



# THE TRUE COST OF GOODS

## HOW MUCH DOES YOUR FOOD REALLY COST?

There is a lot of evidence that our environment is suffering. Farming of any type, including certified organic, often has a disruptive impact on the biosphere. Contrary to the large scale, conventional GMO farming, certified organic farms that are small scale and use organic practices including seasonal soil remediation by cover cropping, composting, crop rotation, grassland grazing, can reduce its impact and even improve the biosphere.

Large scale, conventional GMO farming can be connected to much of the damage caused by agriculture to the fragile ecosystem of the planet. Mass producing food for processing using excessive fossil fuels results in severe soil degradation, air pollution, hypoxic oceans, unusable freshwater, species endangerment and extinctions. The statistics are overwhelming and depressing! Planet-wide, the land, air, oceans and rivers we cherish are being co-opted as sewers and toxic dumps for chemicals like glyphosate, fertilizers, plastics, and more, leaving a mess of toxic by-products to poison ground water, soil and air. The polluters hold no responsibility for the environmental disasters they create while innocent families, wildlife and vegetation are devastated by the contaminated water and food that inevitably ends up in the bodies of all species causing compromised health.

When this kind of systemic destruction occurs, ecosystem services plummet to zero. What are ecosystem services?

Take a moment to reflect on your favorite place in nature, a place you might go to when you need a reset. What does it look like? Is it a farm, yard or park you visit or where your kids or dogs play? Is it the wilderness where you hike or the forest, ocean or lake you visit on summer vacations? Most people might describe a clean, idyllic landscape of blue bird skies, waters that sparkle like jewels, a plethora of tree species, rainbows of flowers and verdant plants punctuated with colorful butterflies, song birds and just the right number of bumblebees and friendly insects. How does this place make you feel?



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Now, how much do you value this place and what would it be worth in dollars? What price would you pay to keep it exactly like it is or better?

Your happy place can be defined as a cultural ecosystem service because it “includes non-material benefits that people can obtain from ecosystems which include spiritual enrichment, intellectual development, recreation and aesthetic values.”(1). The term “eco-system services” was first defined in 1997 in a paper by Robert Costanza et al. (2). The authors point out that “eco-system services contribute to human welfare, both directly and indirectly, and therefore represent part of the total economic value of the planet.” They estimated the value of the biosphere when the paper was written in 1997 was 33 trillion dollars per year with a gross national product of 18 trillion per year. In 2022 the global GNP was approximately 102 trillion with eco-system services estimated to be 125 trillion per year last estimated in 2011.

For an in depth look at an ecosystem analysis of Portland, Maine (NH was not included) take a look at this [EPA analysis](#) (3). Ecosystem services help to create a dollar basis when habitat destruction occurs in glyphosate polluted groundwaters or coastal dead zones created by massive chemical fertilizer runoff from concentrated animal feeding operations. If we can put a dollar value on the loss of a once pristine field in the Midwest that no longer can be used to grow food, then how much does that bag of corn chips, burger and soda you had last weekend really cost? If overuse, pollution and extractive agricultural methods that create dead land are included, the real estimate for this meal is very, very high.

This raises more questions. Who gives the polluters permission to pollute? How do a certain group of humans decide it's their right to dump massive amounts of toxins into precious drinking water, soil and air to generate profits for themselves and to vehemently discard the rights of planetary eco-systems that provide so many beings with clean water, soils and air? If sound farming practices like organic already exist, why are these habitat destroyers allowed to continue doing what they do? Why are the rights of wealthy





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corporations more important than our only planetary home? Why can rich billionaires launch as many rockets, satellites and genetically modified organisms as they want with no thought of future environmental repercussions?

How can we establish a better system and reject injustice?

As organic farmers, gardeners and eaters we can carefully continue to steward our small yards, farms and fields for future generations. We can help educate others to do the same and continue to fight hard for rational organic food systems that support a clean biosphere. We can make better choices and less trips to supermarkets or websites that heavily support the processed food industry. We can spread love and respect for all that brings us a healthy life. We can join a community like NOFA and meet others who have been feeding the land and people. Get involved – farmers and gardeners make great friends! We need your help!

References and additional sources:

1. [What Are Ecosystem Services?](#)
2. Costanza, Robert & Arge, & Groot, Rudolf & Farberk, Stephen & Grasso, Monica & Hannon, Bruce & Limburg, Karin & Naeem, Shahid & neill, Robert & Paruelo, José & Raskin, Robert & Sutton, Paul & Belt, Marjan. (1997). The Value of the World's Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital. Nature. 387. 253-260. 10.1016/S0921-8009(98)00020-2.
3. [Portland, Maine EnviroAtlas Community Summary Fact Sheet, April 2015](#)
4. [EnviroAtlas: About the Data](#)
5. [Sustainable Fisheries: The Environmental Impact of Food](#)
6. [The true cost of food is three times what Americans pay for it](#)
7. [Glyphosate: Widely Used, Widely Detected](#)
8. [Influence of land use and region on glyphosate and aminomethylphosphonic acid in streams in the USA](#)