

The First 30 Years of Natural Life Magazine

Beyond Superficial Change

In Natural Life's March/April 1992 issue, Alberta writer Bob Gillis suggested some non-consumptive, ecologically sustaining lifestyle alternatives for those who realize that we can't have our environmental cake and eat it too. They included bartering, working close to home in order to walk or cycle to work, living without television, refusing or reusing before recycling, installing a composting toilet and other ideas. We were astounded at how relevant his article is today, so here is an excerpt:

Some weeks ago, I was reminded of the superficial component of the current green wave sweeping the continent. When asked (not for the first time) what I would recommend as the most environmentally friendly disposable plates to use at an event, I winced. Having worked and studied human/environment issues for some years, I was used to answering a lot of waste reduction questions from well meaning everyday ecologists. But this one stumped me. Was none of our deep ecology educational stuff having an impact?

I guess people are inevitably blameless. In the age of the techno-fix, it stands to reason that the average individual orientation would be one of "technology can solve it without us having to adapt ourselves." That is, if we can put a man on the moon, we can certainly have our environmental cake and eat it too.

Perhaps this is a fantasy. Sure, it might seem ideal to have a world filled with every conceivable present luxury and adult toy, and still have clean air, water and stable ecosystems. But even if it were possible, would we want it? I'm not so sure that the entire world should look like a clean Tokyo or a West Edmonton Mall. I am more confident that it would not be ecologically sustainable.

Gandhi was quoted as saying, "There is enough in the world for every man's need, but not every man's greed." Other than the sexist bias, how can he be wrong? Our material greed requirements are as limitless as our imaginations, but our actual needs are quite finite. Whenever I feel I don't have enough or when I feel it OK to spend resources frivolously, I remind myself of disparities between myself and the majority of humankind. How can I spend \$150 on a sweater, when that is the average annual income for millions? Is it meaningful to spend thousands on an "energy-efficient" fireplace to burn wood recreationally, while millions walk miles depleting the last of their forests in order to cook their daily meals? Is it wise to super-insulate a 3,000 square-foot house, while most of humanity is stuffed into closet-sized rooms?

Naturally, ecological living is a question of degree. As well, not all meaningful actions can have a net financial gain. We all have needs, but perhaps we can put them into perspective. We must look to non-consumptive values and to putting limits on

our desires. Such limits should be guided by what the ecosphere can endure divided by five billion souls. It boils down to being able to make big changes in your life, rather than cosmetic ones. Cosmetic personal changes can only translate into cosmetic world changes.

Larger changes do require a rearrangement of priorities, but perhaps they deal more fundamentally with creating sustainable lifestyles than the values expressed in green consumerism. - NL -

Covering the News

Natural Life has been at or ahead of the leading edge of many trends – sometimes before the trends are even named – and on creating awareness of many important issues in the last three decades. Here are just a few of those topics, the issues in which we first covered them and the date of our most recent article on the subject.

Topic	First article	Most recent article
GE Foods	Jan/Feb 1978	Sept/Oct 2004
Seed Patenting	May/June 1992	Jan/Feb 2005
Car Sharing	July/Aug 1995	Nov/Dec 1997
Fair Trade	May/June 1994	July/Aug 2004
Straw Bale Houses	Sept/Oct 1995	Nov/Dec 2006
Cordwood Houses	July/Aug 1979	Sept/Oct 1997
Pressure-treated Wood	July/Aug 1996	Nov/Dec 2006
Eco-tourism	May/June 1995	July/Aug 2005
Homeschooling	Sept/Oct 1979	May/June 2000
Climate Change	Nov/Dec 1995	Nov/Dec 2006
Hemp Industry	Sept/Oct 1996	Mar/Apr 2006
Pesticide Bylaws	Sept/Oct 1994	July/Aug 2005
Fish Farming	Nov/Dec 1997	May/June 2005
Ethical Investing	May/June 1998	July/Aug 2004
Solar Energy	Nov/Dec 1976	Nov/Dec 2006
Green Consumerism	Mar/Apr 1992	Sept/Oct 2006
Organic Certification	Sept/Oct 1994	Nov/Dec 2006
Green Business	Nov/Dec 1976	Sept/Oct 2006
Green Politics	Mar/Apr 1996	July/Aug 2006



