



Institute for Local Self-Reliance 2009 Activities Report

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Message from the President



Like many nonprofits, the Institute for Local Self-Reliance was at once buffeted and bolstered by the events of 2009. Looking back on the year, it is gratifying to note the significant accomplishments we made and the obstacles we overcame.

Despite reduced resources we were able to provide direct technical assistance in dozens of communities across the nation. We also implemented an ambitious media strategy to make sure that the message of local self-reliance was heard where our limited resources could not physically reach.

In this report you will see how localism continues to gain traction, and how our efforts are proving that community is not simply some amorphous, feel good thing. It is a necessity for the creation of a just and sustainable society.

To our donors and partners, your support was more important than ever this year. Thank you for joining us as we work towards a prosperous future built from the bottom up.

Neil Seldman
President

PS. If our work resonates with you, **please consider making a tax-deductible gift** to the Institute. **Your continued support is essential** to our ongoing success. Donate online at www.ilsr.org.

THE NEW RULES PROJECT

TELECOMMUNICATIONS AS COMMONS INITIATIVE

In 2009, the Telecommunications as Commons Initiative expanded its focus by starting to weigh in on national matters while continuing to work directly with communities developing and operating broadband networks.

When the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) requested comments on how to distribute \$7.2 billion in stimulus funds, we encouraged them to develop forward-looking standards and only consider networks directly accountable to the public. When NTIA instead formulated rules that put private companies on equal footing with the public sector, we published a brief showing how they violated Congress's intent and undermined the public

interest. Throughout the process, we have aided a number of communities in applying for funds and have argued for public money going to public networks.

We continued supporting the community of Monticello, MN, in a lawsuit brought by the incumbent phone company to block public ownership. The Minnesota Supreme Court allowed the network to move forward and Monticello citizens now have a choice in broadband, telephone, and cable television as well as the fastest broadband speeds at the lowest prices in the state. The City has thanked us for our support, noting that it was essential for their morale.

DECENTRALIZED ENERGY

Renewable energy is available everywhere and a key accomplishment this year was an expanded and updated version of our report, *Energy Self-Reliant States*. We found that every state could meet its renewable energy goals with in-state renewable energy. Furthermore, the report revealed that three in five states could get all their electricity from in-state renewable sources and that almost every state could get 20 percent of its power from rooftop solar PV alone.

Our report – *Feed-in Tariffs: Driving the Economy with Renewable Energy Policy That Works* – highlighted how this innovative renewable energy policy removes barriers to generating renewable energy everywhere that it is available. FITs provide renewable energy projects with a guaranteed price for their electricity for 20 years that makes the investment easier and more economical and allows many more people to become owners of renewable energy projects.

We've been writing about electrified transportation since 2003 and this year ILSR completed a comprehensive electric vehicle policy scoping report for a network of 120 organizations and private foundations in eight Midwestern states. The report will be used to advance state level electric vehicle policy and ILSR will continue to provide technical support throughout the Midwest.

We also put our ideas into action. We assisted Rep. David Bly in the Minnesota legislature in crafting and introducing a bill last year to create a statewide feed-in tariff and it will be introduced again in 2010. ILSR also hosted a successful conference on feed-in tariffs in Minnesota, with over 100 attendees coming to the event at St. Olaf College in January.

ILSR worked with the University of Minnesota's Clean Energy Resource Teams and two customer-owned utilities to develop a local renewable energy pilot project. One hundred homes around Willmar, MN, will get up-front financing for substantial energy efficiency upgrades and renewable energy systems with the up-front costs paid back over 20 years through each participant's electric bill. If successful, it will become a model for replication in communities around the country.

At the federal level, ILSR met with the Chair of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to bring attention to the need for nationwide utility level planning requirements that will facilitate the development of distributed generation. And we assisted members of Congress on an alternative to proposed federal transmission legislation that severely preempted state authority over transmission.

THE HOMETOWN ADVANTAGE AND THE BIG BOX TOOL KIT

ILSR has long been a key resource in the professional work I do, but over the last two years, it has also been a critical resource in my personal advocacy, a local grassroots-based campaign to stop a big-box-anchored mall in my rural community, and turn our town toward more sustainable scales and forms of economic development.

