

Green Consumerism

Now more than ever, green is the color of money (the new twenty-dollar bills notwithstanding).

The U.S. organic food and beverages market, estimated at \$1 billion in 1990, reached \$11 billion in 2002. Organics are projected to top \$30 billion by 2007.

Americans bought 40,000 hybrid-electric vehicles last year, and sales are expected to approach 200,000 in 2005.

Sales from residential renewable energy programs are climbing by nearly 100 percent annually. A half-million households have gone fossil fuel-free by purchasing renewable energy from power companies.

Driving the growth of green from niche market to big business are tens of millions of Americans (see page 3) known as green consumers. As a group, they have come a long way in a short time, considering that twenty years ago they did not exist—at least not properly so called.

The advent of green consumerism can be traced to the late 1980s and early 1990s. *The Green Consumer*, with a million copies sold since its release in 1988, is largely responsible for popularizing an efficient and vivid term for the environmentally conscious consumer. Other books of that era, like *50 Simple Things You Can Do to Save the Earth* and *Hints for a Healthy Planet*, helped spawn the mass movement of everyday environmentalism.

Citizens weren't just reading, they were making their voices heard. Voter pressure compelled George HW Bush to declare himself the "environmental president" and to sign the 1990 Clean Air Act. 1990 was indeed a landmark year for the environment. According to the Earth Day Network, 200 million people in 141 countries celebrated Earth Day's 20th anniversary. Their rallying cry, "Make every day Earth Day," captured the ideal of green consumerism.

As green consumers filtered from Earth Day festivities back into their daily routines, companies were waiting for them in the marketplace. They considered green consumerism to be as much a marketing opportunity as a threat to business. Environmental product claims quadrupled between 1989 and 1990. Frequently, however, such claims were groundless. One 1991 study found that 58 percent of environmental ads included at least one deceptive or misleading claim.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Today, neither green consumers nor corporate greenwashers have ever been as powerful. Green brands are growing rapidly, yet they are increasingly under the control of conventional companies. Green claims have never been more meaningful or meaningless. In this issue, we examine current tensions within green consumerism.

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Printed on 100% post-consumer, chlorine-free recycled paper with soy-based inks.

Just in Time for April Showers



Earth Day Resources for Living Green now houses the program of Earth Day 2000. We are expanding to provide you with even more resources for sustainable living, and evolving to operate entirely from the internet. Visit www.earthdayresources.org to see the changes and get more from your organization for green living. Members receive Earth Tips four times per year. For membership information, call us at 1-877-EARTH46.

Correspondence

We are interested in your questions, comments and suggestions for future topics to be covered in Earth Tips. Please address all correspondence, as well as address changes to:

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It takes more than the pigment chlorophyll to make a green garden. In fact, no matter what color their plants are, many domestic gardens are anything but green. Pesticides and herbicides poison the ground and seep into the water supply, the commercial harvesting of wild plants and seeds strips bare the land, and peat mining for peat gardens destroys wetlands and releases excess nutrient loads into aquatic ecosystems.

That's just a partial list of the problems associated with resource- and chemical-intensive home gardening. Of course, it is possible to have a green thumb without thumbing your nose at the environment. Before we delve into the "how to," here are some reasons why to let your green garden grow:

- Grow food you can trust in a vegetable or herb garden free of chemicals
- Create a classroom just outside your house by teaching your children (or yourself) how food is grown and how nature functions in all its richness
- Take recycling to the next level by turning your waste into food
- Let your plants relax you—it's a wondrous talent they have

Can't wait to get started, right? But before you don a sun-hat and grab a spade, decide what you want from your garden: a simple, relaxing space; an array of colorful flowers; a food supply; a wildlife haven? If you're not sure, take a garden tour or visit local community gardens for inspiration, but keep in mind that every garden has unique characteristics in terms of light, soil and weather. Consult local gardeners or subscribe to free regional gardening tips from Organic Gardening (www.organicgardening.com) to find out which plants suit your conditions.

Two beginning green gardening tools are a water barrel and a compost bin. Collecting water and

soil is a good way to get a head start on the growing season. You'll need plenty of both once you're ready to plant.

