

Deeper Shade of Green

By Holly Barbo



Poverty and Green

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It is a basic human drive to provide the means for survival of ourselves and our families. We all do it. Not being able to provide is a fear that goads. Poverty is a condition without borders. We don't want to be part of that unfortunate group! If conditions are dire enough, ethics are ignored. People do what they need to do to exist. What is in demand at the moment? What can they do to meet that demand and earn enough to sustain their family?

Much of the illegal deforestation going on our planet is happening where poverty and a hunger for a resource meet. First world and emerging industrial nations set up a clamor for an item. Maybe it is charcoal required in steel production, or beef or soy or a specific type of wood. If the market for that item is there and poverty provides the push, regulations are often ignored. It is simply a means to survive. When legalities are enforced and the livelihood of the poor is shut down, they suffer in hopeless anger.

These people cannot be blamed. They are simply, blindly trying to endure. They are the tools used by less-than-scrupulous middle men higher up the chain and closer to the end-user. Sometimes it is greed and sometimes it is the economics of obtaining a necessary product for a lower price. Either way, it greatly aids in phenomenal destruction in very sensitive areas.

Where do we fit in and what can we do? There are a few areas over which we have some control. We need to educate ourselves and our customers about where our products come from. I have created a DVD that starts the conversation with my customers, but I also make it my business to learn where and how pieces are made. We should do our best to carry better-made products, because they last longer and do not need to be replaced for many years, thus using fewer natural resources. Lastly, we could do what is in our power to diminish poverty.

In these tough economic times, I can't do a lot. My family and my employees' families come first. I do what I can when I can.

Besides my annual food drive, my avenue for trying to make a difference is an organization called Heifer International that works on the principle of "If you give a man a fish, he eats for a day, but if you teach him how to fish, he will eat for the rest of his life." For as little as \$20, this foundation can set up a family with the means to make a living and improve their lives. The gift is area-appropriate and could be anything from goats or water buffalo to bees, llamas or silkworms. The recipients receive the animals and training for how to care for them and how to market the products they will get from the animals. They are also charged to share the animal's offspring with people in their village so others can pull themselves out of poverty, too.

Can we end all poverty in our country or in other parts of the world? Perhaps not. But I challenge you to find a means you are comfortable with and to do something. If each of us helped one family, our world would greatly benefit ... and so would we. **HFB**

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