

Harvest a sustainable loan at the PCU



Permaculture in Practice

by Nate Downey

It could be that you've overdone your duty to jumpstart the economy this Christmas, and now you're in major debt. Perhaps you've made a New Year's resolution to get some big projects done around the house. Or, maybe it's just time for another car or to refinance your credit card.

Holiday hangover or not, in this economic climate you might need a loan. And, fortunately, rates have hit historic lows. For the ecologically minded and/or socially responsible among us, the Permaculture Credit Union offers discounts on loan rates for sustainable projects.

Technically, the term "sustainable" means capable of remaining in existence. Since arguments can easily be made for almost anything to be "sustainable"

and since businesses can't sustain themselves if they make their potential customers argue, the PCU defines "sustainable" much more widely than people might think.

Obviously, if you wanted to borrow money to build a golf course in the desert or to start another nuclear laundry in Santa Fe, getting that sustainability discount on your loan would take some sorcerer-like sophistry, and you'd still be declined. But the argument could certainly be made that a Ford F-150 could be a vehicle for sustainability. What if someone were to use the gas guzzler to take vegetables to the local farmers' market?

The people at the Permaculture Credit Union discovered a long time ago that if you try to determine what is and isn't sustainable, you'll expend a lot of energy – and ultimately make too many mistakes. So the idea behind the PCU's sustainability discount is to suggest, encourage and educate people as to choices that make the world a better place – as opposed to drawing a line in the sand between "good" and "evil."

Many everyday projects clearly qualify for the sustainability discount. Insulating your house, installing double-pane windows,

buying a fuel-efficient heater and building a sunroom, as examples, all save resources and are capable of making the world more sustainable. One of the more popular ways to qualify for the sustainability discount is to purchase one of the new hybrid gas-electric cars that get over 50 miles to the gallon. One member even purchased a car that runs on vegetable oil. Relish the irony of saving the world as you drive down the road exuding a slight scent of Happy Meal.

The discount is especially useful for people who have in mind projects that most financial institutions do not yet understand. Photovoltaic panels that save electricity, greenhouses that grow vegetables, cistern systems that harvest water, graywater treatment systems, rows of trees that protect your house from the cold north winds, and shade trees that help to cool your house in the summer are several of the kinds of projects the PCU is especially interested in financing.

Since the PCU is the first credit union to be chartered by the state of New Mexico in decades, there are certain regulatory constraints. For example, at this writing, the

state and federal agencies that oversee credit unions have imposed a \$30,000 loan limit for the PCU. Fortunately, as a credit union, the PCU is part of one of the most cooperative industries imaginable. Other established credit unions that would like to see the PCU thrive are poised to assist their fledgling friend by participating in larger loan amounts.

To become a member of the PCU, the minimum requirements are for you to believe in the "ethics and principles of permaculture" and pay a one-time membership fee. The ethics and principles of permaculture (care for the earth and care for people) are described in greater detail at www.pcuonline.org. For more information visit the web site, call the Permaculture Credit Union at 505-954-3749, or stop by the office in the State Employees Credit Union building next to Pizza Hut in the Villa Linda Mall parking lot.

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