Once you're set to go, here are a few basic tips:

- **Compost:** 40 percent of household waste can be turned into fertile soil. Lawn clippings, kitchen and garden waste, and even spare amounts of shredded newspaper and cardboard can be composted. Don't use meat and fish scraps that will stink and attract pests, or diseased plants that can infect your whole compost. If you can't meet your soil needs with compost alone, buy organic fertilizer.
- **Pests:** You can protect your garden from pests without using pesticides. Hang old CDs above your most precious plants to scare away birds and rabbits that are deterred by shiny objects. Manage smaller pests with natural insect-deterrent plants, like marigolds, and sprays.
- **Water:** Save as much rainwater and water from your home as possible in a water barrel or a built "wetland" in your garden. Use pipes or buckets to channel runoff into reserves. Water your garden with a watering can, not a hose, early in the morning or in the evening.
- **Wildlife:** To make your garden a habitat, or at least a popular hangout for local wildlife, provide fresh water with a pond or bird-bath, and food with seed, edible flowers and fruits. Make wildlife feel at home with native plants along with plenty of shade and branches.

Organic Gardening has a wide variety of resources for the green gardener, including community message boards, recipes and a schedule of gardening events by area. The Natural Gardening Company (www.naturalgardening.com) sells organic seeds and seedlings as well as supplies like natural pest controls, compost and garden tools.

Green Profiling: Market Research on Green Consumers

In recent years, marketing and consulting firms have created detailed profiles of green consumers. Though the profiles are primarily used by client companies, they are not irrelevant to consumers themselves. The profiles are, after all, about them.

LOHAS

LOHAS stands for “lifestyles of health and sustainability.” In 2000, Natural Business Communications (www.naturalbusiness.com) debuted the *LOHAS Journal*, a marketing publication about consumers “who value health, the environment, social justice, personal development and sustainable living.” 68 million LOHAS consumers—32 percent of American adults—spend \$227 billion annually on products that appeal to their values. 90 percent of LOHAS consumers, versus 62 percent of the general population, say that they will usually buy from a company with values like their own.

Green consumers are only part of the LOHAS picture. The LOHAS market is a loose amalgamation of everything from eco-tourism and recycled paper to acupuncture and yoga mats. Perhaps because of its inclusiveness, businesses have adopted LOHAS as the leading classification for values-based consumers. The large web-based lifestyle company Gaiam designed its marketing strategy around catering to LOHAS consumers, and companies as diverse as Tom’s of Maine and Ford Motor Company sent representatives to last year’s LOHAS Market Trends Conference.

CULTURAL CREATIVES

Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson’s *Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World* (www.culturalcreatives.org) describes a group that overlaps with LOHAS consumers. Like the LOHAS group, Creatives are defined according to broad concerns about health, the environment and social justice. In fact, marketers refer to Creatives and LOHAS consumers interchangeably.

Released in 2000, the book is a product of Ray’s 15 years of market research on Creatives. He found that women outnumber men three-to-two overall, and two-to-one within the core group of opinion leaders. Creatives are slightly wealthier and better educated, watch half as much television, read more lifestyle magazines, listen to more radio and read twice as many books as the general population. They are a critical and discerning audience that distrusts mass media and relies instead on word-of-mouth and targeted advertising gather informa-

tion about companies. Creatives, who Ray estimates may compose half of the U.S. in 10 years, see themselves as the pioneers of a new social order, not to the Left or the Right, but in front. They are looking for companies that share their vision.

To successfully market to Creatives, companies are advised to tell the stories behind their products, connecting them to values, personal experiences and life’s larger concerns, and to establish themselves as good citizens by supporting worthy causes.

GAUGING GREEN

Market research firm Roper ASW (www.roperasw.com) publishes the *Green Gauge Report*, which it describes as “the nation’s preeminent guide for surviving and thriving in the green marketplace.”

Roper divides the population into five segments. “True Blue Greens” and “Greenback Greens” are the two most likely to buy green. According to the 2002 report, True Blue Greens constitute 9 percent of the population. Wealthy and well-educated, they include environmental activists, leaders and others who live in close alignment with their values. Greenback Greens (6 percent) are also wealthy and well-educated. They are likely to be green consumers, but don’t always sacrifice comfort or convenience for the sake of the environment.

