, the Wallace Global Fund, and the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation.

### *Actions and Results: the Northern Forest*

The Northern Forest is 26 million acres of woodlands in Northern New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. We used simulation models and facilitated workshops to help environmental activists, forest industry leaders, and others explore the dynamics of regional "boom and bust" cycles. Our work was met with interest, support, and an open reception from many sides.

Highlights:

- 15 half-day model-based workshops in four states, engaging over 400 people in thinking through ways to avoid the regional lumber mills' growing over-capacity.
- An interactive model used with forest policy groups in other regions and with people learning about the use of system dynamics modeling.
- A theory about the drivers of overcapacity in commodity systems, published in the *System Dynamics Review* article, "Resource Sustainability in Commodity Systems: the Case of the Sawmill Industry in the Northern Forest."  
(See *Resources & Services*, page 8 or [sustainer.org/resources.html](http://sustainer.org/resources.html))
- A culminating meeting with leaders in the sawmill industry and state government to think through industry problems and possible actions. Leaders in this highly competitive industry do not communicate much with each other. This gathering was unusual and highly productive.

## *Actions and Results: Midwestern Agriculture*

Our work in the corn system focused on understanding and remedying a set of problems common to agriculture in the Midwest United States: falling farm profitability, ailing farm communities, and environmental catastrophes such as the "Dead Zone" in the Gulf of Mexico. We have found that the traps creating these problems are similar for many commodities, and are eminently solvable.

Highlights:

- A series of briefings based on our simulation models, held in Washington D.C. for NGOs and congressional staffers from the Northeast-Midwest Congressional Coalition.
- Assistance to the Agricultural Policy Analysis Center (APAC). It was able to work more effectively through the use of our models and analysis.
- Development of the "Corn Learning Tool," a model-based learning experience on a CD that conveys insights from our commodities work.
- A culminating meeting of 20 agricultural policy leaders. SI convened leaders from universities and nonprofit organizations around the U.S. and Europe. The group identified three pressures that plague agriculture: overproduction, socio-economic decline among producers, and the power imbalance between producers and buyers or input suppliers. By using tools of system thinking, they were able to identify potential responses to these pressures.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN COMMODITY SYSTEM RESEARCH — SMARTER SYSTEMS**

Leading thinkers in the sustainability movement have made it clear that problems ranging from pollution, to resource depletion, to community disintegration have common origins in our economic system. The problematic features include the externalization of costs onto nature and communities, the pursuit of endless growth on a finite planet, and the tendency for wealth and power to become concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.

We now have strong evidence that many social and environmental problems arise out of such patterns, yet few of the resources devoted to solving the World's problems are focused on changing the assumptions and rules that produce such behaviors. Why is this? Do people working on community development, peace, poverty, resource depletion, biodiversity, agriculture, and pollution not see the connections between the problems and underlying causes? Or do people see the connections clearly, but assume that economic structures are unchangeable?

In our Smarter Systems Project we will ask these questions of people in NGOs, socially and environmentally responsible businesses, and philanthropic foundations. Building on their answers, we will test different ways of communicating three ideas:

- that many social and environmental problems have a common source in our economic assumptions and the rules and incentives that emerge from them,
- that those assumptions, rules, and incentives can and do change, and
- that there is a huge untapped power base that could be mobilized to change those assumptions and the rules and incentives that emerge from them.

We will test the effectiveness of stories, games, datasets, and systems thinking exercises as communication tool that spread these ideas and lead to change in economic rules and incentives.

## WORKSHOPS — SYSTEMS THINKING & SUSTAINABILITY

Over the past year, with support from the Surdna Foundation, we completed the capacity building phase of our Systems Thinking and Sustainability workshop development. Participants in early workshops helped us see the need for two distinct approaches to applying systems tools to sustainability.

One approach focuses on simplifying systems thinking for use by a wide range of people. This workshop helps them with designing, promoting, and supporting actions that move us toward a sustainable world. It has clear relevance "back at the office on Monday morning."

