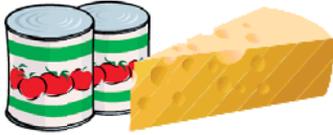




# The ULS Report™

Helping people Use Less Stuff by conserving resources and reducing waste.



## Food for Thought



When it comes to ensuring that sustainable development lives up to its potential for creating environmental, economic and social gains, the global reduction of food and food-related waste represents an enormous opportunity. Key reasons include:

1. Animal agriculture alone contributes about one-fifth of global greenhouse gas generation, and approximately 7% of U.S. greenhouse gas generation. (Sources: UN, EPA and NRDC)
2. In 2004, a University of Arizona study estimated that 14 percent of food bought by U.S. households is wasted, and that overall 40 to 50% of food is wasted.
3. It is estimated by the USDA that at least 27% of all food is wasted. USDA figures for 1995 put total domestic food waste at 96 billion pounds, or 48 million tons. The vast majority of this waste (95%) was related to foodservice and consumer loss. According to the paper *Estimating and Addressing America's Food Losses*:

"Common sources of foodservice food losses include over-preparation of menu items, expanded menu choices (which can make management of food inventories more difficult), and unexpected fluctuations in food sales due to sudden changes in the weather or other factors beyond the control of foodservice operators. In addition, consumer plate loss may be on the rise at restaurants and other eating-places due to a growing trend toward the "upsizing" of food portions. Unless consumers take home uneaten portions for later consumption, restaurants must discard such plate leftovers for health considerations, meaning that increasing amounts of food may be going to waste.

Household food losses occur because of over-preparation, preparation discard, plate waste, cooking losses, spoiled leftovers, and breakage, spillage, and package failure, either in the home or en route from the point of purchase."

4. Food scraps account for 30 million tons, or about 12%, of annual municipal solid waste. (This does not

include food that is ground up in garbage disposals or dishwashers.) *This is enough food to feed the entire population of Canada!* (Sources: US EPA, USDA, Statistics Canada)

5. Food waste is not easily reused or recycled, and hard to compost. Further, the biodegradation that does occur in landfills produces methane; a greenhouse gas that the latest IPCC reports indicate is at least 25 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub>.
6. As reported recently by both the World Bank and United Nations, the rising cost of food is creating hunger, malnutrition, and civil discontent on a global basis. The use of arable land and crops such as corn to produce biofuels and bioplastics, rather than food or animal feed, is ironically contributing to this problem.
7. Loss of carbon from soils due to plowing has contributed about 30% of the excess CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere over the last 200 years, and proper management of the soils could bring most of that carbon back.
8. Up to 50% of the waste created at retail distribution centers is food-related, primarily consisting of fresh meats, fruits and vegetables that are spoiled or un-sellable for related reasons.

Reducing demand for food by reducing waste can help alleviate all of these issues. Wasting food amplifies the environmental and economic impacts of producing food over its life cycle, while creating the additional impacts associated with disposing of the waste.

*Continued on next page...*

### In this issue...

<i>Food for Thought</i>	1-2
<i>Lighten Up</i>	2
<i>Mother Nature &amp; Human Nature</i>	3
<i>What Does "Green" Really Mean?</i>	4

Frankly, it's fairly easy to reduce food waste:

- Start by developing weekly meal plans. Create the shopping list you need to prepare these meals, and stick to it when you get to the store.
- Think of leftovers as ingredients for future meals and alter your meal plans accordingly. Today's grilled chicken is tomorrow's chili, chicken salad, etc.
- If you want your kids to eat new things, *try before you buy*. Have them taste a particular food when you go out to eat, or when visiting family and friends. That way, you'll know ahead of time if that cauliflower will go "down the hatch" rather than down the disposal.
- Food that stays on the platter can live to see another day, while food that stays on the plate becomes garbage. Serve and take smaller portions and have your family ask for seconds if still hungry. This is especially important for teenagers, whose mouths tend to be much larger than their stomachs.
- Speaking of teenagers, help them avoid pre-meal snacking. Doing so will make sure that they eat what's on their plates, rather than pushing them back at you while muttering "I'm not hungry."
- If you buy perishable items such as meat or cheese in bulk, break down into portions and freeze what you don't plan on using immediately. Label items with product descriptions and today's date, and use in the order of being stored.
- Bringing home leftovers? Label with today's date and description. Eat quickly, starting with the oldest items.
- Got a fast food fix? Resist the temptation to supersize if possible. You'll reduce food waste, your spending, and probably your wasteline.
- Fresh is great, if you're going to eat it all. Otherwise, portion-controlled packages for items like salads, carrots, pineapple, and peas may be a better bet economically and environmentally.
- Avoid "Manager's Specials" on perishable foods, unless you plan on using them immediately. Meats, fruits and vegetables are deep-discounted to move them out of the store before they expire. Unless you use it now, today's bargain will be tomorrow's trash.



## LIGHTEN UP

As a regular (and hopefully avid) reader, you know that we are committed to providing useful, accurate information based upon sound scientific research. We have just published three studies on common containers used to package coffee, tuna, and milk.

The studies were performed by a leading life cycle research firm and peer reviewed by a panel of respected outside experts. Each study calculated energy use, solid waste, and greenhouse gas generation, and gave credit for recycling as appropriate -- 62% for steel cans and 15% for HDPE plastic cannisters.

The results are dramatic both in terms of the differences between packages, and the differences between expectations and reality. You can read brief summaries below and the complete documentation at [www.use-less-stuff.com](http://www.use-less-stuff.com).

### Coffee

We looked at 8 different coffee containers including fiberboard and steel cannisters, steel cans, HDPE plastic cannisters, plastic and foil laminated bags, and "brick packs" - those vacuum-packed plastic and foil containers that look and feel exactly like their description. The results? *The two flexible packages – the laminated bag and brick pack – performed significantly better than their rigid counterparts, even though neither is recycled.* The reason is that the two are so much lighter than the others that they use far fewer resources and create far less waste.

### Tuna

We looked at 6 different tuna containers including steel cans, plastic cups, and the newer plastic and foil pouches. The results? *The flexible pouches performed significantly better than their rigid counterparts, even though they are not recycled.* Once again, the reason is that the flexible pouches are so much lighter than the rigid containers that they use far fewer resources and create far less waste.

### Milk

We examined paperboard cartons, refillable glass bottles, and two types of plastic containers - standard high density polyethylene (HDPE) and PLA, a new plastic that is made from corn. The results? *Refillable glass bottles lead the pack in terms of reduced energy consumption, while HDPE containers fared best for pounds of solid waste and greenhouse gas generation.*

**What it all means** – Forget paper vs. plastic or metal vs. glass: packages should be reduced, reused, and recycled - in that order. Surprise!



# Helping Mother Nature Starts By Understanding Human Nature

By Robert Lilienfeld, Editor

As I write this, the global economy is in a deep recession. The global environment is also considered to be in a steep decline. Ironically, the cause of both problems is the same: *human overconsumption*.

Economically speaking, our financial overindulgence has led to a credit hangover that came about because we bought more stuff than we were able to pay for. The result is a glut of cars, homes and other big ticket items, without the ability to comfortably absorb the related expenses.

Environmentally speaking, the production, transport and use of all the stuff we bought required an ever-increasing demand for natural resources. The strain on energy, land and water assets paved the way for global climate change, habitat destruction, and loss of biodiversity.

Unfortunately, it is against our nature to look within for the roles we might have played in either situation. We prefer to find an external icon upon which to place the blame and against which to demand that governments take action.

In the case of the environment, today's villain of choice is the lowly bag, box, can or bottle. We love to hate packages, because they are inanimate and cannot defend themselves. Blaming packages also means that we don't have to blame ourselves for demanding that the products inside them be processed, produced, purveyed, and purchased.

In the case of the economy, the *demon du jour* is the credit card. We blame the banks and other financial institutions for issuing them with reckless regard for the consequences of overuse (which in many cases they did and still do). But as consumers, we are the ones responsible for actually using, and oftentimes abusing, them.