The *Green Gauge Report* helps companies tailor their marketing strategy by providing poll data about consumers’ willingness to pay more for green products, where they turn for information about the environment, their personal involvement with environmental issues and their most significant environmental concerns.

PASSIONATES, FANATICS AND LOVERS

J. Ottman Consulting (www.greenmarketing.com) divides green consumers into three categories: “Planet Passionates,” “Health Fanatics,” and “Animal Lovers.”

Planet Passionates are committed to maintaining a pristine environment. They pattern their consumption to reduce waste and avoid products from companies with bad environmental reputations.

Health Fanatics worry that environmental problems will impact their health. They are by toxic waste, sun exposure and pesticides,

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Insider's Perspective: Urvashi Rangan

Director, eco-labels.org

Urvashi Rangan, Ph.D., is the Director of eco-labels.org, a project of the Consumers Union. The mission of eco-labels.org is to help consumers make more informed choices in the marketplace, and participate more effectively as citizens in decisions that affect the environment. Dr. Rangan has received fellowships from the National Institutes of Health and the Environmental Leadership Program, and has produced two documentaries on sustainable development issues in India.



EARTHDAY RESOURCES: What's the story of eco-labels.org? Who's behind it and how did it come to be?

RANGAN: The Ford Foundation originally came to Consumers Union with idea of creating a guide to environmental labels. We thought that rating labels would be in line with what we do at Consumers Union rating products. We launched the site in April 2001.

ER: What criteria do you use? What makes a good or bad label?

Rangan: The first two criteria are whether the label standards are meaningful and whether the label itself is verified by an independent organization. Bad labels don't have either of those. We look at whether a label is consistent, and whether information about the standards and about the organization that is verifying the label is available to the public, so that the label is transparent. We also consider whether a label is free from conflict of interest, which is very important when a company claims to be independent from the organization that is verifying its product. And finally, we look at whether the label was made with broad public and industry input. The best labels meet all of our criteria, but there are lots of shades of gray.

ER: What are some examples of good and bad labels?

RANGAN: "USDA Organic" on food and "Fair Trade Certified" are good labels. They are both quite meaningful for consumers. Bad labels include general claims which are not verified, have little meaning and can just be voluntarily used by the producer. "Hypoallergenic" and "alcohol free" are two examples. "Free range" also has very little meaning behind it. The USDA says that a "free range" chicken is given the option to go outdoors for "an undetermined period each day." A farmer with 6000 chickens can open the barn door to the chicken house for five minutes every day and even if none of those chickens ever go outside they can still be "free range."

ER: Are government agencies like the FDA and USDA doing enough to regulate labeling, or should they do more?

RANGAN: Government regulation is one way to have a good labeling program, but private programs can provide an equal amount of assurance to consumers. What we wish the government would do is prohibit the use of terms that don't have any meaning, like "hypoallergenic," and do more to enforce the labeling standards that they already have.

ER: What guidelines should consumers follow when they're out shopping and don't have on-line access to eco-labels.org?

RANGAN: Consumers should rely on their common sense. Labels should read like they mean something. If they're vague then consumers should look for more clarification. They can look for contact information for the producer or the organization that verifies the label to ask what it means. Also, from our web-site, consumers can print out or download onto their Palm Pilots our Report Cards that show how labels in a particular product or label category stack up against each other.

ER: The USDA's organic standards are under constant pressure from the conventional food industry to broaden the definition of organic. What can consumers do to support meaningful organic standards?

RANGAN: The National Organic Program is for consumers, it's paid for by consumers. Consumers can send a letter to the head of the National Organic Program, they can follow along with the issues that are happening with it, and they have the opportunity to make public comment as the program puts out each subsequent ruling on standards.

ER: Your web-site currently rates over 100 labels. What new information can we expect to find on eco-labels.org in the future?

RANGAN: We're in the process of uploading another 75 labels on cosmetics and cleaning products. And definitely stay tuned for our "anti-bacterial" rating. It's coming out soon.

