

Published: Oct 21, 2007 09:43 AM  
Modified: Oct 21, 2007 09:43 AM

Stop the leakage -- shop local  
Local leaders want sustainable economy

BY MARK SCHULTZ, STAFF WRITER

CHAPEL HILL -- Leakage.

It sounds like an unfortunate side effect of eating too many fat-free potato chips.

But when local business and community leaders say leakage, they're referring to Orange County dollars leaving the community as shoppers go outside for everything from socks to floor tiles.

On Friday, the Community Leadership Collaboration followed up its recent visit to Madison, Wis., with an hour-long discussion about how to make the Chapel Hill-Carrboro economy more sustainable.

It's an old discussion. But there's new energy behind it, pumped by everything from the recent inter-city trip to the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce's new Foundation for a Sustainable Community and, perhaps, Al Gore.

"I don't think you can find a county anywhere that says 'Buy elsewhere,'" said CLC member Mike Collins, who led the discussion. "Everyone says buy locally."

But to make that happen, members agreed, the private and public sectors need to come together to give shoppers the products they want and to give businesses the support they need to operate in the community.

It won't be easy.

Big retailers have the clout and volume to out-price locally produced goods. Many government incentives are aimed more at attracting big out-of-town corporations than at growing hometown companies.

Food is one of the areas of greatest leakage, Collins said.

An estimated \$4.3 billion is spent on food annually in the Triangle, but only 1 percent of the food is produced locally, he said.

And shoppers go where the goods are.

Nearly 80 percent of Orange County residents surveyed said they shopped outside the county in the past 30 days, said Aaron Nelson, president and CEO of the chamber.

#### Story Tools

-  [Printer Friendly](#)
-  [Email to a Friend](#)
-  [Enlarge Font](#)
-  [Decrease Font](#)
-  [del.icio.us](#)
-  [Digg it](#)

#### More News

- [BB gun triggers lockdown at school](#)
- [Land sale could clear way for club](#)
- [Joe Herzenberg, former council member, dies at 66](#)
- [Lessons learned from annexation](#)
- [Carrboro Police Blotter](#)

Ad Links [Buy a link »](#)

#### Lose 25 lbs this Fall

Oprah & CBS featured Hoodia, a dieting miracle. Get 1 Week Free sample  
[www.curbyourcravings.com](http://www.curbyourcravings.com)

#### Seen your Credit Score?

A good credit score is 700+ and can save you money. See yours now - \$0  
[CreditReport.com](http://CreditReport.com)

#### Refinance Rates at 5.4% Fixed

\$300,000 mortgage for \$899/mo. No credit checks - Get 4 FREE quotes!  
[www.lendgo.com](http://www.lendgo.com)

That compares to 40 percent of Durham County residents and just 20 percent of Wake County residents, he said.

Efforts are under way to plug some of the local leaks, CLC members said.

The county is working on a food-processing center where local growers could prepare food for distribution. The county is also working with partners on a small-farm incubator program where people who want to become farmers can learn on plots before striking out on their own.

But it's not just food.

Collins and others said Carolina North, the university's planned research campus, offers opportunities to spin off local high-tech businesses.

With enough support, more of them could remain here, as opposed to setting up shop outside the county as past spin-offs have done.

"Banish from your minds that we're all talking about going back to living in grass huts," said Collins, who also represents Neighborhoods for Responsible Growth. "That's not what we're talking about."

And ArtsCenter director Jon Wilner, citing the public artist chosen for Chapel Hill's Town Operations Center, asked the group not to forget the "local arts industry" in its sustainability push.

"When a government agency spends \$450,000 on art [from] outside our community that angers a lot of people," he said, "when 10 artists could have been paid \$45,000 and made 10 pieces of art ... and made their livelihood for a whole year."

All rights reserved. This copyrighted material may not be published, broadcast or redistributed in any manner.

The Chapel Hill News

© Copyright 2007, The News & Observer Publishing Company  
A subsidiary of The McClatchy Company 