



Franciscan Action Network

Transforming the World in the Spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

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How do our Food Choices affect the Environment?

(Courtesy of Sue Concannon at Immaculate Conception Church in Durham, NC)

1. To make 10 gallons of Florida orange juice that will go to a breakfast table in Michigan requires one gallon of fuel. How much **water** is required (for irrigation and transportation)?
 - a) 10 gallons of water
 - b) 50 gallons of water
 - c) > 200 gallons of water

To make 10 gallons of Florida orange juice requires one gallon of diesel and **220 gallons** of water.

2. In the U.S., > 80% of the tomato varieties has been lost in the past century.

True

False

True. More than 80% of the types of **tomatoes** grown a hundred years ago are no longer grown. However, because there are so many choices in a grocery store today (the average grocery store has over 50,000 foods you can buy, mostly processed), we often do not recognize a loss of biodiversity. A hundred years ago, we had 7,000 **apple** varieties; today, more than 85% of them have become extinct. We've also lost more than 90% of the varieties of **lettuce** and **corn**.

3. Which adds more greenhouse gases to the atmosphere?
 - a. motorized vehicles
 - b. airplanes
 - c. the livestock industry
 - d. cigarette smoke

Surprise! The **livestock** industry adds the most greenhouse gases to our atmosphere, at 18% of total emissions. This is due to the fuel used to grow grain to feed the livestock, cutting down of trees to clear fields (trees use up carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas), and the methane gas produced by cattle as they digest their food.

4. Plastic water bottles and grocery bags take almost 50 years to decay back into the earth.

True False

False. Plastic typically takes 500 years or more to decay. Styrofoam will never decay (it shreds).

5. Washington State is the source of more than half of all fresh eating apples in the United States. An apple grown in Washington and eaten in North Carolina is shipped >3000 miles and consumes 2 cups of gasoline to get to a store in North Carolina.

True False

True. Semi-trailers carry apples from Washington State to North Carolina use **2 cups of gasoline** per apple. The easiest way to cut down on your food's gas bill is to eat *locally grown* fare. Some groups are looking into feasibility of food labels indicating point of origin and miles traveled.

6. Which of these is a false statement?

- a. 60 million bottles a day are being thrown away into landfills in the US
- b. bottled water costs 500 times more than tap water
- c. 1 billion people worldwide lack access to safe drinking water
- d. none of the above

All of the above are **true**. The 60 million bottles can take 1000 yrs to degrade and require 1.5 million barrels of crude oil each year - enough to keep 100,000 cars running a year. The cost of bottled water is 500X more than tap water (1000X more for fancy bottles) - this is because of the energy to harvest, process, bottle and transport. It is estimated that by the year 2025, two-thirds of the world's population will not have access to safe drinking water.

7. A 12-ounce porterhouse steak contains 940 calories. How much fossil fuel energy is required to raise the meat for one 12-ounce porterhouse steak?

- a. 5000 calories
- b. 15,000 calories
- c. 30,000 calories
- d. who cares, I'm a vegetarian

A 12-ounce porterhouse steak contains 940 calories and requires **32,900 calories** of fossil fuel energy to raise the meat. We get only one-third of our protein from flesh, but devote nearly a third of our planet to raising it.

8. The food on a typical American dinner plate travels a total of roughly 10,000 miles from where it's grown to where it's packaged to where it's sold.

True False

Can you imagine if every time you got hungry you needed to travel to the other side of the planet before you could sit down to eat? As absurd as this may sound, many are not bothered by the fact that most of our food has to make this same journey to get to us. To reach your plate, the food on a typical American dinner plate (meat, fish, vegetables, spices, eggs, milk, fruit, and grains) travels a total of roughly **22,000** miles from where it's grown, to where it's packaged, to where it's sold. In addition to the environmental impact of fossil fuel usage is the paper, plastic and aluminum used for packaging.

9. Eighty percent or more of the grain grown in the U.S. is fed to cows. It takes between 10 and 16 pounds of grain to produce one pound of meat.

True False

True. Most of the grain grown in the U.S. is fed to cows, not people. It takes between 10 and 16 pounds of grain to produce one pound of meat.

10. The world's cattle alone consume enough to feed 8.7 billion humans.

True False

True. There is a limited amount of land on earth. With the rapidly growing human population, it would be impossible to feed everybody on a typical American, heavy-meat diet. More and more land is being used to support the growing demand for meat. More and more desperately poor people in the world that can barely survive have to compete for limited resources - in terms of energy and land - with cattle.

11. Buying organic food over conventionally-grown food is always the best choice for the environment.

True False

False. Buying organic food is *not* always the best choice for the environment. Some of the biggest food companies use modern business practices to make growing foods organic more efficient. However, this may mean that the food is grown as a **monoculture**, growing one species or type of food so biodiversity is lost. Also, if the

food is grown across the United States (Florida oranges, California tomatoes), gasoline is often needed to transport the food across hundreds if not thousands of miles.

12. A family of four could save an estimated \$11.35 a week, or \$590 a year by:
- switching from paper to cloth napkins
 - turning down your thermostat
 - eating the food that you buy
 - eating at fast food restaurants

A family of four could save an estimated \$11.35 per week, or \$590 a year by **eating the food that you buy!** Switching to cloth napkins saves approximately \$1.68 a week (at 2¢ a napkin) and prevents forest clear-cutting, which results erosion and loss of habitat. Also, most paper mills use chlorine bleach to make the paper white, which releases toxins into the waterways. And finally, less paper means less trash in the landfills.

13. Which choice(s) below helps to respect the earth?
- buying multiple small packets of food, because there's less waste
 - buying in bulk to reduce packaging
 - doodling a walrus on your homework
 - shopping at the local farmer's market
 - more than one of the above

Buying in bulk actually reduces packaging, not the other way around. For example, one large cereal box is made from less cardboard than two small ones. (Squash the boxes flat and then measure them, if you'd like). Shopping at the local farmer's market or other local sources of food means that the food travels a shorter distance (saving fuel). Also, the food may be fresher and less expensive because it was picked recently (hasn't sat on a grocery shelf) and does not require packaging to help it be transported.