Just How Friendly is “Eco-Friendly”?

The Perplexing World of Green Labeling

Companies use literally hundreds of labels to distinguish their products as environmentally preferable options. Some, like “100% post-consumer recycled content,” have very specific meanings, while others, like, “environmentally friendly,” are vague. There are reliable labels, such as “organic” labels on food, and misleading labels, such as “Sustainable Forestry Initiative Participant.”

With so many labels meaning so many different things, who could possibly keep track of them all? It is a daunting and courageous task to sort through a maze of products and select the greenest among them—consumers do not need the added challenge of knowing exactly what each of the various labels mean. Still, it is nice to know which labels can be trusted and which should be treated with skepticism, so that the effort to buy green isn’t undermined by vague or deceptive claims. Getting the scoop on the most common labels and picking up a few guidelines to help sort through the rest will ensure that the time consumers take to buy green is well spent.

To begin with, many common labels are placed on products by the manufacturer without any assurance that the labels mean what they say. “Non-toxic,” for example, is a label that commonly appears on household cleaners and a range of other products. Products that feature the label may well be free of harmful chemicals, but not necessarily. There are no scientific or legal standards for what “toxic” means, so its meaning is at the discretion of the manufacturer. Consumers should look for specific reasons why the product is non-toxic before assuming that it is any less toxic than its competitors. By and large, labels that mix

and match vague terms like “natural,” “environment,” “eco” and “safe” are similarly ambiguous, and should be supplemented with additional information if consumers are to assume that they mean anything at all.

Labels that are only featured products when they have been certified or verified by a government agency or private organization are, in general, more meaningful unrestricted claims. These labels lend authenticity to a product’s environmental claims. “The Food Alliance Approved” (www.thefoodalliance.org) appears on fruits, vegetables and nuts that meet the organization’s high standards for environmentally and socially responsible agriculture. The “Green Seal” (www.greenseal.org) check-mark is placed on an array of products, including windows, paints and household cleaners, once they have passed Green Seal’s thorough testing process that measures environmental impact all the way from production to disposal. In 2002, the United States Department of Agriculture set federal standards for organic certification (www.ams.usda.gov/nop/Consumers/brochure.html), assuring consumers that all foods labeled “organic” meet the same standards nationwide.

In certain cases, however, verification and certification do not guarantee that a product is truly green. The Sustainable Forestry Initiative’s “SFI Participant” label (www.aboutsfi.org) on wood and paper products is based on modest standards and is flawed by conflict-of-interest. The Sustainable Forestry Initiative is a program of the American Forestry and Paper Association, an industry group whose membership includes notoriously destructive companies like Sierra Pacific and International Paper. Compared to

“SFI Participant,” the “FSC” logo of the Forest Stewardship Council (www.fsc.org), an independent accreditor with several environmentalists on its board, is a superior sign of environmental integrity.

Some familiar labels have varying meanings. For instance, the meaning of “dolphin safe” tuna depends on where and how the tuna was caught. Tuna caught with purse seiners in the Eastern Tropical Pacific Ocean must receive on-board, independent certification to be labeled “dolphin safe”, while tuna caught outside that region or by other fishing methods does not. The Earth Island Institute’s International Marine Mammal Project (www.eii.org/immp) monitors which brands are genuinely “dolphin safe” and which are suspect. The green oak-leaf logo of The Nature Conservancy (www.nature.org) shows up on, among other products, Eastern Shore Select potato chips and Nature Valley granola bars. The chips are from potatoes that were grown in accordance with largely flexible and optional guidelines, while the granola bars are not subject to any environmental standards. Nature Valley donated \$125,000 to TNC to use the oak-leaf on its products.

Again, there are more labels out there than most of us have the time, energy or memory to keep track of, especially when we’re trying to race through a shopping list. Fortunately, someone has done most of the leg-work for us. The Consumers Union, publisher of *Consumer Reports*, has set up an easy-to-use website (www.eco-labels.org), with detailed information on over 100 labels.

A Different Kind of Green Consumption: The Consolidation of the Organics Market

The organic foods and beverages market is growing at a rate of 20-25 percent a year. Americans spent \$11 billion on organic foods and beverages in 2002, and sales were projected to reach \$13.4 billion in 2003. But even as organics expand, so too are they shrinking. Consolidation is sweeping through the market.