Our second approach takes leaders in sustainable development deeper into the dynamics of complex systems. We run hands-on workshops in which people build their own computer simulation models addressing a regional environmental challenge.

We continue to offer these and other systems thinking and strategy workshops to many groups and organizations.

### 2002 Sustainability Institute Workshops

|                            |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Jan. Randolph, VT          | Agricultural Leaders           |
| Jan. Montana               | Agricultural Leaders           |
| Mar. Boston, MA            | Foundation Leaders             |
| Apr. Washington, DC        | World Bank/IFC                 |
| Jun. Durham, NH            | Non-profit Leaders & Trainers  |
| Jun. Jackson City, NC      | Land Conservation Stakeholders |
| July. Narragansett Bay, RI | Marine Resource Managers       |
| Aug. Durham, NH            | Developing Country Trainers    |
| Sept. San Diego, CA        | Systems Thinking Conference    |

(See *Resources & Services* on page 8 and [sustainer.org/working.html](http://sustainer.org/working.html).)

## DONELLA MEADOWS LEADERSHIP FELLOWS PROGRAM

This past year saw the completion of the feasibility testing and planning stages of the Fellows program, generously funded by the Morgan Family Foundation and the David & Lucile Packard Foundation. The program honors Donella Meadows and boosts the effectiveness of people whose approach to sustainability displays analytic clarity, a focus on systemic change, and attention to spirit, values, and meaning.

We received 130 applications to the program, many of them from established environmental leaders. Fifteen Fellows will join us in June 2003, for the first of four workshops on systems thinking and organizational learning. Funding for the Fellows program in 2003 comes from the Morgan Family Foundation and 175 individual supporters.

With the launching of the Fellows program, the Sustainability Institute has joined the Environmental Leadership Collaborative (ELC) — a network of organizations providing leadership training and skill development programs.

## PARTNERSHIP WITH LEAD INTERNATIONAL

A central goal of the Sustainability Institute is to help a large number of people apply an understanding of systems to their own work in sustainable development. By teaching people who then go out into the world to teach others, our efforts can be multiplied. This is a "train-the-trainers" approach.

In 2002, Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD) International, a London-based training group, became the first network of trainers to adopt our curriculum, "Systems Thinking for Leaders in Social Change." We designed a workshop in collaboration with Dennis Meadows of the University of New Hampshire, developed a facilitator's manual, piloted the workshop, and then trained a dozen LEAD trainers from countries including Brazil, India, Mexico, Zambia, Russia, Pakistan, China and Senegal. LEAD trainers went on to run the workshop for a group at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg, South Africa. Demand was so great that they had to turn potential participants away. The LEAD trainers are now running the workshop for promising leaders of sustainable development in their home countries.

Sustainability Institute is identifying future partners who want to co-host "train-the-trainers" events to keep this infectious workshop spreading through the world. And we continue to offer "Systems Thinking for Leaders in Social Change" on demand.

(See *Resources & Services*, pg.8 or [sustainer.org/working.html](http://sustainer.org/working.html))

## GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM LEADERSHIP LABORATORY

Through research in commodity systems and in conversations with agricultural leaders from the U.S., Europe, and developing countries, we see the need for a new way of addressing world agriculture's "race to the bottom." This race is one in which vital ecological services are being depleted while failing to meet the needs of most farmers and farming communities. Many leaders and analysts believe that the capacity of the world to feed itself is at risk from these unsustainable trends.

The purpose of the Global Sustainable Food System Leadership Laboratory is to develop solutions to the crucial problem of sustainably raising sufficient food on a dwindling land base to feed a growing population.

The Leadership Lab will bring together a small team of leaders from around the world and from all three sectors: business, including food producers; governmental and inter-governmental organizations; and civil society organizations, including research institutes. Using a multi-stakeholder dialogue-and-action process, the team will seek breakthrough solutions to problems faced by world agriculture. The project team will not only think together but also act together. They will build a set of prototype solutions — microcosms of sustainable food systems.

The Sustainability Institute is collaborating on the Leadership Laboratory with colleagues from Generon Consulting, Unilever (based in Rotterdam), W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Center for Alternative Development Initiatives in the Philippines, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, and the Society for Organizational Learning.

