

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 just over 6 billion people. World per capita annual income: \$7,000. US: about \$34,000. Vietnam : \$240. 1.2 billion poorest people in world: under \$1 per day.
- The richest 20% of the world's people earn 86% of world's income, consume 80% of the world's resources and create 83% of the world's waste. The poorest 20% of the world's population earn less than 2% of world's income.
- Each US citizen consumes twice his or her weight in stuff (fuels, minerals, wood products, metals, agricultural raw materials, etc.) per day (around 400 lbs. per person).
- Per person municipal waste in US per year: 1800 lbs.; with 4% of world's population, we use one-third of all materials consumed on earth. US consumers discard over 30 billion aluminum cans annually—enough to rebuild the world airline fleet one and a half times.
- Every product we purchase requires on average 30 times its weight in materials to make, package and ship. An automobile uses twice its weight in materials to produce.
- Dividing the earth's productive land by the world's population of just over 6 billion, there are approximately 4.5 acres of land available to meet each person's consumption needs. Already global per capita consumption is at 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 (all 6 billion people 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 . An ocean-going container ship carrying consumer goods to the US emits as much pollution *every mile* as a car driven 25,000 *miles* . Every year, 60,000 such ships dock at US ports.
- Automobile miles driven per household: 22,000 per year—up 75% since 1979; Cameroon (or other poor country): 75. Minutes in car each day, 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; one quarter of all large mammals are endangered, 14% of birds, 12% of plants; we have lost 33% of all topsoil through erosion.
- 37 million acres are deforested around the world each year. One acre of rainforest recycles 1000 pounds of CO₂ each year. Rainforest is being cut down at the rate of an acre a second. Culprits: Fire wood for cooking, ranching and agriculture. Paper production is responsible for 20% of the world's deforestation. It takes 3.5 lbs. of wood to create 1lb. of paper. 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 is 760 pounds (writing, packaging, etc); world average: 125 pounds. The poorest countries (for instance, the 20 poorest countries in Africa) 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; i.e. it takes 8 gallons of water to grow one tomato in an irrigated field; a water bottle requires 17.5 times its weight in water to produce). Most irrigated crop in the US ? Lawn grass—25 million acres under irrigation. Globally, 1.2 billion people don't have access to clean water (defined by UN as 5 gallons per person per day within 1 kilometer). There is no potable water from any faucet in Guatemala .

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, less for pork, about two for poultry), making meat an unaffordable luxury for many. A cow may also belch as much as 640 pounds of methane a day—a potent global warming gas. Meat consumption per person per year: US—250 pounds; India —5 pounds. If every US citizen cut their 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 has a 10-15 times increased likelihood of dying 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. This can causes mental slowness in children and increased maternal mortality in women.
- Globally, a billion people are malnourished. An average of 20,000 children die from hunger-related causes every day—that's about one child every six seconds.

Sources: World Watch Institute, United Nations Development Program, Bread for the World, Our Ecological Footprint , State of the World's Children 2005 (Unicef), US Census Bureau.

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

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