- In January, Dean Foods, the nation's largest conventional milk processor, purchased Horizon Organic, which controls close to 70 percent of the organic milk market. Dean also owns White Wave, the maker of Silk, the leading soymilk brand in the U.S.
- The world's top soft-drink manufacturer has gotten in on the organic juice business. In 2001, Coca-Cola purchased organic juice brand Odwalla, which had scooped up competitor Fresh Samantha the year before. Citing overlapping orange juice options, Odwalla discontinued Fresh Samantha last summer.
- Earthbound Farm, North America's largest organic produce brand, developed from a nameless roadside raspberry stand into the umbrella brand of 200 growers spread across 15,000 acres from Washington to Mexico. Earthbound is one of five farms that control half of California's organic produce market.
- Whatever happened to Bread & Circus, Mrs. Gooch's and Fresh Fields? Whole Foods Market, that's what. The nation's largest organics retailer has amassed many of its 145 stores by buying out the competition.

The ownership of food industry giants has helped organic brands become widely available in supermarkets, the site of most of the recent growth in the organics market has taken place. Between 1998 and 2001, the organics retail market share of health- and natural foods stores dropped from 62 to 49 percent, while supermarkets increased their share from 31 to 45 percent. It can be argued that without supermarkets, organics will never break into the mainstream, and will never fulfill their potential to shift the conventional food system towards sustainability.

At the same time, many organic consumers don't want to see organics go "mainstream," at least not in the sense that organics will come to resemble modern industrial agriculture. Through consolidation, corporations with deep pockets will be able to fuel the expansion of organics with massive financial investment and vast systems of production and

distribution. This developing model of organic agriculture associated with economic efficiency may clash with organics' traditional associations with good taste, good health, environmental integrity and community values, all of which may suffer as the organics market continues its current patterns of growth on large farms and in supermarkets.

Earthbound, whose produce is available in 70 percent of supermarkets nationwide, controls two-thirds of the organic lettuce market. Earthbound collects produce from throughout the West Coast at its central facilities in California and Arizona, then distributes its products to all fifty states. Early harvests to accommodate travel time, as well as the travel process, can take a toll on flavor and nutrition.

Plastic wrap can seal in "freshness," though only at the expense of adding extra waste. In order to fit the prototype of supermarket products, organics need fancy packaging, such as colorful boxes that attract children, and individually wrapped servings. Post-consumer waste is only part of the environmental predicament. No matter how benign organic production may be, it is less than environmentally ideal to ship food across the country, or even internationally, in the case of New Zealand kiwis and other exotic foods.

As an increasing share of organics arrives in supermarkets from far-away places, the economic and social relationship between consumers and local farmers is at risk. Farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture programs and neighborhood co-ops frequently offer local organics at a fraction of the price and environmental impact of supermarket options, but many consumers new to organics are unfamiliar with or unwilling to explore such alternative venues.

Consolidation may endanger the very definition of organic. Ever since the United States Department of Agriculture first proposed organic standards in 1997, the conventional food industry has lobbied to make the standards as broad as possible. The USDA originally recommended bringing genetically modified foods, irradiation, toxic sludge fertilizer and pesticides within the fold of organics. Because of the backlash of organic consumers and producers, the USDA did not have its way, and the standards created in 2002 are more stringent than the original proposal. Yet they are still under threat. A congressional bill last year could have allowed farmers to give their livestock conventional feed and still label their meat organic, but organic consumer and industry advocates pressured President Bush to close the loophole.

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Green Profiling

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and try to stay in good health through a healthy diet and lifestyle.

Animal Lovers defend animal rights through vegetarianism, by purchasing products labeled “cruelty free” and boycotting products like fur and tuna.

Ottman recommends that companies green their image by developing relationships with NGOs, community members, educators and regulators.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE, AND THE COMPANIES

Profiles of green consumers, particularly the LOHAS consumers and Cultural Creatives, offer encouraging evidence that green consumers are empowered to play a significant role in the marketplace, now and in the future. As the numbers suggest, they are increasing in size and influence.

