

going beyond...

CONSUMERISM

The idea of "voting with your dollar," or only buying from companies whose practices you support, is a popular one. After all, who doesn't like the idea of making a difference just by going shopping? But being choosy about the products you buy isn't actually the best way to create the big changes you want to see. Here are six reasons why— and one thing you can do differently.

INEQUALITY

"Voting with your dollar" requires that you have a dollar to vote with. But many Americans can't afford to pay more for products that match their values, meaning that companies will only see the priorities of wealthier people.

DIFFERING OPINIONS

It's like voting for president— not everyone wants the same candidate to win. Differences in opinion make it almost impossible for a noticeably large percentage of consumers to boycott a company.

ECO-NICHES

Companies make regular and "eco" versions of many products and charge more for the eco-version, since it looks better by comparison. Buying "eco" products won't make all products eco-friendly, since companies would lose their markup.

SYSTEMIC FORCES

Some products are used by industries rather than individual consumers. Once a technology becomes the industry standard, there's almost no turning back, even if consumers don't like it.

NOT ENOUGH INFO

Unless you work in manufacturing or farming, you probably don't know exactly how consumer goods are produced— and companies probably aren't going to tell you, since no production practice is 100% benign.

\$\$\$ TALKS...

but some voices are louder than others. Wealthy individuals can buy stock and influence how companies are run. Large corporations can buy smaller green companies, changing production practices and the causes that profits go to support.

THINK BIGGER!

The companies you like and the companies you dislike both work within an economic system that encourages certain behaviors, including the ones mentioned above. Real change requires thinking bigger— changing the way the system itself works, or minimizing its effects. So instead of just "voting with your dollar," try reaching out to actual politicians about food policy, or donating to organizations that are making changes you want to see.



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LABELS

(because they don't tell you everything!)



NUTRITION

While it's important to eat foods that keep you feeling good, seeing food only as a source of nutrition distracts from its social, political, economic, and environmental effects. Food is more than just something you eat!

PESTICIDES

You may have concerns about the effects of pesticides on your health. An even better reason to regulate pesticides is their impact on farm workers, who suffer from higher rates of pesticide poisoning than average Americans.



NON-GMO

No need to avoid GMOs for your health— independent studies have shown genetically modified crops are safe to eat. Issues that arise with GMOs are generally social and economic, and affect farmers rather than consumers.

RECYCLING

Recyclable packaging is appealing because it seems eco-friendly, but packaging is just a small part of food's impact on the environment. When choosing food, consider the company's waste reduction practices as well as your own.



IT'S TOUGH...

...after all, it's easier to read labels than to research companies' practices. But keeping yourself informed helps you avoid greenwashing, or labels and ads that make a product look more eco-friendly than it really is.

...BUT IT HELPS

By researching companies' environmental and labor practices, you can more effectively change the food system. While it's difficult to change industry-wide practices, direct public pressure and targeted laws can help hold specific companies accountable.



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SCIENCE



FIRST THINGS FIRST: SCIENCE IS A USEFUL TOOL

The scientific method is great at describing what's happening and explaining how the process works in a rational way. And in an age when climate change denial and misinformation about vaccines are rampant, it's more important than ever for people to be scientifically literate. But like any tool, science has limitations.



WHEN YOU HAVE A HAMMER, EVERYTHING HAS TO BE A NAIL

When it comes to very large subjects of study (think interconnected biological and geological systems or complex political and social relations), the scientific method can have a hard time finding explanations simply because it's difficult to conduct experiments that require so much time, funding, and sampling.



SCIENCE DOESN'T SOLVE THE BIGGEST PROBLEMS

Actually, science can't even decide whether something *is* a problem, since it doesn't make moral judgements. But science also doesn't decide how things are implemented, distributed, or regulated— all of which are key to solving problems that arise.



HUMAN VALUES AREN'T TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

The hard sciences look at biological, chemical, and physical processes in a vacuum, without considering the influence of human values. If you ask an atmospheric chemist what to do about climate change, they'll probably say, "reduce the amount of CO₂ in the air"— but that doesn't address the societal reasons behind why it's there in the first place.



SCIENCE IS VALUABLE, BUT DON'T LET IT CLOUD YOUR VISION

Only valuing information from the hard sciences can keep you from seeing important insights in other fields. For example, while GMOs have been scientifically proven safe for consumption, there are still legitimate critiques about their economic effects on farmers.