

Consumers



This section is for individuals or organizations seeking to educate consumers to produce a shift towards more environmentally sustainable purchasing and consumption patterns.

Outcomes

Consumers will:

1. Recognize the environmental benefits of purchasing local products whenever possible

Sample Indicators:

- They favour bioregional producers and community-based retailers.
 - They request information on products' country or province of origin (so that environmental costs can be evaluated)
 - They factor in transportation costs (fossil fuel use, production of greenhouse gases) as a major environmental cost of goods
2. Gain access to information that helps them choose products, equipment, and services which minimize waste, energy, resources, and water consumption

Sample Indicators:

- They choose products manufactured with processes or equipment that reduce the amount of resources, energy, and water used in production.
- They buy in bulk, and prefer products with minimal or environmentally friendly packaging.
- They choose durable, reusable, and repairable products.
- They employ energy saving products and practices in their homes and at work.



- They use environmentally friendly transport such as walking, bicycling, and public transit.
- They support reusing, recycling, bartering, and trading centres or practices.
- They actively support the development of solar, wind, and other eco-friendly energy sources, and seek green energy alternatives for daily life.

3. Ask questions, request more environmentally sound products and green marketing, and challenge the status quo



Sample indicators:

- They call upon the media, government, and business to promote and provide information on environmentally sustainable products and practices.
 - They request disclosure of environmental costs of products (e.g., energy consumed, materials used, waste produced, pesticides applied, genetically modified content) and they consider environmental costs when choosing products (e.g., shipping produce long-distance by refrigerated truck versus transportation from local fields).
 - They actively seek information on products, transportation modes, and energy sources developed using environmentally sustainable practices.
 - They are informed about food production practices.
 - They actively promote product labelling with environmental information.
 - They take courses, read books, join groups, or attend events to increase their awareness of environmental issues, and environmentally friendly alternatives and practices.
4. Recognize the benefits of environmentally certified products, and be informed on the environmental questions in the debate over genetically modified organisms (GMO)

Sample Indicators:

- They seek out and favour products that are environmentally certified and labelled with environmental information (e.g., organic, Eco-Logo, non-toxic).
- Their food choices are informed by current information on the benefits and risks of genetic engineering.

5. Reward companies that apply **ecosystem thinking**

Sample indicators:

- They support companies that respond to green consumer demands by including environmental information related to ingredients, production, processing, and recycling on websites, on packaging, and in advertising.
- They “vote” for environmentally responsible companies and products with their shopping dollars.



- They invest in corporations that they rate on measures of environmental performance.
- They favour corporations and companies that encourage lateral thinking on the part of their employees (e.g., management and employees receive incentives for innovations that result in more environmentally responsible production methods).
- Sales of more environmentally responsible products and services increase, and prices become competitive.

Needs

Consumers need:

- Education to help them understand the links between consumption, available choices, and human and environmental health
- Critical thinking related to environmentally sound consumption
- Improved understanding of the product life cycle and the environmental history of products or services
- Improved knowledge about the consequences of their actions and behaviours that encourage industrial malpractice
- An understanding of media that promotes conspicuous, unsustainable consumption
- Support from governments in moving towards more regular use of sustainable products and services
- Access to information on:
 - available sustainable choices for basic products and services
 - the environmental costs of the production, transportation, use, and disposal of products
 - the meaning, pros, and cons of various certification schemes
 - the energy and water consumption requirements of appliances
 - the place of origin of products and distances products travel
 - sources of reports on corporate and institutional environmental and ethical practices
 - corporate and institutional environmental policies that are comprehensive but easy to read
 - groups, courses, materials, and programs that can help them to be more environmentally friendly
- Access to courses, websites, books, and other sources of environmental information that will broaden their ecological knowledge
- Information on and access to local produce and products
- Access to environmentally certified products and those with Eco-Logos
- A solid, convincing case for the economic viability of “going green”
- Access to environmentally friendly modes of transportation
- Appreciation of economic costing for environmentally sound products or production processes
- Understanding of long-term social and ecological costs and benefits of products and services
- Access to organizations, service groups, or individuals who can help consumers evaluate their consumption practices and develop strategies for improvement (e.g., Ontario Power Generation/Hydro One energy conservation programs)



