What you can do about climate change

Last week’s View From Here column, “Climate Change is Real,” reported on the overwhelming scientific evidence behind the causes of climate change. It also chronicled both the current impacts of global warming and the catastrophic repercussions that are projected if we do not take the actions needed to address the climate emergency that confronts the world.

But hope is not lost. The successful international effort over the past 30 years to phase out the emission of ozone-depleting gases and halt the damage being done to the stratospheric ozone layer demonstrates that humankind is capable of responding successfully to mitigate a global environmental crisis caused by atmospheric pollution. International efforts to combat global warming will continue at the COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference from Oct. 31 to Nov. 12 in Glasgow, Scotland.

Meanwhile, here are some concrete steps that you can take to reduce carbon emissions and fight climate change:

• First and foremost: How often you use the key to your car or truck is critical for reducing carbon emissions. (Ground transportation accounts for nearly 45 percent of the total carbon emissions produced in Vermont—nearly twice the combined emissions from homes and businesses.) Telecommute from home whenever possible. Travel for personal reasons only when essential. Plan one large weekly food shopping trip, rather than multiple trips. Schedule household trips together. Once it again becomes safe to carpool, use Go Vermont’s resources to track and manage your trips efficiently and to link up with others to carpool: connectingcommuters.org

• Drive the most fuel-efficient vehicle you can afford. Visit the website of Drive Electric Vermont to learn about and take advantage of the incentives offered by the state and federal governments: driveelectricvt.com

• Weatherize and insulate to reduce the energy required to heat and cool your home and/or business. Residential, commercial and industrial energy consumption is second only to transportation as a source of Vermont’s greenhouse gas emissions. Take advantage of the many programs and incentives offered by Efficiency Vermont: efficiencyvermont.com

• Wherever the opportunity and budget allow: Employ renewable energy (such as solar) to power your home, and a highly-efficient energy system (such as a heat pump) for heating and cooling.

• Replace lightbulbs with LEDs and older appliances with energy-efficient models. Check the Energy Star label when purchasing new appliances to find those that are the most energy-efficient. (energystar.gov)

• Produce your own food. Grow more vegetables by increasing the size of your garden, or by starting a garden. Plant berry bushes, apple trees and other fruit-bearers. If your yard allows, consider chickens for meat and eggs, as well as other animals for milk and meat.

• Patronize local farms and businesses. Purchase food and provisions grown, made and sold locally and regionally whenever possible in order to reduce distances traveled for shopping and to help local businesses remain economically sustainable. The carbon footprint of locally grown apples, for instance, is far smaller than apples shipped from the Pacific Northwest.

• Eat lower on the food chain by consuming a more plant-based diet and by choosing animal sources of protein that have a lower carbon footprint. For example, the greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) generated when producing eggs laid by local free-range chickens (per kilogram of protein) are 625 percent less than the GHGs emitted when raising meat from commercially-produced chickens, and 3,250 times less than the GHGs emitted when raising meat from beef cattle.

• Get involved in local and regional food networks to engage with nearby farms, coops and food shelves. Learn more about how to eat sustainably and to help others find the sustenance they need.

• Compost food scraps. Vermont law requires everyone to separate food scraps from trash, with the exception of meat and bones if you are composting at home. Food waste that ends up in landfills generates methane—a greenhouse gas that, per volume, has an impact on climate change 25 times greater than carbon dioxide.

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MICHAEL CADUTO
From Page 2D times greater than carbon dioxide. For more information about where and how to compost, visit Sustainable Woodstock’s online composting page: sustainablewoodstock.org/our-programs/composting

- Use less hot water, and use less water overall by installing water-saving fixtures.

- Choose and value things made out of wood and other long-lasting materials that will endure through time, reuse things made out of plastic, metal and glass for other purposes and recycle the disposable materials that are still hard to avoid in today’s marketplace. For example, purchase inexpensive silverware and plates at yard sales and consignment shops and use in place of paper plates and disposable utensils. For information about locations and schedules for recycling in the Upper Valley, visit the website of the Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste Management District: guvswd.org.

- Instead of always buying “new,” seek out places that offer an array of quality second-hand goods that have plenty of use left in them. Local and regional resale outlets include: Encore Designer Consignment, and Who Is Sylvia? in Woodstock; Bridgewater Thrift Store in Bridgewater; and Listen Thrift Store and Revolution in White River Junction.

- Learn and/or practice the New England traditions of self-sufficiency and the do-it-yourself mindset that many have rediscovered during the pandemic. Make your own clothes, learn how to perform repairs around the house, put up your own preserves, make your own farm cheese, etc.

- Take long walks, bird-watching expeditions, bicycle rides and the myriad other healthy outdoor activities that feed your body, mind and spirit while treading lightly on the planet.

Michael Caduto, executive director of Sustainable Woodstock, brings nearly 30 years of experience as an environmental advocate, educator and writer. He has devoted his life to bringing people closer to the natural world and helping others better understand the role that we all play in its stewardship. His books include the “Keepers of the Earth” series (co-author); “Catch the Wind,” “Harness the Sun” and “Through a Naturalist’s Eyes.”