

# ECOLOGIST

..... guide to .....

## Food

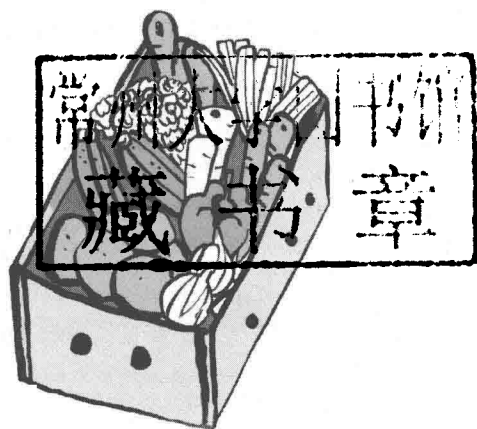


Andrew Wasley

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The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an independent, not for profit, non-government organization established to support environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests.

FSC's vision is that the world's forests meet the social, ecological and economic rights and needs of the present generation without compromising those of future generations.

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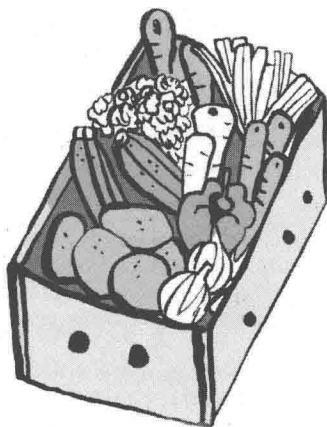
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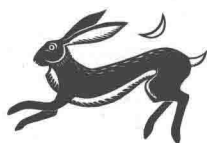
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# FOREWORD

*The Ecologist* has been setting the environmental agenda for over 40 years – bringing the critical issues of our time into the mainstream through cutting-edge reporting, as well as pioneering original thinking and inspiring action. Whether it's challenging vast corporations, exposing corruption or shining a light on unquestioned orthodoxies, *The Ecologist* remains to this day the world's leading environmental affairs title.

As the environmental debate has evolved and increasingly moved into the mainstream, *The Ecologist* has placed more emphasis on promoting ethical consumerism. This has included the publication of practical green living advice, as well as reportage around the issues concerning our day to day products and lifestyle choices.

Perhaps most well known is the critically-acclaimed Behind The Label (BTL) series, in which health

commentator and ex-*Ecologist* editor Pat Thomas deconstructed the ingredients of some of our most popular and seemingly innocent products. From unearthing the chemical nasties in your body cream and revealing what's really in your bottle of tomato ketchup to examining the devastation your 'dolphin-friendly' tuna might actually be causing, this column has been scrutinizing the contents of the nation's shopping baskets for more than 8 years.

More recently, the series evolved into Behind The Brand (BTB), which took readers on a whistle-stop tour to the heart of some of the world's largest corporations. From Bernard Matthews to IKEA, the BTB columns investigated the claims made against the companies in question, and examined the 'greenwash' effect, questioning whether some companies truly were 'green'.

Elsewhere, *The Ecologist* has repeatedly exposed the 'hidden costs' of many consumerables. From palm oil to petrol, tinned tomatoes to timber, bananas to beef, its unique investigations, some of them undercover and carried out at great personal risk, have taken readers on a unique journey to some of the world's environmental front lines to bring back the often unpalatable truths about many of the consumer goods

we take for granted. In recent years the intrepid Ecologist Film Unit has trod where few others have dared to go and shone a much needed spotlight on some of the world's most unreported environmental issues.

Building on all of this, *The Ecologist* is producing the much anticipated *Ecologist Guides*. Drawing from the magazine's unique archive, and containing much new material, the series will be written by leading experts in the field and will cover a range of topics on the environmental agenda, presenting the often hard truths surrounding these themes, and offering enlightening debate as they consider the changes that need to be made. The guides – sometimes surprising, sometimes controversial – will be essential reading for anyone interested in making ethical choices and living a more sustainable life.

**Zac Goldsmith**

*Environmental Campaigner, MP  
and Editor of The Ecologist, 1998–2007*

# INTRODUCTION

**THE HIDDEN COST OF CHOICE** If you are reading this, you are probably lucky enough to live in the 'developed' world, where – as long as you have the means of paying for it – there are seemingly endless food choices and a year-round abundance of often frighteningly cheap foodstuffs from every corner of the earth.

This choice is available only as the result of an increasingly industrialized farming and food production system. One that comes with a 'hidden' price tag – from often cruel and barbaric farming methods to the decline in small, traditional farms, a loss of community, human rights abuses, the destruction of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity, pollution and waste, the spread of disease, an unsustainable reliance on fossil fuels... the list is endless.

Add to this the 'bigger' challenges facing the planet – climate change, a rising population, water shortages – and you have a potential recipe for disaster. Quite simply, our current food system cannot continue as it is.

For over 40 years, *The Ecologist* magazine has been covering food in a way few others could (or would) – investigating unpalatable truths, going against the grain, delving behind the labels (literally), uncovering scandals, reporting on seemingly distant problems, championing maverick thinking ahead of its time, as well as giving a voice to some of those marginalized in more mainstream debates.

As a journalist and undercover investigator specializing in food issues, I've been able to see, often at first hand, just how broken our food system has become. My reporting has enabled me to shine a light on some of the murkier

corners of the global food industry. The bits they don't want you to read about. The bits that get glossed over on the labels and in the slick advertising. The bits, quite frankly, that would put you off your food and – in more cases than one – the bits that could (and would) make you ill.

It's been a disturbing journey, but also an inspiring one, and I've been lucky enough to meet some of the growing number of pioneering (and sometimes brave) individuals – farmers, producers, activists and others – challenging the status quo and showing there are humane, sustainable and viable alternatives.

This book draws together some of these findings. Some have been published before, either in *The Ecologist* or elsewhere; others are new or appearing for the first time. The book also highlights some of the magazine's most original food reporting from recent years. Some of the pieces are effectively cut-down snapshots of much longer *Ecologist* reports, designed to offer readers a taste of particular issues around certain foodstuffs. Others – particularly where the original reporting was highly powerful or groundbreaking

– make use of much longer excerpts, and point readers towards potential solutions to the issues.

This book is not a shopping guide. Or a food guide in a traditional sense, where an A to Z of foodstuffs are profiled and given an ethical rating – there are plenty of those already. And it doesn't pretend to be comprehensive: to cover all the issues connected to our modern food system we'd need a book many times the size of this one. No, this book serves to highlight some of the surprising truths about what we put into our mouths each day – where it comes from, at what cost and what the alternatives might be.



# 1 Fruit

# INTRODUCTION



Recent years have brought a crop of headlines highlighting disturbing problems connected to our love affair with fruit. Tropical fruit grown in developing countries has generated some of the most serious concerns, with the alarm being raised over food miles and packaging, health and pesticide use, unfair trade mechanisms, the power of supermarkets, as well as conditions for workers toiling in the plantations and packhouses.

*The Ecologist* has been at the forefront of this reporting, investigating the complex supply chains that keep our supermarket shelves stuffed, and examining the often uneven economics of production that perpetuate poverty and suffering, rather than address it. Some of these reports are highlighted here, where we also ask whether ethical certification schemes really live up to the hype, talk to campaigners about successes in cleaning up the pineapple trade and highlight some of the bold producers selling fruit in a more sustainable and inspiring fashion.