Hooked on Goats

When *Natural Life* was launched in 1976, it was in the middle of what was called the “back-to-the-land” movement. Many families were packing up their city belongings and trying to be self-sufficient on country acreages. And many of them were totally unprepared for the experience. *Natural Life*’s letters section quickly became a place for the novices to pose their questions and have them answered by more experienced country lovers. Many readers had questions about goats. So we ran a series of articles on the topic, which became a small book entitled “So You Want to Buy a Goat” by farmer John Foster (pictured below). The first article about goats, in 1977, was called “Hooked On Goats” by freelance writer and goat lover Judith Shrubsole. Here’s an excerpt:

So you think you want to have some goats; or perhaps you already have a couple but wonder what to do next; or maybe you want to have your own natural supply of milk, cheese and yogurt on your homestead but you don’t need 15 quarts of milk a day. Whatever the reason, there’s no doubt about it: Goats are uncommonly delightful creatures and once you have had some you won’t want to be without them again.

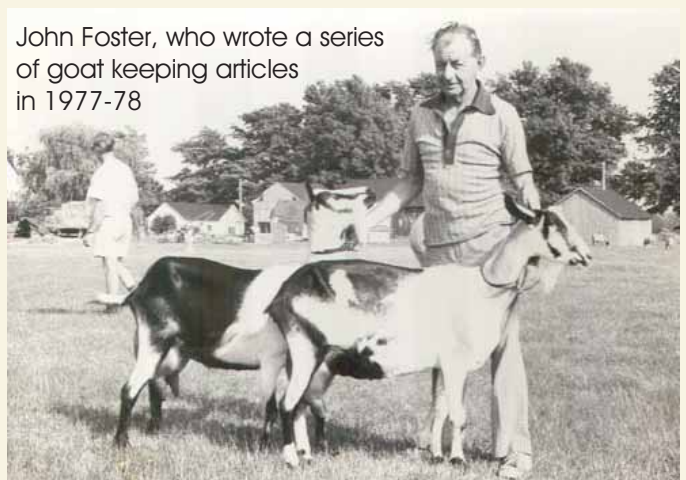
Despite the plethora of myths, goats tend to be economical, useful and entertaining. One milking doe provides an average of three to six quarts of delicious, naturally homogenized milk daily, one to three kids yearly, many hours of delightful antics and a respectable supply of manure for your organic garden.

The article continues on about the various breeds of goats and what kind of housing they need. Also covered is what to feed your goats... “one of the main advantages of keeping them because they eat so much less than a cow.” Then there is the milk part:

In order to have that natural milk supply, your doe must have kids; therefore, she must be freshened. Sounds easy, doesn’t it? We thought so too but apparently goats have certain disadvantages. Does come into heat generally only in the fall and early winter months, and not all that often. So you must recognize the signs of estrus in order for Nanny to be freshened. You might feel that it would be more advantageous to have your own buck. Most goat owners with one or two goats would find that it is more economically feasible to pay the five to ten dollar service fee per doe than to feed a buck all year round.

Goats are easy to transport in the back seat of a car or station wagon. *[This was clearly before mandatory seat belt laws! We don’t recommend this now. Editor]* Just be prepared for the accident you may cause or the smiles and laughs when you are driving along the roads with your goat(s) in the back seat.

In a related article in the same issue, Peter Lang wrote



John Foster, who wrote a series of goat keeping articles in 1977-78

about “Goat Economy” – an appraisal of the economics of small-scale goats milk production. Here are some of his comments:

Another necessity is a goat-proof fence around your garden, fruit trees, perennial bushes and flowers. Ideally, the fence should include your house and children’s playspace, unless you want goats continually on your doorstep. Goats will also tread not-so-softly over the entire painted surface of your car, which is especially embarrassing when guests arrive. So you might just want to include the driveway and garage inside that fence....

Weighing the costs of labor against the value of farm products is usually a depressing exercise in strictly economic terms. Living in the country and doing-it-yourself involves a kind of faith – either that the value of your activity will eventually find a sane place in the society-at-large, or that as society becomes more confused you will become less dependent upon it. **- NL -**