

Consuming Appetites

*Global Patterns in Consumption of the Earth's Bounty: Food, Energy and Materials
New Community Project*

Just the Basics

- The earth's population is 7 billion people, and is predicted to peak at 9 billion by mid-century. World per capita annual income: \$7,000. US: about \$46,000. Afghanistan: \$356. 1.2 billion poorest people in world: under \$1 per day.
- The richest 20% of the world earns 86% of world's income, consume 80% of the world's resources, create 83% of the world's waste. The poorest 50% of the world's population have 1% of the world's household wealth. Richest 1% of US households=42% of US wealth.
- Per capita US consumption (all fuels, minerals, wood products, metals, agricultural raw materials, etc.) per day: around 400 lbs. per person. Per year: 27 tractor trailer loads (95% of the materials needed to create a product become waste in the production process).
- Per person municipal waste in US per year: 1600 lbs.; with 4% of world's population, we create 40 percent of the world's household waste. US consumers discard over 50 billion aluminum cans annually—enough to rebuild the US airline fleet four and a half times.
- US'ers spend \$16 billion on bottled water per year (more than all US government aid to the world's poor), and toss 60 million bottles daily. Petroleum used to produce, ship and dispose of US water bottles: 50 million barrels/year. Percent of world without clean water: 20.
- Dividing the earth's productive land by the world's population, there are approximately 4.5 acres of land available to meet each person's consumption needs. Global per capita consumption: 5.1 acres per person. In the US, per capita consumption demands 23.7 acres of productive space—far beyond one person's fair share. In other words, if everyone on the planet consumed like we do, we'd need four more planets like this one.

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- CO₂ emissions by US citizens: 19 tons of CO₂ per person per year. Per person emissions in poor areas of world: 1/10 ton per year. Energy usage for all purposes (in coal equivalent): 10 tons per person per year in US; 150 pounds per person per year in Bangladesh. The average US household uses 12,000 kilowatts of electricity annually (two times the per capita energy use in Europe), 71% from fossil fuels, creating around 10 tons of CO₂ in the process.
- Automobile miles driven per household: 22,000 per year—up 75% since 1979; Cameroon (or other poor country): 75. Minutes spent in car each day by US preschooler: 65.
- The US consumes 25% of all fossil fuels burned in the world. Two billion people around the world do not have access to electricity.

Where have all the flowers gone. . .

- The US has lost 50 % of wetlands since the colonial era, 90% of prairie, 95% of virgin forests. Globally, 25% of all large mammals are endangered, 14% of birds, 12% of plants; we have lost 33% of all topsoil through erosion. Since 1970, there are 40% fewer living creatures on earth; 25% of creatures could go extinct due to climate change by 2100.

- One acre of rainforest can sequester 120-150 tons of CO₂. Some 50 million acres of forests are cut around the world each year. Culprits: Ranching, agriculture, fire wood for cooking. Paper production is responsible for 20% of the world's deforestation. US cities have lost 20% of their trees in the past 10 years to urbanization.
- The richest 20% of the world's people consume 84% of the world's paper. Annual US per person paper consumption: 760 pounds (writing, packaging, etc), requiring 1 billion trees (3.5 pounds wood=1 pound paper); world average: 125 pounds. The world's poorest countries consume less than a pound per person per year. UN recommended per person paper consumption for literacy and communication: 75 pounds.
- Per capita water use in US: 1300 gallons per day (100 gal. for household use, remainder in agriculture and industry). Most irrigated crop in the US? Lawn grass—25 million irrigated acres. Water needed to produce a fast food meal: 1400 gallons (mostly the beef). Rate of depletion of Ogallala Aquifer underlying Great Plains: 12 billion cubic meters per year. Globally, 1.2 billion people don't have access to clean water (5 gallons per person per day within 1 kilometer); 3000 people—mostly children—die daily from impure water.

Food for Thought

- US per person grain consumption is about 2000 pounds per year, or about 6 pounds per day (total of all grain produced for all purposes, including livestock feed). In China, India and other poorer countries, the daily ration is one pound or less per day. It takes several pounds of grain to produce one pound of meat (as much as 15 for beef, four or so for pork, about two for poultry), making meat an unaffordable luxury for many. A cow also belches as much as 640 quarts of methane a day—a potent global warming gas (according to the FAO, beef production is the leading source globally of greenhouse gases). Meat consumption per person per year: US—250 pounds; India—5 pounds. If every US citizen cut consumption of animal products in half by 2025, it would free up water equal to the flow of 14 Colorado Rivers.
- A child in the poorest countries is 10-15 times more likely to die before the age of 5 than a child in the US. Fifty percent of children in poorer countries experience "wasting" or "stunting"—not developing to their full physical or mental capacity. Two billion people—mostly women and children—are iron deficient (mental slowness in children and increased maternal mortality in women).
- Globally, a billion people are malnourished. An average of 17,000 children die from hunger-related causes daily—about one child every six seconds. 65% of US adults are overweight.

Sources: World Watch Institute, United Nations Development Program, Bread for the World, Our Ecological Footprint, State of the World's Children (Unicef), US Census Bureau.

"No one can serve two masters; you cannot serve both God and material things." -Jesus

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