

2-1-2014

The Merits of Separating Global Warming from Extension Education Sustainability Programs

Richard V. Tyson

UF/IFAS Extension Orange County, rvt@ufl.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Tyson, R. V. (2014). The Merits of Separating Global Warming from Extension Education Sustainability Programs. *The Journal of Extension*, 52(1), Article 7. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol52/iss1/7>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.

The Merits of Separating Global Warming from Extension Education Sustainability Programs

Abstract

Using the rhetoric of global warming to support the adoption of sustainable practices beneficial to society limits their adoption. Climate data are about to fall outside the models used to "settle" the global warming issue. Atmospheric carbon dioxide continues to increase, while temperature, since 1998, has decreased. The science is becoming unsettling. Is it time for Extension educators to reevaluate sustainability programming and de-emphasize climate and concentrate instead on the many other beneficial aspects of moving toward a more sustainable future at all levels of Extension programming—agriculture, natural resources, the environment, health, nutrition, and housing?

Richard V. Tyson
County Extension
Director
UF/IFAS Extension
Orange County
Orlando, Florida
rvt@ufl.edu

Introduction

Extension educators have embraced global warming and climate change programs over the last 20 years (Miller, 1990; Fraisse, Breuer, Zierden, & Ingram, 2009; Mazze & Stockard, 2013) and have incorporated those topics into sustainable living educational programs (Elliot et al., 2008). However, average global temperatures have declined for the last 15 years compared to the El Niño peak of 1998 (NASA, 2013), while carbon dioxide emissions continue their steady rise (NOAA, 2013). Global warming terms used in sustainable living education programs now raise more questions than answers. It's not the same as presenting data from a replicated crop variety trial with statistically significant winners and losers. Instead, we are discussing projections, models, predictions, and attempting to attach winners and losers to it. None of the current climate models predicted temperature would stop rising (Plimer, 2009).

Re-Thinking Climate Change

- Historically, today's climate is within natural variations and is nothing to fear.
- Climate is always changing, and civilizations thrive and expand during warm periods.

Increasing 20th century CO₂ levels contributed to the Green Revolution's higher plant yields and will be a factor in feeding a rising world population.

- The large diurnal surface temperature variations between daytime highs and nighttime lows leave one to seek the simplest explanation—the sun drives climate.
- We are entering a cycle of reduced sun spot activity that may account for the halt in temperature rise and would mean cooler, not warmer temperatures ahead.
- How many years must the planet cool before we can say it is not warming?

The Debate or the Facts

We can debate the positives and negatives of global warming, the difficulties and merits of using computer models for data collection. We can debate the many variables associated with climate science—the atmosphere, clouds, oceanography, the sun—and whether these and their relative weights are included correctly in the climate models used to set policy. But it would be a debate, not a presentation of hard facts backed up by replicated data collection through observation and measurement, based on the scientific method. The latter I can confidently present to my clientele groups and stakeholders. And they can confidently accept. The debate leaves us both confused.

UF/IFAS Extension Orange County is in its sixth year of sustainable living Extension education programs. Significant results for adopting sustainable practices have occurred without emphasizing climate as a motivating factor (Tyson et al., 2012). Because, frankly, it is easier to present just the facts. We can present the environmental and social benefits of reducing water, fertilizer, and pesticide use. We can save energy and healthcare costs by promoting healthy lifestyle changes. We can encourage support for local food production thus improving food security and healthy local—by just presenting the facts, please, just the facts!

References

- Elliott, C., Hyde, L., McDonnell, L., Monroe, M., Rashash, D., Sheftall, W., Simon-Brown, V., Worthley, T., Crosby, G., & Tupas, L. (2008). Sustainable living education: A call to all Extension. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 46 (2) Article 2COM1. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2008april/comm1.php>
- Fraisse, C. W., Breuer N. E., Zierden D., & Ingram, K. T. (2009). From climate variability to climate change: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Extension* [on-line], 47(2) Article 2FEA9. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2009april/a9.php>
- Mazze, S., & Stockard, J. (2013). Evaluating the effectiveness of a sustainable living education program. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 51(1), Article 1RIB1. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2013february/rb1.php>
- Miller, B. J. (1990). Global environmental change: Extension frontier for the 1990s. *Journal of Extension* [on-line], 28(4). Article 4FRM1. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/1990winter/f1.php>

National Aeronautics and Space Administration. (2013). Goddard Institute for Space Studies. Surface temperature analysis. Retrieved from: http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/graphs_v3/

National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. (2013). Earth Systems Research Laboratory. Trends in atmospheric carbon dioxide. from: <http://www.esrl.noaa.gov/gmd/ccgg/trends/>

Plimer, I. (2009). *Heaven and earth: Global warming the missing science*. Taylor Trade Publishing, Landham, MD.

Tyson, R., Felter, E., Kennington, M., Mudge, D., Pehlke, T., Thralls, E., & White, C. (2012). Sustainable living educational expos build teamwork, community networks and adoption of sustainable practices. *Journal of NACAA*, 5(2).

Copyright © by Extension Journal, Inc. ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the *Journal Editorial Office*, joe-ed@joe.org.

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#)