

HIGHLIGHTS

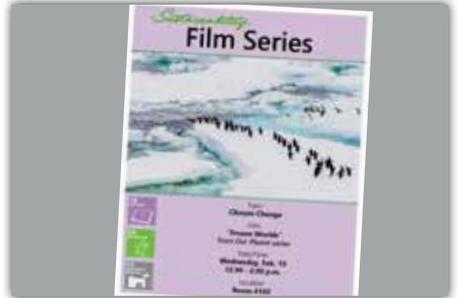
The Revolving Sustainability Fund (RSF) enables waste reduction for Biology department! The RSF funded its first project this fall semester. This project retired the single-use whiteboard markers (that go to the landfill after about a week of use) in favor of refillable markers that can be used for years and are fully recyclable at the end of their lives. Along with reducing the waste our classes produce, this will save the biology department about \$145 each year, paying back the full project cost in less than three years. *If you have questions about this RSF project or ideas for another, get in touch with Joel!*



PSC's first-ever Upcycle-palooza's main event was the student **Upcycle Competition**. Student groups and individuals were invited to submit creations made from would-be waste materials. Seven very impressive creations were entered into the competition, including a working wind turbine, a vinyl-record coffee table, and an artistic meditation device. However the winner was a backgammon board made from old electronic components submitted by Jahlel, an Industrial Electrician student. Congratulations to Jahlel and all of the students who participated in the competition!



To inform and engage with our campus community on important sustainability-related topics, the Sustainability Committee will be hosting **screenings of a series of films** on several topics this spring. The first will be Feb. 19, from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m., and will cover the topic of climate change. Look for more details in the coming weeks!



UPCOMING



The Prairie State Regional Sustainability Network and the South Metropolitan Higher Education Consortium (SMHEC) have a **Growing Sustainable Communities Together** Conference on Feb. 7, from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., in the PSC Conference Center. [Registration is open here.](#)



The Sustainability Committee will be hosting a series of **sustainability-themed films** (and related discussions) throughout this semester, starting with one on the topic of climate change scheduled for Feb. 19, from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m., in room 4105. If you have any questions, get in touch with Joel.



Earth Day falls on April 22 this year, and PSC will hold a new host of activities and information sessions as part of its **Earth Week celebrations**. If you have suggestions for topics you would like to learn more about, get in touch with [Joel](#).



The University of Illinois Extension is offering a free **Native Landscape Design Workshop**. You still have time to get to the last of their three sessions offered this season on Feb. 22. [More information here.](#)

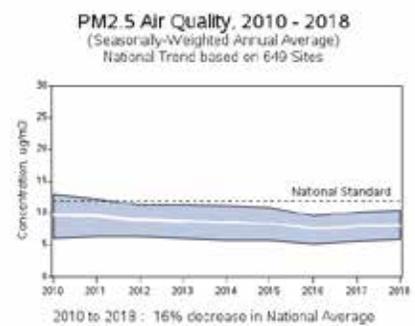
IN THE NEWS

Climate change and its implications when assessing investment risk were central themes throughout Larry Fink's [annual letter](#) to other CEOs. Fink is the CEO and founder of the world's largest asset manager, BlackRock, which has over \$7 trillion under management. In his letter, he calls on companies to become more transparent and to be proactive in accurately assessing long-term sustainability risks like those associated with climate change. Sustainability will be "at the center of our investment approach," he writes. Read [more about the letter](#), and [reactions](#) to it.

A lot has been said about more frequent and destructive extreme weather events caused or made worse by climate change, but the world is also experiencing significant **public health crises** that disproportionately affect children and poor communities. [This article](#) outlines some of the **health-related impacts of climate change** on us and our children.

Development of natural areas often means removing forests, some of the Earth's most effective [carbon sinks](#). The **Cook County Forest Preserve District is taking a step to do the opposite: renaturalize once-developed land**. Midlothian Meadows preserve soon will be [absorbing about 2.3 acres of developed land back into nature](#), starting with the demolition of the St. Roch Friary.