They also show that companies, too, are empowered with insight into the minds and lives of green consumers. This insight is essential for genuine green companies to succeed in a competitive marketplace. For example, “storytelling” allows companies to

communicate with like-minded consumers in the “About Us” section or on the packaging of their products. Through market research, green companies know where to tell their stories and what type of stories will resonate with their customers.

Often times, the stories uncover real common ground in values and philosophy, upon which customers and companies can together build a greener economy. At the web-site of Real Goods (www.realgoods.com), for instance, consumers can be assured that the company isn't trying to make a fast buck off of their green values. Real Goods has been promoting renewable energy for over 25 years and, writes company president and founder John Schaeffer, “We will always strive to maintain our innovation, our friendliness, our integrity, and most of all our authenticity which values walking our talk and shunning the hyperbole and disingenuity that has become commonplace in American business.” Real Goods provides evidence for its claims with data from an “Eco-Audit”, including the total amount of virgin and recycled paper it uses annually for its catalog, newsletter and other publications.

Yet consumers should be advised that companies can become trained in the style of storytelling and other forms of green marketing without changing the substance of their environmental practices. J. Ottman Consulting's clients, for example, include established greenwashers Kraft Foods, DuPont and General Electric.

Regardless of who is behind them, the stories reveal a positive trend towards transparency and communication between consumers and companies. Their connections do not have to be merely financial, but can be based on joint activism and mutual support. This current trend grew out of consumers' savvy in sorting out truly green companies from greenwashers. Faced with increasing skepticism about their environmental claims, companies responded by opening up, or at least appearing to do so. To maintain the trend, consumers should continue to reward companies that are sincere and specific about their environmental commitment, which will force those who aren't to follow suit.

Organics Consolidation

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Who will defend organic standards if the organic lobby is controlled by conventional food producers? Time will tell whether consolidation allows organics to reform the conventional food system or the conventional food system has its way with organics.

While corporate mergers acquisitions are the driving force behind consolidation, consumers can also decide organics' fate. Measures that stem the tide of consolidation include buying locally at farmers' markets, CSAs and neighborhood co-ops, and submit-

ting public comments to the USDA in favor of keeping organic standards strong. Of course, there is no reason to feel guilty about buying Earthbound, Odwalla or Silk at the supermarket. Purchasing organic brands sustains the greening of the agricultural production no matter whether the brands are independent or controlled by primarily conventional food companies, or whether they are local or come from far away. Production practices are the leading cause of environmental impact from food.

For news about the organics market, action alerts and a directory of local farmers' markets and CSAs, check the web-site of the Organic Consumers Association (www.organicconsumers.org). Eco-labels.org details the assault on organic standards and tips on how to take action to prevent them from becoming watered down (www.eco-labels.org/feature.cfm?FeatureID=5).

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What's Happening

Green Building

Southern California, notoriously plagued by smog and sprawl, is now at the center of the green building movement. On January 14th, the National Audubon Society announced that its Audubon Center at Debs Park had been certified as the America's greenest building. The U.S. Green Building Council awarded the Audubon Center a Platinum Rating, the highest honor possible, based on the Council's new LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) 2.1 rating system.

Every moment is a moment in the sun at the Audubon Center—it is powered entirely by an on-site solar system—but its reign as the nation's greenest building was short-lived. Just a week after going Platinum, the Audubon Center was outshined by the Natural Resources Defense Council's regional headquarters in Santa Monica. The Robert Redford Building, which recycles sink water into toilet water, also received a Platinum Rating, yet surpassed the Audubon Center by a slim margin on the 69 point LEED scale.

Though well-funded non-profits are behind the latest innovations in green building, homeowners can also be vanguards of sustainable design. *Good Green Homes* by Jennifer Roberts (Gibbs Smith, 2003) offers a range of practical tips, resources and inspiring pictures for greening your home.

Earthday Resources

We're happening! On April 1st, coinciding with the release of our annual *Don't Be Fooled* report, Earthday Resources for Living Green expects to launch a revamped web-site with all-new features. Check us out at www.earthdayresources.org.