Daniel Mackay, New Scotland Council member

We continue to lead nationally in the growing movement to constrain big-box retailers and support locally owned businesses.

Our research played a key role in defeating a campaign, funded by Wal-Mart, to overturn a North Dakota law that prohibits corporations from owning pharmacies. We also worked to spread Maine's Informed Growth Act as a policy model. The policy and many resources from our Big Box Tool Kit web site were distributed to tens of thousands of city planners nationwide in April by the American Planning Association. Bills were introduced in Missouri and Oregon, and we met with and provided campaign materials and detailed advice to the coalition behind the Oregon bill.

Relying on resources and technical assistance provided through the Big Box Tool Kit, citizens groups in more than two-dozen communities defeated Wal-Mart or other big-box development projects in the last 12 months. Hundreds of other grassroots groups used our resources to make progress in their buy-local campaigns. We provided a wide array of technical

THE HOMETOWN ADVANTAGE AND THE BIG BOXTOOL KIT (CONTINUED)

assistance to these groups, including helping them interpret local zoning laws, develop a campaign strategy, analyze economic impact studies, draft public hearing testimony, and write newspaper op-eds.

A strategic partnership with the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies resulted in a feature article on "The Corporate Co-Opt of 'Local,'" which was published, often as a lead story, in over 30 publications in July and August. We also disseminated a paper rebutting an academic journal article ("Has Wal-Mart Buried Mom and Pop?") that claimed that Wal-Mart has not impacted small businesses. Our paper exposed the article's flawed methodology and undermined Wal-Mart's attempt to use the article against local groups opposed to its development projects.

WASTE TO WEALTH PROGRAM

For 35 years ILSR has helped communities convert waste from a liability into a valuable resource. From Hawaii to Tennessee to Florida and California, this year we assisted over 25 communities on a range of sustainability and economic development issues. As part of this assistance, we tabled waste incineration proposals in 9 cities and counties and are helping several of these communities find reuse, recycling, and composting opportunities.

This year we also developed a resource recovery park for Alachua County, FL; completed recycling and economic development plans for Los Angeles, Austin, and San Juan, Puerto Rico; advised St. Lucie County, FL, after the county halted plans for a large garbage incinerator; and continued policy assistance to citizens and city council of Detroit in their effort to implement recycling and economic development infrastructure.

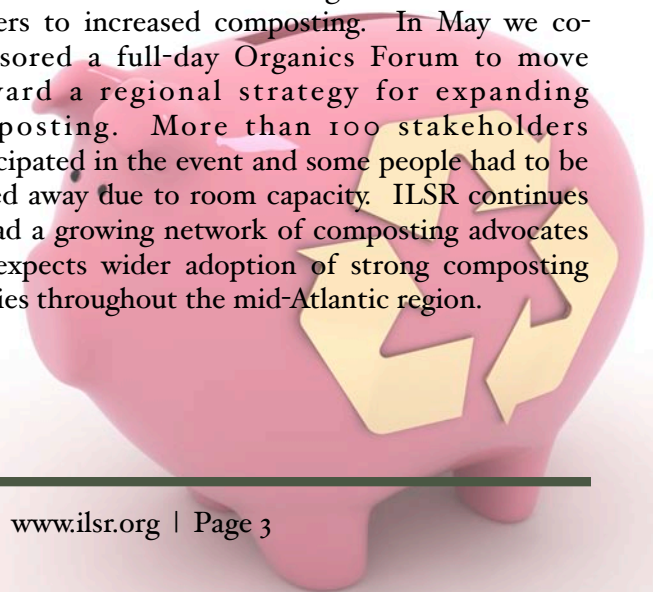
RECYCLING MAKES SENSE PROJECT

Reducing Plastic Trash: This year we helped to establish a fee on single-use retail bags in the nation's capital. We provided timely technical assistance to the DC City Council – virtually all of ILSR's recommendations were reflected in the unanimously approved Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Act of 2009. The bill establishes a 6¢ fee on single-use plastic and paper shopping bags, with the bulk of the fees collected going to a newly created fund that will be used for river cleanup and restoration as well as for public education and to provide free reusable bags to DC residents. The Act is a major step toward reducing plastic trash in the Anacostia, which is one of only two rivers in the US classified as "trash-impaired" by the EPA.

