

SAY GOOD BUY TO BAD FOOD

CATHY COOTE

YOU'RE STANDING IN THE SUPERMARKET after a long day at work. All around you other shoppers are swarming, mobile phones are ringing, and babies are screaming. You've got to be home to make dinner in twenty minutes. You stare at row after row of brightly packaged products, whose labels shout 'Green! Australian made! Fairtrade! Organic!'

You *want* to make the most ethical choices. But sometimes it all just seems too confusing....

Consumer power is one of the most direct ways in which we can act to influence our society for the better. Even the most unethical or environmentally damaging company can understand the meaning of reduced sales.

Ethical shopping might require a little thought and preparation, but if you are prepared to ask yourself a few simple questions about what you buy, you can make a big difference to our environment.

How far has it travelled to get to your plate?

Look at the label. Does it read 'Product of Australia'? If it was made here, it hasn't travelled as far as products made overseas, and therefore has created less greenhouse pollution. Plus you can be more certain that the workers involved in its creation were paid a fair wage and worked in decent conditions. In addition, your money will be supporting local farmers and growers. According to studies, if all food was consumed within 20km of where it was produced, costs associated with congestion and transport would be cut by 90%.

Is it in season?

Out of season fruit and vegetables generally has to travel many 'food miles' in order to reach you and employ packaging and refrigeration to maintain that fake fresh appeal. We're used to having every variety of vegetable and flavour of fruit available to us, but it uses far less in the way of resources to consume only produce that is in season.



Is it highly processed?

Highly processed or refined foods tend to use more energy and water in their production. If what you want to buy is canned, freeze dried or wrapped in plastic, think about whether there is a less processed alternative. For example, if tomatoes are an ingredient in tonight's meal, why not buy fresh tomatoes instead of tinned?

How much packaging is there?

Do you really need individually wrapped biscuits or lollies? Is there an alternative that uses less packaging? Remember, today's packaging is tomorrow's landfill.

Is it organic?

Organic farming focuses on the health of the soil and uses natural production methods rather than relying on synthetic chemicals. The upshot is that organic farms

tend to be gentle on our native wildlife and produce less greenhouse pollution.

Food labelled "Certified Australian Organic" also means it is free of genetically modified organisms, and farm animals have been treated according to the strictest welfare standards.

While most conventional farmers are doing better and better by the environment, until more credible "clean & green" labels are developed, organic is your clearest choice.

Organic food may cost a little more, but if you only buy what you need, you probably won't end up spending too much more.

Is it endangered?

You wouldn't buy a tiger steak or a bilby burger, so you don't want to fuel the trade in marine species that are having trouble surviving either. The Orange Roughy, a

LEFT: Think about how far your food has had to travel from the paddock to your plate

PHOTO: Getty



fish that we often see in Australian fish markets and supermarkets, is nearing extinction. Labelling doesn't help – sometimes Orange Roughy is misleading called Sea Perch. Better seafood choices include whiting, flathead, mullet and snapper. If seafood isn't clearly labelled with the species name, don't buy it.

Do you really need it?

In 2004, Australians threw away \$5.3 billion worth of fresh food, uneaten take-away food, leftovers, frozen food and unfinished drinks. According to Clive Hamilton of the Australia Institute, "This represents more than 13 times the \$386 million donated by Australian households to overseas aid agencies in 2003." If you don't buy food that you can't consume, you'll have more money left over for yourself – around \$1226 per year according to an Australia Institute study - and also to support the charities and NGOs working to make a better world.

If a product is imported, were the people who worked to make it treated fairly?

Some industries are notorious for the exploitation of workers. You can buy Fairtrade coffee and chocolate in most Australian supermarkets – it will taste all the better without the stink of exploitation on it.

Ethical shopping can be as much about what you don't do as what you do. Shunning big chain supermarkets to support local markets can make a big contribution. As well as supporting stallholders and their employees you'll be shopping at a venue that's likely to use much less packaging.

Shopping more often but buying less each time from local outlets near your home might stop you using your car to venture to an out of suburb multiplex. That will save greenhouse gas emissions from your car as well as keeping money in your community. And by only buying what you need, you won't throw away as much. That means you'll cut down on some of the estimated 980 kilograms of landfill waste

each Australian household creates every year.

Or you could cut out the middleman entirely by growing your own food. Setting up a kitchen garden can provide a great source of fresh food to supplement your diet. Even the smallest balcony can provide space for a pot full of parsley or a mini mint plant. If you don't have a balcony, what about a window box? Or you could join a community garden scheme.

If you've got more space, you could plant a fruit tree or start a vegetable patch. Then you'll have somewhere for the waste from your worm farm or compost pile to go. By using your food scraps in this way, you'll be reducing the amount of rubbish your kitchen sends to landfill and helping to grow your next meal! So, you've done the shopping. You've got your basket of ethical goods to the checkout, and you're satisfied that you've made the best choices. But there's one more thing to remember. Plastic bags that end up as litter cause the death of marine species like turtles as well as choking our rivers and waterways. Support the campaign to cut down plastic bag use by bringing your own reusable bags with you to when you go shopping. Keep them in your car or at your desk at work – that way you can be sure they'll be handy even for last-minute shopping trips.

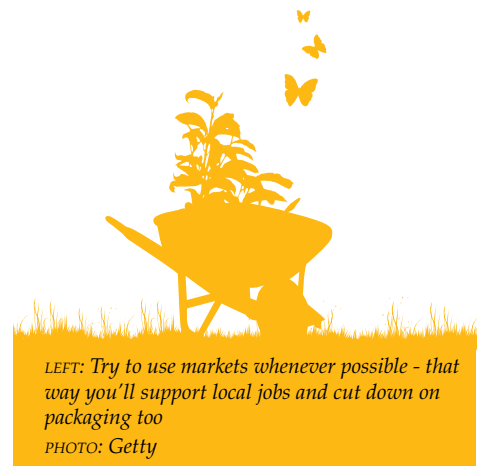
Remember – everything tastes better when it's eaten with a serve of clean conscience.



5 easy ways to make sure your shopping doesn't cost the earth

1. Order a regular box of fresh produce from a local supplier. That way you're supporting a local business and you know the food is fresh, in season and hasn't had to travel far to reach you
2. Look at the label. Is it produced in Australia? Is it organic? If not, think twice before you buy.
3. Shop at the market where possible. Market food uses less packaging, and is more likely to be locally produced.
4. Pay for the product, not the packaging. Try to choose products that don't use wasteful or excessive packaging.
5. Don't forget your shopping bags. Remember to take your reusable shopping bags along so that you won't be forced to take plastic bags. contribution to global warming.

For more information, visit ACF's website at www.acfonline.org.au/shopping



LEFT: Try to use markets whenever possible - that way you'll support local jobs and cut down on packaging too

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