Strategies

Programs, Projects, and Policies



A. Consumer Education for the Marketplace

1. Use opinion polling and consumer research to identify what motivates Ontario consumers in terms of personal and family health; saving money; saving time; simplicity of solutions; and interest.
2. Identify and report on priorities for implementation, including gaps that need to be addressed.
3. Establish a working group for environmental consumer education in Ontario; develop new projects and partnerships.
4. Develop—with identified partners in green consumption (producers, retailers, organizations, government)—key messages about green consumption; shift environmentally conscious consumption from a precautionary measure to a positive force.
5. Identify and use innovative marketing and communication tools to promote green consumption: social marketing, youth movements (e.g., GNN-TV, rock videos), and environmental information and awareness campaigns (e.g., Suzuki Nature Challenge).
6. Educate Ontario consumers through web resources, libraries, community centres, health facilities, groups, and schools to create a significant demand for environmentally sound products and services (a “common green awareness” campaign).
7. Coordinate community forums to provide environmental consumer information and give the public an opportunity to voice their concerns.
8. Promote programs already available through government, industry, or educational institutions to help consumers measure aspects of their environmental performance and identify areas for improvement.
9. Initiate and support efforts that promote green consumption, including labelling that streamlines environmental choices for shoppers, public campaigns to get both people and business to think and act environmentally, measures of comparative environmental performance and quality for different choices (**ecological footprinting**), green consumption programs and community group efforts, and recognition or reward systems for responsible businesses and products.
10. Establish or enable existing, environmentally active community groups to assist consumers in making environmentally responsible choices.
11. Provide educational material to consumers, explaining the importance of environmental **sustainability**, promoting the values of durability and **sustainability**, and encouraging the purchase of products that reduce resource use and environmental effects.
12. Provide a central resource of highly-rated environmental products and services, and encourage their regular purchase and use.



B. Consumer Education for Environmentally Responsible Government and Business

1. Establish independent watchdog organizations to monitor the environmental performance of various Ontario businesses, industries and government agencies.
2. Set up a pollution watch website, which reports on air, water, and waste releases from large companies.
3. Design campaigns that focus on specific environmental issues of business.
4. Call upon government, business, and industry to disclose to consumers the true environmental costs of products to allow for more informed choice.
5. Work towards regulatory accountability for environmental impacts through initiatives such as additional taxes on products that require proper hazardous waste disposal; net metering legislation to make renewable energy sources competitive, volume-based waste disposal tax; polluter pays principle; road tolls for transport trucks; and fuel taxes based on harmful emissions.
6. Increase the level of environmental reporting required from businesses on emissions and waste data; regulate mandatory annual environmental reports with proposed action plans; and provide instruction to the public on how to interpret this data.
7. Establish cross-industry, standardized environmental practices and programs to eliminate the competitive advantage that one company may gain over another by not adhering to the same level of environmental responsibility.
8. Create a grading system to evaluate environmental benefits and costs of products.
9. Create a public expectation of more government and private sector investment into research and development in the areas of environmental **sustainability**.
10. Establish a standard environmental labelling system per product, per industry sector that will help busy consumers make environmentally friendly choices quickly.
11. Develop product and service user fee programs to reflect true environmental costs.
12. Make industries aware of competitors' improvements.

Resources

1. Source and publicize available information materials on
 - a) lead organizations for consumer education;
 - b) methods that help consumers evaluate their environmental performance. (e.g., a pollution index by sector for shareholders; and "environmental footprint" analysis software or websites);
 - c) how companies, services, and products are assessed, tested, and rated for their "green" qualities;
 - d) how to evaluate personal cost savings and other benefits associated with environmentally oriented changes in shopping, transportation, and other everyday choices;
 - e) lists of relevant agencies, services, and regulatory bodies; and
 - f) mailing lists of political representatives, private sector, and non-governmental contacts.



2. Establish environmental consumer education working groups.
3. Provide dedicated, well-signed space in local libraries or community centres where consumers can find relevant environmental product and service information.
4. Establish “sustainability centres” that are central, visible, at street-level, and community-based, and that gather and provide consumer information on environmentally responsible programs, products, services, technologies, advisors, suppliers, and investments.

Support

1. Identify, with municipal and provincial governments, tax reduction incentives and recognition for environmentally responsible practices and products.
2. Increase consumer education through support from municipal environmental agencies.
3. Encourage the development of environmental product policies and economic initiatives.
4. Establish a reward system and recognition programs for “green” businesses and industries.
5. Establish environmental achievement awards.

Please see Appendix 1 for a list of useful websites.

