

# MIZZOU

The magazine of  
the Mizzou Alumni Association

[Home](#) » [Spring 2009](#) » [Features](#) » [Jill & Bill: Having more with less](#)



## Jill & Bill: Having more with less

### Two MU research associates simplify their lives

For rural sociologists Jill Lucht and Bill McKelvey, and an increasing number of Americans, incorporating elements of a simpler time has become a daily endeavor.

*Adobe Flash version 8, or higher, and Java Script are required to view the slide show for this feature story.*

Simple living — or voluntary simplicity — is a movement that has entered the mainstream in response to global concerns about planetary ecology and conservation. It is a way of life that rejects obsessive consumerism in favor of a more self-sustaining existence focused on the environment, health, efficiency and community.

“For me it means being environmentally conscious, making choices that are good for the earth, making choices that are good for my health, and being frugal,” Lucht says.

#### Sorting the clutter

Lucht grew up on a northern Wisconsin dairy farm, while McKelvey was reared in suburban Kansas City. Coming from different upbringings, they were married in December 2007.

Both are research associates at MU, and they recently purchased an 880-square-foot home one and a half miles from campus. They grow much of their own food in a backyard garden and a plot in a [community garden](#).

Lucht puts her dairy-farm skills to good use on Friday nights at [Goatsbeard Farm](#) near Harrisburg, Mo., where she milks goats in exchange for cheese.

“It allows me to stay close to livestock and agriculture and to participate on a working farm,” she says. “It’s an important value of mine.”

Of course, Lucht and McKelvey recycle cans, bottles and paper. They also purchase clothes

from consignment stores, exchange tools with friends, host neighborhood potlucks, drive fuel-efficient vehicles (when they aren't walking or biking), and try to survive in a home without a television.

"We're not bombarded with consumer messages," says McKelvey, an MU Extension associate who works with the [Healthy Lifestyle Initiative](#), dedicated to developing community-based nutrition, health and physical activity. "It's really helped reduce the mental and physical clutter."

## Defining the movement

Voluntary simplicity is loosely defined to encompass a variety of behaviors, practices and habits. Mary Grigsby, rural sociology professor and author of *Buying Time and Getting By: The Voluntary Simplicity Movement* (State University of New York Press, 2004), calls it an "unbounded cultural movement."

"It doesn't have an elected leadership, rules for participation or dues that you pay," Grigsby says. "What's distinctive is how people who adopt this way of life put together the available cultural materials in unique ways."

Grigsby explains that, on the simple living spectrum, one extreme includes those who have withdrawn from the job market completely and survive on little cash by way of barter," Grigsby says.

Closer to the other end of the spectrum are couples such as Lucht and McKelvey, who are experimenting with preserving their own produce, as well as making other choices.

## Reducing materialism

The couple choreographed their thrifty wedding ceremony with pine boughs from her family's Wisconsin farm and pork, potatoes and beverages produced in Missouri.

As the consequences of environmental indifference become more apparent, it's no surprise that the voluntary simplicity movement has gained momentum.

For Lucht and McKelvey, it's a way of life that has cultivated happiness.




"It's not so much that we're anti materialistic, but that we're pro un-materialistic," Lucht says, laughing. "Take a moment to appreciate the playfulness of the squirrels in your yard, or really feel the sun on your cheeks on a chilly winter morning.

"That's pure bliss."

**Share your comments with Mizzou magazine at [Mizzou@missouri.edu](mailto:Mizzou@missouri.edu).**

*Note: If published, feedback may be edited for length, style and clarity.*

---

 [Follow us on Twitter](#)  [Join us on Facebook](#)  [Subscribe to our feed](#)

---

Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone: 573-882-5916  
| E-mail: [Mizzou@missouri.edu](mailto:Mizzou@missouri.edu)

Opinions expressed in this site do not necessarily reflect the official position of MU or the Mizzou Alumni Association.

Copyright © 2021 — Curators of the [University of Missouri](#). All rights reserved. [DMCA](#) and other [copyright information](#).

An equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.

**Last updated: Feb. 15, 2013**