ILSR staff co-led a Young Activist Club at Piney Branch Elementary School whose members (3rd through 5th graders) are working to replace their school's single-use polystyrene lunch trays with durable, washable trays. ILSR's support of the Young Activist Club led to a front-page *Washington Post* article and to the City of Takoma Park passing a resolution supporting the phase-out of polystyrene used in food service.

Increasing Regional Composting: At the request of the DC Department of Public Works ILSR helped frame the scope of work and is providing some oversight of arrangements for continued fall leaf composting with Pogo Organics, in Sunshine, Maryland. The District will send all its leaves to be composted at Pogo reducing transportation costs, creating a valuable end product and saving the city hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.

Throughout the year ILSR has worked closely with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and the Alice Ferguson Foundation on barriers to increased composting. In May we co-sponsored a full-day Organics Forum to move forward a regional strategy for expanding composting. More than 100 stakeholders participated in the event and some people had to be turned away due to room capacity. ILSR continues to lead a growing network of composting advocates and expects wider adoption of strong composting policies throughout the mid-Atlantic region.



ON-FARM COMPOSTING

In 2009, ILSR implemented a comprehensive outreach campaign to inform farmers about opportunities for on-farm food scrap composting. ILSR reached out to state farm associations for their support in the campaign, resulting in food composting workshops in Delaware, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

ILSR identified farmers who were interested in on-farm composting and developed a core group of on-farm composting technical advisors who are conducting site visits to provide preliminary assessments for these interested farmers. In addition, ILSR is working to address regulatory barriers to on-farm composting in some of the states and has met with key stakeholders in Maryland and in West Virginia to begin to address these issues.

What's new at ILSR?

This year we published numerous reports and policy briefs and updated and launched several web sites –

www.newrules.org,
www.sustainableplastics.org,
and www.muninetworks.org.

Check out all of our publications, newsletters, RSS feeds, and other resources online at www.ilsr.org.

SUSTAINABLE PLASTICS AND BIOMATERIALS

Through our Sustainable Plastics Project and the Sustainable Biomaterials Collaborative (SBC), ILSR is working to promote plant-based plastics that are sustainable at every step of their production, use, and recovery.

In the past year, the SBC published the Sustainable Bioplastics Guidelines and successfully launched the *Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Specifications for Compostable Biobased Food Service Ware*. Both of these documents engage the business community in shifting towards more sustainable biomaterials.

This year the SBC also launched the Working Landscapes Certificate program to offset the production of GMO crops with sustainably grown

non-GMO crops. Participating farmers raise their crops under approved sustainability standards that are verified by a certification entity. This past year we secured two companies as purchasers of the Certificates.

The SBC has played a substantial role in the Maine Potatoes to Plastics Project, which seeks to use Maine potatoes to meet the increasing demand for bioresin. We believe the Maine Project represents a great opportunity that will serve as a case study in rural economic and market development based on aggregating demand for biomaterials and shifting the market away from oil-based products by following sustainability principles at every stage of the product's life cycle.



ILSR board and staff at the May 2009 Board of Directors meeting.

Top row – (left to right) John Bailey, Andy Reicher, Neil Seldman, Kirk Marckwald, Sarah Pickell, and Brenda Platt. **Bottom row** – (left to right) Jolie Jones, Justin Dahlheimer, David Morris, Chris Mitchell, Stacy Mitchell, Leigh Crenshaw, and Becca Vargo Daggett. **Not pictured** – Heeral Bhalala, Stanley Eller, Sarah Gilberg, Linda Knapp, Roy Priest and Martin Seldman.

Founded in 1974, the Institute for Local Self-Reliance is a nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation dedicated to promoting an equitable, sustainable, democratic and prosperous future built from the bottom up. All donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law and greatly appreciated.

Support ILSR! To make a secure donation online visit our web site at www.ilsr.org/donate, or call John Bailey at 612-379-3815 x211 to make a gift by phone. You can also send donations by mail to ILSR at: 1313 5th Street SE, Suite 303, Minneapolis, MN 55414.

ILSR-DC has moved! Please contact us at our new DC office: 2001 S St. NW, Suite 570, Washington, DC 20009.