



Differing visions of sustainability

If you've ever witnessed a hog being slaughtered on a family farm, as I did many years ago as a youth, you get some idea what bloody business sustainability can be. Or at least how it was on the rocky Appalachian homestead where my mother grew up with five brothers and sisters and where my grandparents lived until their deaths in the 1970s.

Witnessing my grandpa Silas and my uncle Ray dispatch and dissect that squealing hog more than 50 years ago colors my perception of the word sustainability. That, and the times — wide-eyed, fascinated and repulsed — that I watched my grandma ring the neck of a chicken, pluck it over a cauldron of boiling water and sacrifice it to the frying pan.

My grandparents lived, for the most part, "off the grid" and in a manner that practically none of us would wish for ourselves. But looking back on it, I suppose you could describe their lifestyle as green, organic or natural; take your pick.

Today, I marvel at the chasm separating my grandparent's existence with the consumerist, resource-churning life-style we now take for granted and, to the point of this column, how we too often run our businesses.

Sustainability to them meant using everything

they had as efficiently as they could. Everything. They wasted virtually nothing.

So, what does this have to do with the landscape/lawn service industry?

Whenever I grapple with the term sustainable, especially as it's applied to the landscapes we design, install and maintain, I keep coming back to the question of waste — wasted effort, wasted time and materials and especially wasted resources such as water and energy.

To survive as a company or an industry, that can't continue. We're facing a future of rising resource costs and escalating concern over environmental issues. While we can't see the degree to which these trends will play out, let's begin now to ensure the future of our companies and our industry by adopting strategies to more efficiently deliver services, protect and enhance beneficial ecosystems, and, most especially, to conserve resources such as water and energy.

Let's consider yet another meaning for the word sustainability as in generating sufficient revenue from year to year to enable us to continue to providing the attractive and resource-conserving landscapes that provide so many benefits to our customers and our society, in general.

Customers recognize that their landscapes are sustainable only because of us. They remain healthy, attractive and provide the property-enhancing and life-enriching benefits they appreciate only through our expertise, and the intelligent use of our time, materials, water and energy.

I'm convinced that we can and will adapt to whatever new economic and environmental challenges arise, and that we will create a more prosperous and environmentally focused future for our industry.

Certainly, our goal is to build a models of sustainability very unlike the depression-era existence that my grandparents experienced well into the 1950s. Even the most committed proponents of sustainability wouldn't want that.

Urban landscapes are sustainable only because of us. They remain **healthy, attractive** and **life-enriching** only through our expertise and the intelligent use of our time, materials, water and energy.