

## green saver

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## Buyer alert

The simple act of choosing one product over another can reduce the cost to the planet



**INCREASINGLY COMPANIES ARE** tapping into public concern for the environment to increase sales and improve their bottom line. The positive outcome of this for all of us is that where you choose to spend your dollars is just as important as who you vote for. Of course, choosing to buy ethically is easier said than done. Not everyone can cycle down to a nearby farmers market to buy their organic vegies, or shop at the local co-op. But you can still make an impact at the supermarket.

For starters, look for products manufactured in Australia with Australian ingredients. The less distance the product had to travel to get to your trolley, the less petrol was consumed and the less carbon released.

Check the labelling – a product labelled “Australian made” means that over 50% of the production was done in Australia, although all raw ingredients can come from overseas. “Product of Australia” means all the raw ingredients are Australian, and the final product was made here. “Australian owned” means the company is more than 50% Australian owned. The Ausbuy Guide ([www.ausbuy.com.au](http://www.ausbuy.com.au)) lists all Australian-owned and Australian-made products and is available at supermarkets and newsagents.

**While buying sustainably may take a little research, it is getting easier**

Choose products that contain recycled materials and have minimal packaging. Paper packaging, steel and aluminium are preferable over plastic, but some plastics can be recycled. Ever wondered what that triangle and arrow symbol means on plastic bottles? If it has 1, 2, or 3 in the centre it can be recycled; any other number means it can't. Buying items in bulk can also reduce the amount of packaging, and is often cheaper.

As well as websites, several books can help. Two are *Greenology* by Planet Ark's Tanya Ha, and the CSIRO's *Rough Guide to Ethical Living*. While buying sustainably may take a little research, it is getting easier. About a quarter of Australian companies now release their environmental accounts voluntarily.



Pick products with minimal processing. Not only is it better for your health, the less processed a food or product, the less chemicals and energy went into the manufacture and the less industrial waste was produced.

Chlorine bleach and laundry products containing phosphates are toxic for our waterways and damage your garden if you have a grey-water system. Choose concentrated cleaning products as they use less bulking materials (like salt) and less packaging.

The tough part in all this is: How do you know whether the company that makes the product is sustainable? Several websites list “green” companies and products, but they tend to focus on one ethical aspect.

For example, the Australian Marine Conservation Society ([www.amcs.org.au](http://www.amcs.org.au)) provides a guide to buying sustainably cultivated seafood.

For an overall listing of ethical products you can search Greenpages ([www.greenpagesaustralia.com.au](http://www.greenpagesaustralia.com.au)). It's available online or can be bought in hardcopy form for \$39. Sustainable Living Foundation and The Ethical Consumer Group also produce a green directory ([www.slf.org.au/directory](http://www.slf.org.au/directory)), listing consumer guides and common supermarket products given the ethical tick of approval.

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## Green tip

If you doubt your shopping choices really matter, here are just a few successful consumer boycotts of the 1990s\*.

- In 1990 Heinz in the US was boycotted over the killing of 100,000 dolphins each year in tuna fishing. Later that year the “dolphin-friendly” logo was launched by the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and the tuna industry.
- In 1997 the charity Save the Children and several trade unions highlighted the working conditions of football manufacturers in Pakistan. This led to a number of sports companies including Nike, Reebok, and Adidas pledging to phase out child labour by 1999.
- When France tested nuclear weapons in the South Pacific a boycott of French products saw the testing cut short in 1995. French wine imports to the UK fell from 70% to 53% and 80% of New Zealanders actively boycotted French goods.

\*Sourced from: Ethical Consumerism: Democracy through the Wallet Journal of Research for Consumers, issue 3, 2005 ([www.jrconsumers.com](http://www.jrconsumers.com)).