As if connections between air pollution and climate change weren't enough, the **rising presence of PM2.5** (pollution smaller than 2.5 micrometers across) in our country's air since 2016 is concerning here and detrimental to human health in many international cities. [This article/infographic outlines](#) how this pollutant is causing premature deaths in some of the most vulnerable communities and allows readers to compare the situations in dozens of cities in the United States and abroad. ([The EPA's seasonally-weighted annual average](#) for PM2.5 levels in the U.S. saw its first increases in 2017 and 2018, after six straight years of declines.)



WORDS: Carbon Fee and Dividend

The climate is changing rapidly, in large part, due to the emission of carbon into the atmosphere. The fossil fuel industry has benefited in a huge way from this activity, but many argue that these emitters do not pay the "[true cost](#)" of their activities. In other words, society pays a very real price for climate change (in the form of increased risk and severity of extreme weather events, decreased biodiversity, adverse health effects, etc.) that is not factored into the economic pictures of the largest emitters. *Society is effectively subsidizing climate change.*

What a [carbon fee and dividend system](#) would do is force carbon emitters to pay a fee based on the amount of emissions they produce. Without growing government, the revenue from those fees would then be divided up and provided to everyone in the country as a carbon dividend. The idea being - if society is picking up the tab for the effects of climate change, we should be compensated by those causing it. (One of the proposals to implement this type of system was put together by a group of Republicans called the [Climate Leadership Council](#).)

Under this type of system, most Americans would receive more from the dividend than they would pay in increased commodity costs (due to the fee). You can use [this calculator](#) to see how much you would likely pay/receive in a system like this. Or [check out how Canada](#) is implementing a carbon fee and dividend system nationwide.



SPOTLIGHT

Tablecloths are frequently used at PSC events to enhance the appearance and simplify cleanup, but the Academic Advising Center recently has taken steps to reduce the waste produced at their events by purchasing 40 reusable tablecloths. During the 2018-2019 academic year, the department used 80 single-use plastic tablecloths at their two open house events, alone. Seeing the resulting waste prompted them to explore other options.

As it turns out, the economic case for switching to reusable tablecloths is as solid as the environmental case. Yes, the up-front cost is higher: single-use plastic tablecloths cost \$1 to \$2 each, while the reusable ones purchased by the Academic Advising Center were closer to \$12 each. But with two major events each year where all 40 tablecloths are needed, the payback period for this alternative is only about 3 to 5 years.

And that's assuming they aren't used at any other events throughout the year, which is not the case. The Sustainability Committee, for example, used six of these reusable tablecloths at PSC's Upcycle-palooza event in November. They weren't the first to borrow them, and won't be the last. The Academic Advising Center has generously offered to make their tablecloths available for others at PSC, provided they continue to be returned in good condition. This will multiply the waste reductions and financial savings realized by their decision to go green!

If you would like to borrow tablecloths for an event, get in touch with Beth Wyack (bwyack@prairiestate.edu). If you think your department has enough events to justify getting your own reusable tablecloths, get in touch with Joel (jnightingale@prairiestate.edu) to find out how the Revolving Sustainability Fund may be able to help make that happen!



What can I do to help?

- **Incorporate sustainability into your courses.**

Don't know how? Moraine Valley Community College offers an 8- or 5- week online workshop for educators who want to bring themes of sustainability into their classes. If you missed their 8-week workshop that started Jan. 20, they will be offering the 5-week version of this workshop starting in May. [Learn more here.](#)

Got Ideas?

If you have ideas for helping our campus run more efficiently, produce less waste, offer sustainability-related courses or programs or generally be more sustainable, contact PSC's Sustainability Coordinator Joel Nightingale at jnightingale@prairiestate.edu or extension 3727.



