



WHY FOOD IS IMPORTANT TO ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

We eat every day but often don't realise that the food that is so readily available in supermarkets is often there at a cost to the environment. Crop and grazing land for fruit, vegetables and meat and the resources required for fishing make up almost 35 per cent of Australia's ecological footprint. By choosing food that has less packaging, has not travelled vast distances and has been produced in a sustainable way, we can help reduce our footprint.

FIRST STEP – WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

Don't waste food. Buy only what you will eat. The production of food uses water and energy and the food we don't eat creates waste. In Australia \$5.3 billion worth of food was thrown away in 2004¹.

Buy food in season. If the fruit and vegetables you want are not available, choose those that are in season. If you eat fruit and vegetables out of season, remember that they must have travelled vast distances from a place where they are in season. Buying locally grown, seasonal food means a reduction in food miles and less packaging required to preserve fresh produce.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW – BIG OPPORTUNITIES

Buy less processed food. Generally, processed food requires more energy and water to produce. Buy fresh fruit and vegetables rather than canned or frozen.

Eat less meat. Meat and dairy products are the most resource-intensive foods. A single serve of meat is

estimated to create five kilograms of greenhouse gases². It takes 1350 litres of water to produce a kilogram of wheat, but it takes 16,000 litres of water to produce one kilogram of beef³.

FURTHER TIPS ON REDUCING YOUR FOOD FOOTPRINT – LONGER TERM

Buy food that is locally produced. Although Australia only imports about 10 per cent of its fresh fruit and vegetables year round, the vastness of the country means that, in many cases, food travels vast distances, requiring refrigeration and storage.

Growing your own fruit and vegetables reduces the energy and waste which normally goes into getting food from the field to your plate, such as transport, refrigeration and packaging. You can also monitor the amount and type of fertiliser and nutrients used to grow your food.

Look for products that have less packaging. The more processed a food is, the more packaging it seems to use – therefore it is far more damaging to the environment. Great amounts of resources are required to produce the packaging; energy is used to package the product and the disposal of the waste when the packaging is thrown away has negative impacts on the environment.

Visit your local farmers market. A farmers market is one in which local farmers or producers sell their own produce. All products sold should have been grown, reared, caught, brewed, pickled, baked, smoked or processed by the stallholder. To find your local farmers' market, see www.farmersmarkets.org.au/finder/vic.jsp

¹ www.acfonline.org.au/uploads/res/res_greenhome.pdf

² South Australian Government.

³ Angela Crocombe, *A Lighter Footprint, a practical guide to minimizing your impact on the planet*

Avoid processed food. Processed foods often have a high content of salts, saturated fats and sugars. Eating fresh, unprocessed food helps maintain a healthy diet. The manufacture of processed foods uses large amounts of energy, water and materials in production, chilling, packaging and transport as well as producing large amounts of waste.

Drink tap water instead of bottled water. Bottled water costs around 500 times more than tap water, and the industry emits thousands of tonnes of CO2 every year. In Australia we have a reliable and safe supply of mains drinking water and drinking bottled water offers no proven health benefits. Because no materials are used in its individual packaging and it is generally sourced locally – rather than in Fiji or the European Alps – drinking tap water is a greener, cheaper option.

Take a homemade lunch to work. Taking your own packed lunch means you can reuse your packaging daily and saves you money.

Compost your kitchen waste and garden cuttings. Did you know, kitchen scraps such as vegetable peelings, apple cores, eggshells and most garden waste biodegrades in a bin into a rich fertiliser which can be used in gardens?

Buy fairly traded food and drink. When you buy food from overseas, try to buy fairly traded products, such as those certified by Fairtrade. These products encourage investment in people – promoting social justice, local economic development and fair prices.

Buy sustainable fish. Over three-quarters of the world's fishing grounds have been so overfished they are now below sustainable levels. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC – www.msc.org) is an independent, global non-profit organisation that has developed an environmental standard for sustainable and well-managed fisheries.

You can use your consumer power to protect endangered species. Say 'No' to Orange Roughy, which is close to endangered, but 'Yes' to fish like flathead. The Australian Seafood Guide is available from the Australian Marine Conservation Society at www.amcs.org.au or by calling them toll-free on 1800 066 299.

Buy organic food. Organic and other forms of low-input farming that use minimal or no pesticides and fertilisers – which are energy-intensive in their manufacture – consume up to 40 per cent less energy, and support higher levels of wildlife on farms. Organic and other, holistic farming approaches tend to prioritise animal welfare more than conventional methods. Buying more organic food can reduce your food footprint by around 15 per cent.

- **Get involved in community composting projects.**
- **Lobby schools to provide local, organic and/or fairly traded food.**
- **Make local, organic and/or fairly traded food available at work for your employees.**
- **Reuse glass jars as storage containers, such as for homemade jams or pickles.**