So, how do we go about creating both a sustainable economy and a sustainable ecology if we have such a need to consume? The answer may not lie in how or why we consume, but rather in *what* we consume. Consider this:

Consumption can be defined as exchanging one type of assets, usually time or money, for other assets, generally material goods or services. We make the exchange because we think there is more value in what we are

purchasing than in the assets we are trading to make that purchase.

Smart retailers, economists, and geneticists will tell you that one of the biggest values we seek when we go shopping is *novelty* (yes, there is apparently a novelty gene that drives a physical need for things new and unique). If we are truly seeking something different, there are many ways to fill this need without forcing us to live beyond either our economic or environmental means.

A great way to start is by making a conscious decision to switch from consuming *stuff* to instead consuming *experiences*. (This is what our parents and grandparents did before there were malls, big box stores and the internet.)

You can create much novelty and value if instead of consuming products, you consume:

1. *Travel* – Few things offer the excitement, value, and long term emotional or intellectual impact of going someplace new and experiencing something different. Take public transportation when possible and use your camera to create memories, rather than your wallet to purchase them in souvenir shops.
2. *Social Occasions* – Invite family, friends and potential friends over for an evening in, rather than spending money for an evening out. Watch a movie together. Talk. Eat. Reminisce. Complain. Argue. Laugh. Cry. The novelty factor and emotional value are high, the economic and environmental costs are low.
3. *Entertainment* – Go to a ball game, a museum, a concert, the theatre, a comedy club. Read a book. Play games or cards with family and friends. The intellectual and spiritual value received is great, while the physical costs to wallet and Earth are small.

As you grow older, you will find that the two most valuable resources you possess are the memories you already have and the time available to create new ones. If you use your assets to build memories rather than to help build more homes, cars and factories, your personal economic situation and the global environmental situation will improve dramatically.



## What Does “Green” Really Mean?

You pick up a product in the grocery store. The package shouts at you “recyclable” or “more sustainable than ever before.” What does that really mean?

According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), it probably doesn’t mean much, if anything. The FTC may even consider broad statements such as these to be misleading and thus subject to fines and legal action.

According to their Guidelines:

- *Claims are to be as specific as possible.* Substantiation must be provided regarding what is being claimed, by how much, and compared to what.
- To further prevent deception, any qualifications or disclosures relating to claims should *be clear, prominent and easily understood.*
- *Environmental claims, attributes and benefits should not be explicitly or implicitly overstated.* This requires that both the absolute and relative merits of a claim be considered.
- *Comparative claims must be stated in a way that makes the basis for comparison as clear as possible.* The comparison should also be substantiated.

Here is what the FTC says about environmental claims that are commonly made:

- Unless **substantiation** can be provided, broad environmental claims must either be avoided or qualified.
- A product or package should not be marketed as **recyclable** unless it can be collected, separated or otherwise recovered from the solid waste stream for reuse, or in the manufacture or assembly of another package or product, through an established recycling program.
- A **recycled content** claim may be made only for materials that have been recovered or otherwise diverted from the solid waste stream, either during the manufacturing process (pre-consumer), or after consumer use (post-consumer).

- Claims of **degradability** should be qualified “by competent and reliable scientific evidence” to avoid consumer deception about (1) the product or package’s ability to completely break down into elements found in nature, (2) in the environment where it is customarily disposed, and (3) the rate and extent of degradation.
- A **compostability** claim must be substantiated by “competent and reliable scientific evidence” that all the materials in the product or package will (1) break down into, or otherwise become part of, usable compost (e.g., soil-conditioners, mulch, (2) in a safe and timely manner, (3) in an appropriate composting program or facility, or in a home compost pile or device.
- **Source reduction** claims should be qualified to the extent necessary to avoid consumer deception about both the amount of reduction and the basis for any comparison that is asserted.

For a more comprehensive explanation of FTC Guidelines relating to environmental claims, head to the Resources page on [www.use-less-stuff.com](http://www.use-less-stuff.com).



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