



Ethical Shopping – Buying For a Better World.

With each and every purchasing decision, from a tube of toothpaste to a Rolls Royce, we are making choices that affect the environmental and social quality of the world we live in.

Take a bite of a hamburger and you are taking a bite out of the world's rain forests, contributing to global warming, waste build-up and the supporting of cruelty in intensive animal husbandry. Two-fifths of the deforestation in Brazil was caused by the clearance of forests for cattle ranching which supplies much of the beef destined for fast food outlets. Buy fish-farmed fish and you are polluting your body and the seas with the antibiotics fed to these fish to prevent disease from being cooped up in crowded pens. Spray furniture with polish from certain aerosols, and not only are you paving the way for respiratory ailments but helping to destroy the earth's atmosphere, increasing everyone's chances of contracting skin cancer. Fancy a coral or shark's tooth gold pendant? That shark might be on the list of endangered species and necessary to preserving the delicate balance of the food chain. You may also be lending a hand in wiping out a whole ecosystem dependent on that coral reef. Apart from the appalling safety records of gold mining in South Africa, the production of gold in turn carries an invisible environmental price tag. The sulphides burnt off in gold processing, produce sulphur dioxide causing acid rain, killing trees and aquatic life. Additionally, child labour may have been employed in fashioning that third-world trinket.

There is often an inconspicuous health hazard, environmental and social cost for each of the items in your shopping basket. Ethical shopping is about shopping with a conscience and being aware of the repercussions of your purchases. In a capitalist economy, the consumer is king. It is the consumer's ethical responsibility to become informed, to surf the net and find out more about the companies and distributors behind the products and what goes into them. Finally it is the consumer's prerogative to switch brands or even more worryingly for manufactures and retailers, to boycott a particular product altogether.

Exercise your Purchasing power. Become an active green consumer and avoid products which are likely to cause significant damage to the environment during manufacture, use or disposal; consume a disproportionate amount of energy; use materials derived from threatened species or environments; cause unnecessary waste because of over-packaging or an unduly short useful life; involve cruelty to animals; exploit employees and third world countries, and endanger public health.

Think Global but eat local. Support your community's farmers and your corner grocer store providing fresh local produce which hasn't been transported thousands of kilometres to get to your table, thereby losing most of its nutritional value. Is that tuna dolphin friendly? Has it been fish farmed? Become vegetarian or ensure that the meat you do buy comes from animals that have been well cared for, have been killed humanely and have not been fed or injected with antibiotics and growth hormones. Buy GMO free foodstuffs, organic fruit, vegetables and wine. Find out where you can buy free-range eggs to help reduce the suffering of hens in batteries. Switch to organic fertilizers, pesticides and fungicides in the garden. Plant endemic and indigenous plants, shrubs and trees, which are hardy and drought resistant, thereby ensuring they do not become extinct. The cultivation of imported hybrid crops and animal breeds, due to

their poor acclimatisation, consumes more chemical fertilizers, antibiotics, hormones, water and energy, rapidly destroying soil fertility. Simultaneously these hybrids, by replacing local varieties are destroying Mediterranean agro-biodiversity and endangering the agricultural viability of the entire region. Make sure the coffee you're drinking is fair-trade. Besides providing a fair price for economically disadvantaged producers, fair-trade improves the working environment for workers.

Do not contribute towards tropical deforestation by buying furniture made from tropical hardwoods such as mahogany or teak. Buy recycled stationery and toilet paper where possible. Substitute harsh chlorine and optical (whitening) bleaches, petroleum and phosphate based detergents with biodegradable, eco-friendly cleaning products which don't pollute our lakes and seas. Buy low energy consumption washing machines, freezers and dishwashers. Put the kettle back on the gas stove and stock up on energy efficient lightbulbs.

Car pool, use public transport, walk, or bike it to reduce hydrocarbon, nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide and lead pollution. Decrease the number of cars on the road and you shrink the amount of chemical smog in the air, acid rain, breathing distress, global warming and damage to the brain and nervous system caused by lead. Buy catalytic converters for your car engine to clean up car exhaust emissions. Invest in fuel efficient cars. If you can't afford an electric car, use unleaded petrol or even better – biodiesel. Fit radial tyres on your car which cut tyre drag, providing a 6-8 per cent fuel saving.

Don't buy a dog or cat unless you have the time for it, and are prepared to look after it. Do not support the trade in exotic pets. Most die being shipped and in addition to being a threat towards, might not adapt to, the local eco-system. Ban items from your household derived from protected species such as sea turtles which are turned into shells, soup, oil, combs or jewellery. Boycott products imported from countries that are still actively whaling. You should be able to eat what you put on your face. Scrutinise labels. Ensure that the perfumes, cosmetic, hair and body products you use, do not contain harmful allergenic and carcinogenic chemicals and haven't been tested on animals. Look out for brands and concerns that don't use a lot of packaging, that support recycling or have a bottle re-fill service. Blitz your wardrobe. Buy natural fibres such as cotton and hemp which detoxifies the land it is grown on.

For those armchair shoppers, mail order catalogues by Green peace, WWF and Friends of the Earth, to name a few, offer plenty of alternative green gift ideas, products and services. Ditch the remote control and log on.