## RECENT SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE PAPERS

"Moving Sustainability into the Mainstream of Natural Resource Economies,"  
A Sustainability Institute Report, due out in 2003.

"Supporting Effective Participation in the Climate Change Debate: The Role of System Dynamics Simulation Modeling," by Andrew Jones and Don Seville, 21 October 2002.

"Resource Sustainability In Commodity Systems: The Sawmill Industry in the Northern Forest," by Andrew Jones, Don Seville, and Donella Meadows, *System Dynamics Review* Vol. 18, No. 2, (Summer 2002): 171–204.

"Commercializing Distributed Generation: A Customer-Based Collaborative Learning Project," by Andrew Horning, Don Seville, Ryan Waddington, March 26, 2002.

The complete library of SI papers is available on our website [sustainer.org/resources.html](http://sustainer.org/resources.html)

## COLUMNS & NEWSLETTERS

Staff members of the Sustainability Institute write opinion columns as well as research and policy papers. Columns are posted on our website ([sustainer.org/resources.html](http://sustainer.org/resources.html)) and are available via email.

SI publishes a monthly newsletter called "*Dear Folks*." Started in the 1980s by Donella Meadows, *Dear Folks* now includes stories of the Sustainability Institute, Cobb Hill Cohousing and its farm, plus all articles SI staff members have published during the month. To receive *Dear Folks*, please send \$25 for a one-year subscription.

## WORKSHOPS & CONSULTING

We use the tools of systems thinking and organizational learning to help groups navigate issues that are structurally and politically complex. These tools are particularly helpful when it is difficult to understand impacts over time, when assumptions are unstated or unclear, and when success requires collaborative teams.

We offer two types of short engagements for groups working on issues of sustainability. *Facilitated Strategy Sessions* are designed to help a team improve its strategy or to help a cross-stakeholder group work on shared issues. *Training Workshops* help groups improve their effectiveness using systems thinking and indicators.

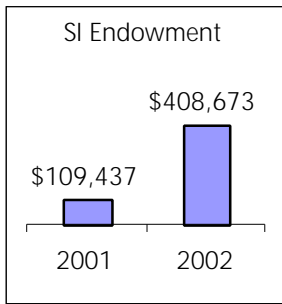
In addition, we offer custom-designed consulting services on strategy development, leadership development, stakeholder engagement, and collaborative learning and we have developed a set of workshops specifically for philanthropic organizations and foundations.

More information on workshops can be found on our website, [sustainer.org/working.html](http://sustainer.org/working.html). To arrange a workshop, contact SI by phone.

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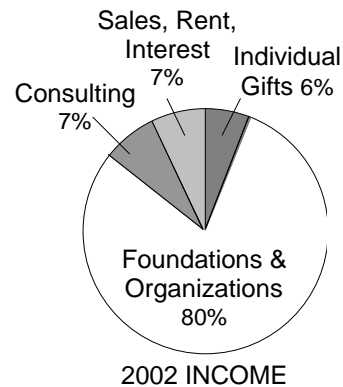
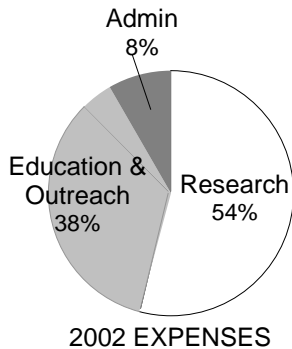
Sustainability Institute, Balance Sheet as of December 31, 2002.

|                              |                |                                       |                  |
|------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>ASSETS</b>                |                | <b>LIABILITIES</b>                    |                  |
| Fixed (property & equipment) | 250,300        | Payroll Taxes                         | 3,003            |
| Accumulated depreciation     | -16,420        | Project Commitments                   | <u>261,447</u>   |
| Total Fixed Assets           | 233,880        | <b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>              | \$264,450        |
| Cash Assets                  | 346,379        | <b>EQUITY</b>                         |                  |
| Investment Assets            | 214,947        | Reserve Funds                         | 296,877          |
| Endowment                    | <u>408,674</u> | Property less Building Fund           | 223,878          |
| <b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>          | \$1,203,880    | Total Unrestricted Funds              | 520,755          |
|                              |                | Endowment                             | 408,673          |
|                              |                | Building Renovation                   | 10,002           |
|                              |                | Total Board Designated Funds          | <u>418,675</u>   |
|                              |                | <b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>                   | <u>\$939,430</u> |
|                              |                | <b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b> | \$1,203,880      |



In 2002 the Sustainability Institute's endowment grew dramatically, thanks to the generous bequests of several individuals.

