

Know what you're buying – Water and energy demands of food and clothing industries

EARTH FIRST

By Haidee Nelson, ECCO

After sitting down to a lovely dinner of beef stew and rice with a glass of red wine the other night, I was doing some research on the internet. I was astounded to discover that approximately 4,300 litres of water was used for the production of just that one meal and glass of wine! Furthermore, 3.41 kilograms of CO₂ was released into the atmosphere. This started me thinking about the hidden environmental costs for all products.

Fred Pearce highlights this issue in *When the Rivers Run Dry*. He points out that while annually we drink approximately 1 tonne of water and use between 50 and 100 tonnes around the home, 1,500 to 2,000 tonnes of water is used to produce the food and clothing that we use.

It made me realise that to be responsible citizens of the earth we need to do more than just think about how we deal with the produce when it reaches our hands. We need to extend our thought process to the whole cycle of production through to waste management.

Achieving this though, is an increasingly difficult task as we are often so far removed from the production system. It can become completely mind boggling when deciding which produce has a smaller ecological footprint. Further to considering the embodied water and carbon dioxide there are questions like: How far has the produce travelled? Is it organic? Is it free range? How much packaging is there? What are the social conditions for the producers? The list goes on...

I can't pretend I have any answers- if anything I have more questions. But please don't throw the paper down in despair (and if you do make sure it's in the compost or recycling bin)!

Instead, where possible, try and grow your own fruit and vegetables in an ecologically sustainable manner. Also try and find local sources of produce and develop a relationship with the producer. Ask questions about the production cycle so you know what you are buying. Peruse the table in this article so you can gain a general understanding of some of the water and energy demands of common food and clothing products.

It is time for us to think about how the goods we consume directly affect the environment where they are produced. It's time for us as consumers to ask questions and make responsible choices.

Water and CO2 emissions of common food products.

Product	Water (L/kg food)	CO2 Emissions (g/kg of food)
Beef	16,000	13,300
Pork	10,000	3,250
Poultry		3,500
Eggs	1,900	1,950
Butter		23,800
Cream		7,600
Milk	1,000	950
Yoghurt		1,250
Hard Cheese		8,500
Apples	700	550
White Bread	4,500	650
Rice	3,000	
Potato	250	
Sugar	3,000	
Coffee	20,000	
Wine	960	3000 (g/L)

Water and energy demands of common clothing products.

Product	Water (L/kg)	Energy MJ/kg
Acrylic	300	200
Polyester	0	100
Viscose	800	90
Wool	200	9
Cotton	9,000	70

Green tip for the week: Realise the power of the consumer! When you go out to dinner, when you're buying your food or are in a clothing store ask about the product. Let the producer know that you demand products that are ecologically sustainable.

Future environmental events: In Transition, a 50-minute UK movie about the Transition Town movement (an international movement concerned with local responses to peak oil and climate change) around the world, will be showing in

Bathurst at 5.30pm on Wednesday April 7 in the Courtyard room at the Bathurst RSL.
To see the trailer visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkxJssI950w>