

Earthwise Special Edition

By Beth Casper

Special to the Salem Business Journal

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To date, Marion County has certified 160 businesses, agencies and organizations as EarthWISE, or committed to environmentally friendly practices. To earn certification, businesses meet criteria in categories, such as water conservation, recycling, waste reduction and energy usage.

While some of these companies are taking on big projects—replacing all lighting with LEDs, for example—most of them are examining their daily practices and making small changes that



add up to a big environmental impact.

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Cascade Baking Company

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Lifesource's Green Practices Help Environment & Save Money

By Beth Casper

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LifeSource Natural Foods' mission to promote health and wellness to its customers applies equally to the environment.

LifeSource employees have put so much time, energy and resources into making the grocery store and its operations as sustainable as possible that there are few areas that can be improved.

But that hasn't stopped them from trying.

LifeSource was EarthWISE certified in 2010. EarthWISE staff helps businesses recycle, save energy, reduce waste and much more. To earn certification, a business meets

criteria in six areas. LifeSource is one of more than 150 EarthWISE businesses and organizations in Marion County, and the only grocery store.

As the sustainability coordinator, Michelle Suess analyzes the company's practices for ways to make them more environmentally friendly. Recently, Suess has been able to find gains that have reduced water and energy use and—in the end—saved money.

A few years ago, all of the lights in the coolers were replaced with LED lighting. Last fall, all of the overhead lights were replaced with LEDs. The switch to LEDs is projected to reduce LifeSource's lighting costs by 70 percent.

That means that the expense of the LEDs will be recouped in fewer than 4 years.

The LED switch comes on the heels of an already amazing commitment to energy reduction and clean energy at LifeSource. In 2008, LifeSource installed 162-watt solar panels that offset about \$3,700 a year of its electricity bill. The remainder of the electricity purchased by LifeSource is wind power.

Last January, LifeSource installed 10 ceiling fans, also known as destratification fans, to move the hot air that accumulated at the ceiling. Since the fans were installed, LifeSource has realized a 20 percent decrease in natural gas usage. Plus, employees no longer have to

continually rearrange store products to accommodate the hot temperatures up high.

LifeSource's attention to water use has always been exceptional. At the start of 2011, LifeSource replaced old toilets in both of its bathrooms with dual-flush toilets that save at least a gallon of water on each flush. On nine sinks, aerated faucets replaced the old water-hogging kind – saving almost a gallon of water per minute. For the year, the store reduced its water use by 27 percent, saving 270,000 gallons of water compared to the previous year. The reduction saved LifeSource \$800 on its water bill.

But last year, high water bills alerted Suess



to a problem with the water usage outside.

“We had purposely installed low water usage plants,” Suess said. “So it didn’t make sense that we needed so much irrigation water.”

After fixing several leaks, LifeSource reduced its irrigation water use by 65 percent.

Their attention to reducing garbage is just as thorough. In fact, LifeSource redirects 93 percent of potential waste to reuse, compost and recycling.

By being able to include all food waste in the green yard debris bins, LifeSource has been able to reduce their garbage significantly. Produce often is packed in ice within waxed cardboard containers. Those containers often would end up in the garbage because they can’t be recycled. Now, they are flattened and composted. This change alone has allowed LifeSource to shift 360 gallons of garbage to compost a week. All of the paper towels used in the deli area – some of which may be smeared with food – can now go in the compost bin as well.

In addition to sorting all of their paper, cardboard and plastics, LifeSource separates materials that have special recycling needs.

The film plastic – from shrink wrapped yogurt containers, for example – is picked up by plastics recycler Agri-Plas.

All edible items pulled from shelves in the deli or produce department are offered to staff and then given to several area nonprofits. All inedible food such as moldy bread, vegetable scraps and rotten produce gets picked up by local chicken or pig farmers or home compost enthusiasts.

Eggs, milk and some produce are delivered in reusable tubs that LifeSource stores to return to the company.

While LifeSource recycles comprehensively, Suess understands that not generating the material in the first place is the best option. LifeSource works with buyers to ensure that the companies that supply the store have solid environmental practices and little packaging. If there is excessive packaging, LifeSource simply doesn’t carry it.

Almost all of their paper products and cleaning supplies are purchased in bulk to eliminate unnecessary packaging. A 2011 switch in the all-purpose cleaner used by LifeSource employees saves 28 plastic spray bottles per year and about \$20 for every five gallons ordered.

Bulk purchases extend to the customers as well. LifeSource showcases a bountiful bulk department partly to help customers reduce the amount of packaging brought into their own homes.

To encourage customers to bring reusable bags, LifeSource offers a 5- or 10-cent per bag credit. In keeping with their community commitment, that credit can be donated to a variety of nonprofits featured by LifeSource. And the store gives away a free reusable bag with every purchase over \$100.

For more information about the EarthWISE program, go to www.mcEarthWISE.net or call 503-365-3188. To learn more about LifeSource, visit: www.lifesourcenaturalfoods.com.

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Cascade Baking Company purchased a used Hobart mixer for mixing dough and saved \$30,000. The used equipment not only saves the bakery money but the quality is often better than present-day products.

By separating recycling and finding outlets for all of its “trash,” South Salem Cycleworks has eliminated the need for garbage service. It has not had dumpster service in 25 years of business!

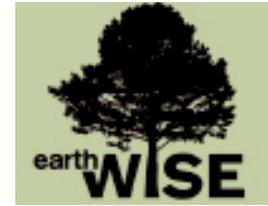
Friends of Family Farmers uses durable plates, cups and utensils for all of its “listening sessions” across the state—saving thousands of items from heading to the landfill. This practice also saves the nonprofit money

on the purchase of disposables for every meeting.

These businesses and dozens more are doing what is right for the environment and also running a fiscally responsible operation.

“There is nothing more satisfying than talking to business owners or organization leaders about how eco-friendly practices within their organization can save them money,” said Alan Pennington of Marion County’s EarthWISE program. “It is a no-brainer to implement these practices.”

For more information about the EarthWISE program, go to www.mcEarthWISE.net or call 503-365-3188.



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