In 2002, expenses for research and projects at the Sustainability Institute were \$572,360.



The Sustainability Institute received support for research and projects in 2002 from the following foundations and partner organizations:

- Audubon Society of NH
- Carolina Day School
- Center for Sustainable Systems
- Compton Foundation
- Detroit Edison
- Friendship Fund
- William & Flora Hewlett Foundation
- R.A. Hunt Foundation
- IFC/World Bank
- Inst. For Agriculture & Trade Policy
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- KMUN Public Radio

- Land Trust for the Little Tennessee
- LEAD International
- Henry Luce Foundation
- Morgan Family Foundation
- National Parks Conservation Association
- New Hampshire Charitable Foundation
- David & Lucile Packard Foundation
- Pomona College
- Surdna Foundation
- Switzer Foundation
- Systems Thinking Collaborative
- University of New Hampshire
- University of Rhode Island

In addition to grants, consulting, publication sales, royalties, and workshop fees, work at the Sustainability Institute has been supported by generous gifts from many people and institutions.

*Thank you to everyone who donated in 2002!*

Curt McNamara & Kathy Ahlers  
David & Deborah Andersen  
Michael & Carol Andrews  
Anonymous  
Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne  
Stuart & Susan Auchincloss  
Earl & Sheila Babbie  
Michael & Margie Baldwin  
Barnes Family Fund, Tides Foundation  
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Stephen & Suzanne Carlson  
Bob Christy  
Marshall Chrostowski  
Tim Traver & Delia Clark  
In honor of Karlton Clemons  
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Mary & Paul Clipson  
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Robert & Ellie Kates  
Arthur & Marriana Grossman Keller  
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Jane Westervelt  
Cheryl Wilfong  
Suzanne Williams  
Barbara & Chris Wilson  
Noel Brissenden & Jeffrey Yegian  
Hans & Ann Zulliger

A sustainable world can never come into being if it cannot be envisioned.  
The vision must be built up from the contributions of many people before  
it is complete and compelling.

— Donella Meadows et al., *Beyond the Limits* (1992)

Donations toward the Sustainability Institute's general operations or any of our programs and research projects are gratefully accepted.

In addition, gifts in 2003 can be earmarked for:

- Donella Meadows Leadership Fellows Program. Donations from individuals are doubled by a \$50,000 challenge grant from Morgan Family Foundation.
- Teaching about green construction choices at Cobb Hill Cohousing.
- Donella Meadows Legacy Project, including a public archive of articles, columns, and speeches, plus publication of manuscripts.
- Green design renovation of SI's offices, housed in the old farmhouse at Cobb Hill.
- Sustainability Institute Endowment.

Donations of \$100 or more receive a complimentary one-year subscription to the monthly *Dear Folks* newsletter. Some donors contribute monthly to SI automatically via their credit card. If you'd like us to set that up for you, please let us know.

SI has also been blessed with several bequests. Thank you for considering this option as well.

Please contact us at (802) 436-1277.

Tax deductible donations can be sent by check or credit card to:

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*Thank you for your support in shifting our world toward a sustainable future.*

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The necessity to take the industrial world of growth to its next stage of evolution is not a disaster, it is an opportunity. How to seize the opportunity, how to bring into being a sustainable world that is not only functional but desirable is a question about leadership and ethics and vision and courage. Those are properties not of technologies, markets, governments, corporations, or computer models, but of the human heart and soul.

—Donella Meadows et al., *Beyond the Limits* (1992)