FORWARD THINKING: Making Sense of Sustainable Produce Subscription Services

Depending on who you ask, somewhere [between 28 and 40 percent](#) of food produced in the United States goes to waste. Of that, ReFED (a non-profit whose aim it is to eliminate food waste) [estimates that 42 percent occurs](#) between farms and consumers, mostly in consumer-facing businesses like grocery stores. This segment is being targeted by a growing field of start-ups who are hoping to sell that would-be waste directly to you. So, what's their basic model?

Most of these companies can be described as national (or aspiring-to-go-national) start-ups. They have partnerships with farmers across North America who often have produce that, for cosmetic reasons, is unacceptable to grocery stores. Their pitch to you: cheaper produce, that would otherwise go to waste, delivered directly to your door.

Putting to use the roughly [63 million tons of food wasted](#) each year in the United States is widely seen as a potential solution to hunger in the country, but this waste also represents a source of climate-changing greenhouse gases (GHGs) when sent to the landfill. According to ReFED, diverting this, and other organic waste from the landfill using a network of centralized composting systems has the potential to reduce GHG emissions by about [2.6 million tons of CO₂e per year](#). This would suggest that other outcomes for this would-be waste, like feeding people with it, could result in GHG emissions savings on a similar scale.

Everyone agrees that food waste is a big issue, but there is a lively debate about whether the model of ugly produce start-ups is the best way to facilitate the changes needed to fix it. [Critics of these companies](#) have claimed that they "commodify need and undermine food banks and CSAs" (community-supported agriculture enterprises), by competing for fresh produce (that may otherwise be donated to food banks) and customers (who may otherwise subscribe to CSAs).

In response to the claim that their operations compete with food banks, one ugly produce company, [Imperfect Produce](#), pointed out that there is plenty of food waste to go around. "According to Feeding America, NRDC and ReFED, there are 20 billion pounds of produce getting wasted on farms each year -- after food banks take what they can," Imperfect Produce's CEO and co-founder [writes in their rebuttal](#). The magnitude of the problem, he argues, requires a scalable solution, and has room for food banks, CSAs, and ugly produce companies to coexist. After the initial [critique](#) and [rebuttal](#), Imperfect Produce met with the critics at [Phat Beets](#) to address their concerns head on and [later released a list of some steps](#) they were taking to do better.

So as a consumer, what's your best option for a sustainable food subscription?

From a customer perspective, CSAs and ugly produce subscriptions look pretty similar: in both, you subscribe to the service, and then fresh produce is delivered to you regularly (some CSAs require pick-up rather than delivery). But there are some notable differences. With a CSA, you're supporting a local farm and avoiding the transportation costs and emissions that shipping produce over long distances entails. Spending dollars on local produce is a huge win environmentally and economically.

But the flip side of this is that CSAs are limited by the local growing seasons and overall climate. There are a select few Chicago-area CSAs that offer subscriptions between late November and May. One that does is an organization called The Urban Canopy, but they [don't deliver outside of the city of Chicago](#). These limitations mean that during certain times of the year, and in many less well-served areas, the local produce that CSAs offer is tough to find.

Ugly produce companies, however, do offer service year-round. And while their corporate offices are not local, some allow you to see where their produce is sourced from so that you can opt to customize your deliveries with relatively local food. Customization of deliveries is a feature that some ugly produce companies allow that most CSAs cannot. The customers of a small-farm CSA generally get what the farm produces, without much, if any, room for adding/removing specific items.

The type of service that works for you will depend on your specific household needs. Weighing the pros and cons of ugly produce and CSAs also comes down to personal value judgments: local versus national/global; cost; seasonality; convenience; natural/organic. These differences are outlined in the table below on a very generalized level.

	Ugly produce	CSA
Organic, non-GMO, etc.	Varies	Varies
Local	No	Yes
Seasonal service gaps	No	Yes
Delivery	Yes	Some
Cost	Less	More
Availability	Wide	Small

There is variation within each service type, but this table is meant to capture the general offerings of each respective market as a whole. Don't let the table mislead you! These services are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the most sustainable version of produce delivery might involve subscribing to a local CSA when available, and then opting for ugly produce delivery during the winter, when the CSA farm can't grow locally.