

Defining and Creating New Green Jobs

By Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) was elected POTUS 32 and took office in 1933 he inherited a monumental mess of poverty and unemployment amidst the Great Depression. Within his first month in office FDR signed an executive order which created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Those of us who visit our National Parks benefit to this day from the infrastructure projects that put millions of Americans to work. In the current pandemic and its subsequent impact on jobs, industries, and the personal welfare of every United States citizen, it is time to quickly implement programs which can put people to work. We can improve our infrastructure, slow climate change, address gender and racial inequality, and feed an increasingly food insecure nation.

What might a 21st century CCC look like? Restaurants might be contracted by the Federal Government to feed those in need. Sustainable farmers could be paid to provide food for Food Banks. Contact tracing could be done by citizens being paid to make calls and follow up on the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The crumbling infrastructure of roads and bridges could be built and maintained by corps of unemployed workers. Accelerated installation of fiber optics and internet infrastructure could be facilitated, especially in rural communities currently without the benefit of fast affordable internet. The Federal Government could provide the PPE, supplies and materials to school systems in every corner of the U.S. to help equalize the gap between students in rich and poor communities. Empty office buildings could be repurposed to utilize the space for educational/day care for parents who do not have the ability to stay at home for their jobs. Energy infrastructure could be fast tracked, training people in installation jobs in solar and wind. Prioritizing the construction of bicycle and pedestrian trails could be accomplished.

The article “Redefining Green Jobs for a Sustainable Economy” (tcf.org) includes an excellent overview of the historical evolution of green jobs, the evolving definitions, and the state of wages and inclusivity of the green sector. “Out of all occupations nationally, over 30 percent of workers earn under \$15 per hour, whereas that figure is around only 4 percent of green workers. Notably, in effect, there is less income inequality within green jobs than the national average, despite there being lower educational requirements, on average, than jobs nationally.” In 2018 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projected that the two occupations (of all occupations) most likely to have the fastest growth between 2016 and 2026 are solar voltaic installers and wind turbine service technicians.

How we define “the green economy” is not standardized. If we simply count wind, solar and geothermal design and production the economic numbers will be different than if we include many peripheral professions and industries. For example, conservation, arguably the parent of environmentalism, includes employment by the National Park Service, sustainable farming, forestry, biology, fish and wildlife, game wardens and conservation professionals. Economic activity related to visitation to national and state parks translates into billions of dollars spent and hundreds of thousands of jobs.

What can individuals do to encourage, promote and demand green jobs? We can buy our food from sustainable farmers, preferably as local as possible to reduce the carbon footprint of our eating habits. We can buy our meat from local ranchers who offer sustainably raised beef, bison, pork, poultry and eggs. In our small community we can buy chocolate from local chocolate makers, beer, wine and spirits

from local brewers, wineries, and distilleries. We can buy greens locally. We can order fresh produce and eggs online from a nearby family farm and pick up our food locally.

We can insist that our clothing be produced in the USA. The cheap goods we source from China are not cheap if you look at the big picture, including the carbon footprint and American jobs. We are not helping support our health insurance coverage, and we are not supporting our local economies when we insist on buying cheap over local. The cost of cheap food can be measured in the stress corporate farms put on the earth, the increased need for fertilizers and pesticides due to unsustainable agricultural practices, the loss of wildlife as poisons are introduced via the food chain. The cost of cheap goods can be seen in the environmental impacts of factories located in countries unfettered by pesky environmental regulations. The cost of ignoring clean energy options will be to make our country much less livable for generations not far into the future. We have a choice.

Beck, Thomas W. "Defining and Creating New Green Jobs", *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday November 2, 2020, <https://www.eptrail.com/2020/11/02/defining-and-creating-new-green-jobs/>