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Market Matters: Sustainable investing can reap rewards on multiple levels

By Joseph Matthews

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For a growing number of investors, it is clear that many of the solutions to pressing global issues will require a critical mass of private funds. Certainly, the need for local, regional and global solutions to complex environmental and social issues has never been more crucial.

Interestingly, research suggests that companies that think beyond the bottom line and take into consideration the world's environmental and social concerns may actually be stronger and more innovative over the long term.

Companies across the globe, for example, are working to reduce their corporate "carbon footprints" through actions ranging from purchase of energy-efficient machinery to carpooling in hybrid autos.

Some investors incorporate sustainability into their portfolios by choosing to invest in companies that focus on minimizing their impact to the global climate. Sustainability, as well, often is the umbrella term used by investors interested in a focus on social issues as well as issues related to the climate. Here, too, there are options to hone a portfolio to reflect an individual's values and societal concerns.

One of the most important factors in the movement toward sustainable investing is the attitude of Millennial investors. A recent survey revealed that of the high net worth investors polled, 75 percent of the total and 86 percent of Millennial investors consider themselves interested in sustainable investing.

Since Millennials are just hitting their stride in terms of careers, families, education and investments, their opinions matter. Not only are they important in the long term, but also

in the foreseeable future, as a larger number of Millennials advance in their working careers. Currently, Millennial investors are twice as likely to support companies that focus on social or environmental issues as the overall population of investors.

However, if a rising tide lifts all boats, the attention that Millennial investors bring to social and climate issues could be influencing investors from other generations as well. A significant majority — 84 percent — of Millennials believe that their investments can help address global issues, such as poverty. While that premise is not quite as widespread among the larger world of investors, it is nonetheless shared by 79 percent of the total.

Sustainable investing is not a one-size-fits-all approach to finances and leverages a diverse set of strategies for investors to consider. Regardless of which approach may strike a chord with individual investors, there is a commonality to sustainable investing that appeals to those who invest for their present and future financial needs.

With the Millennial generation taking great interest in those sectors and firms that share their concerns for the planet, it stands to reason that there will be continued growth in sustainable investing. As with any other financial decision, our individual investments require scrutiny and vigilance. But, in the long run, we can “go green” on multiple fronts that will help us reach our personal financial goals at the same time as we are helping to better the planet.

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