

President J. Bernard Machen  
Sustainability Speech – October 2005

Good Afternoon! It is a pleasure to be here on National Campus Sustainability Day.

I am pleased to see so many of our community participating and I am more and more cognizant of the growing interest in this subject. It is fair to say I have been a fringe player in this movement although I have been on this fringe for a long time. We have been recycling long before recycling was cool – even before there were ways to recycle!!

Today offers us a chance to do something positive in a time when there is so much negative happening in our world.

After experiencing my second hurricane season I am struck by the impact it has on people. Of course there is the physical devastation which directly impacts so many. I believe that today in South Florida, millions are without power and many have lost their worldly possessions.

But in addition to that impact, I note how communities like Gainesville, which have had minimal destruction, experience a form of mental depression associate with the helplessness we feel in the face of these natural disasters. Speaking for myself, it affects me and, I think, others in this way.

Another circumstance that affects everyone in a similar way is the precipitous rise in gas and oil prices. How many of you have had a sense of depression standing at the gas pump as the meter clicks past \$50.00 during a fill-up?

It is a helpless feeling when you have to drive and cannot really change your life to offset this dramatic increase in fuel costs – with no end in sight!

Well, today, I want us to focus on our local environment – on things that we can do that could have a positive impact on our lives.

Hopefully, this will help us feel better in these troubled times. And let us recognize that is one of the important outcomes we can get from our involvement in sustainability.

Another is the potential economic benefit that can accrue to us by changing the way we do things.

And, a third impact will be to improve the actual quality of life for us and for future generations.

So, as I talk about what we have done, are now doing, and what we will be doing, let's remember there are at least these three levels of impact that we expect to have. Not every action taken will have all three but, hopefully, they all will have some effect.

The University of Florida is on its way to becoming a global leader in sustainability.

- 1) We are the first university in the world to be designated a Certified Audubon Cooperative Society. This designation recognizes a high level of environmental stewardship in five areas, including wildlife habitat management, resource conservation and outreach.
- 2) We have more “green” buildings in one place than anywhere in the nation. These are energy efficient buildings built in part with renewable materials. Fully one-third of all the buildings in the State of Florida that meet the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, standards, are here on our Gainesville campus. One example of a LEED-certified building is the new butterfly pavilion at the Florida Museum of Natural History.
- 3) We are among the first major research universities in the nation to open an Office of Sustainability to coordinate academic and administrative efforts in this area.

As president, I fully support our move toward greater sustainability. This is not a simple problem, and there is no simple solution. We are fortunate that, before I came to Florida the UF Sustainability Task Force worked very hard not only to bring this issue to the fore, but also to give us a series of recommendations and steps we need to take to reach our goal.

As the task force has suggested, we should integrate sustainability into our mission of research, education and service.

We can:

- 1) Leverage the valuable research and other work of past and present faculty members to make UF a leader in sustainability research.
- 2) Build bridges between existing sustainability programs and courses by promoting the many excellent sustainability-related courses we already have. We can also stimulate the creation of more sustainability related courses. A class being offered for the first time this semester, “Facets of Sustainability,” available to UF students regardless of major, is a good example.
- 3) Take a proactive approach to providing expertise and resources in sustainability to the nation, state and community. We can work to engage students and staff already involved in volunteer and service projects in sustainability related efforts.

We need to elevate the role of sustainability in campus operations. We want to make it an ingredient in what we build, how we get around, and what we consume and throw away.

- 1) We should plan new construction sites to minimize the impact on local ecosystems. In particular, we should strive to avoid negative impacts on biodiversity, a key measure of environmental quality.
- 2) Our new buildings should meet high standards of energy, water and materials efficiency. And when we remodel, we should upgrade air conditioning and other systems to the same high standards of efficiency and environmental friendliness.
- 3) We can increase incentives for walking, bicycling, ridesharing and taking the bus. We can also do a better job of linking plans for new buildings and facilities with road and transportation corridor plans.

- 4) We already recycle paper, cans, glass and four other types of waste, capturing and recycling 30 percent of the solid waste we generate on campus. But we can also reduce our waste stream at the front end. Long-range, we should try to get away from plastics and other throw-away material.

We should give sustainability a place at the decision-making table.

- 1) We should review our procurement and contracting policies to reflect sustainability concerns.
- 2) We should explore options for socially and environmentally responsible investments.
- 3) We should set aggressive hiring and retention goals to ensure the university reflects society's racial, ethnic and gender diversity. We can also maintain our living-wage initiatives so that all employees earn wages appropriate for a world-class institution.

The aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita remind us of the increasing scarcity and rising cost of the fossil fuels. Ecologically and financially, we couldn't pick a better time to step up conservation. With that in mind, I'd like to announce today that the university is taking several significant steps to reduce both electricity and gasoline consumption.

- 1) We will implement a comprehensive fleet management system for our automotive fleet. This system will require the exclusive purchase of hybrid or alternative fuel-efficiency vehicles for university uses. We plan to charge departments to park university vehicles and develop a lease-rent system for departmental vehicles. This should help reduce the actual number of university vehicles.
- 2) We plan to provide additional incentives for employees to car-pool and continue to encourage them to ride the bus for free. We'll also request that all employees traveling around campus use the bus system rather than state cars.
- 3) The University will evaluate work areas where telecommunicating or flex scheduling would be effective.

On the electricity front:

- 1) We're asking employees to turn off computers, related devices such as cell phone chargers, as well as electrical equipment, fans and radios when not needed.
- 2) We're evaluating hallway, corridor and non-security night lighting to turn it down or off when possible.
- 3) Depending on the season, we will raise or lower heating and air conditioning systems for optimum efficiency. The Executive Branch of the State of Florida has indoor temperature requirements of 78° in the summer. We will work to reach this optimum level.

In concert with these steps, we're also stepping up our recycling and environmental stewardship efforts:

- 1) The university's goal is to reduce waste disposal to zero by 2015. To point us that direction, we will require that all departments and divisions recycle. We will also set ambitious targets for increased recycling across campus. We will further endeavor to make recycling more convenient and effective.

- 2) We will require that all departments and divisions adhere to the university's "green" purchasing policies. We plan to identify preferred "green" vendors to support the supply of sustainable products. This will alter some of our purchasing practices in favor of products that are environmentally-friendly.
- 3) UF's student government has dedicated \$500,000 to promote and protect environmentally sensitive areas on campus. The president's home, meanwhile, will be developed as a model of sustainable living practices.

These measures are good first steps in what I regard as a serious and long-term commitment to improving UF's sustainability. But as an institution, we can only do so much. Our success depends in large part on cooperation and commitment from our employees and affiliates. To help bring people on board, we plan to launch an educational campaign, "Sustainability Responsibility," that will explain the sustainability concept and discuss how we can all contribute to this initiative's success. In future years we will use this day – National Campus Sustainability Day – to report to the community our progress and our course of action.

Sustainability is traditionally defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to provide for themselves. That's often interpreted as an environmental matter, and rightly so. But most broadly defined, sustainability means protecting the environment while also elevating the social and economic status of everyone in the community. In other words, it's uplifting -- even transforming. Ultimately, sustainability will improve our lives and the lives of our children. That's something we at the University of Florida should all be able to get behind.