

Motorbikes are now the number one form of transportation in Vietnam. Although they may seem less fuel efficient than the bicycles that they are replacing their efficiency is incredible compared to our number one mode, cars. Motorbikes get between 5 and 20 times the miles to the gallon that our cars do. It is common for whole families to share the ride, making it even more efficient. And it seems that just about anything can be carried on a motorbike.

Even though the trend seems to be moving toward motorized vehicles the bicycle still represents the ultimate in vehicle efficiency. Bikes need no fuel at all, and travel with ease on city streets and on narrow Hamlet paths.

Pigs are a very common site in Vietnamese yards. These pigs are family pets that will provide both food and fuel. The pigs' manure releases useful gas and also provides food for fish. The gas is used in the kitchen, and later both the pigs and fish will provide needed protein for the family diet.

The pig manure is washed into large plastic collection bags on the ground. Here the manure sits and gives up its valuable gas. The gas rises into a second bag which fills like a balloon and stores it for when it is needed.

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When many Vietnamese in the Mekong Delta want to cook they have access to free gas. Instead of burning wood or coal, which can be expensive and dirty these people simply turn on the gas stove like you or I would. However, they are not paying the gas company because their gas is generated in the yard, the first gift of the pigs which will later provide a second gift, food.

The outer shell of the rice grain, called the husk, is a byproduct of processing the grain so that it is edible. This byproduct is not discarded but put to several uses. Its widest use is as a fuel. These rice husks are collected and delivered to the huge ovens in which bricks are fired.

Rice husks are put to still a further use after they give up their energy to make hot flames. The ashes of the rice husks are a wonderful fertilizer and are spread in organic gardens to bring nutrients to growing food crops.

Everywhere I went in Vietnam I witnessed locals drying the shells of various fruits to use as fuel. Usually the materials to be dried are lain out on a tarp in the yard or even right on the street. This not only gives a second use to things that would probably be thrown away here in the U.S., but exploits of the solar energy that is readily available to all.

People in Vietnam do not throw much away. Everything can be useful if you give it the chance. When Logan fruits are eaten the cardboard-like shells are not discarded but saved for fuel. These shells burn hot enough to cook puffed rice and to steam rice noodles.