

## Lowering Your Eco-Footprint -- Buy Local Food, Change Your Lightbulbs

By Kristan Cockerill

The table below shows the calculations from the latest eco-footprint questionnaires that MountainKeepers have received and analyzed from Watauga County residents. (You can download and complete the form here: [http://www.mountainkeepers.org/null\\_ecofootprintform.pdf](http://www.mountainkeepers.org/null_ecofootprintform.pdf))

Respondent	Ecofootprint (global acres)	Buy local food	Add energy efficiency
5447	11	11	11
1029	17	15	16
1072	20	18	20
1440	29	26	27
0610	30	30	24
0711	31	31	29
Average	25		
US Average	24		

As reported before, an eco-footprint measures our resource use (demand) relative to nature's ability to regenerate those resources (supply). It is reported in "global acres," which represent the area of biologically productive land and water required to supply resources and absorb waste. This means that if everyone in the world had the same standard of living as the average U.S. resident (24 global acres) we'd need about 5 planets to provide all the resources and then process the waste.

The table above shows what happens to an eco-footprint when consumers change their food purchases or add energy efficiency to their home. These are relatively simple changes, but they affect the amount of resources required.

Buying local food is a great way to use fewer resources. A 2003 University of Iowa study reported that much of the food we consume has traveled about 1,500 miles from the farm to our table. This requires significant resources in packaging and shipping. Respondent 1440 above reported that most of the food he/she eats is processed, packaged, and from far away. If 1440 started buying food locally, his/her footprint would drop 3 global acres.

The eco-footprint of three respondents (5447, 0610, and 0711) did not change when local food was factored in because they had already reported very little food purchased from afar. Soon, with the reopening of the local farmer's market on May 5, it will be easier to buy locally. Even when shopping at a grocery store, check the label and try to avoid items that have traveled halfway around the world.

Another simple thing you can do to lower your footprint is to make your home more energy efficient. In her column in February, Nancy Spann highlighted numerous steps you can take, including switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs, choosing energy efficient appliances, and plugging air holes. For our current group of respondents, some reported that they do employ energy conservation and efficiency. For others, like respondent 0610, adding energy efficiency would lower his/her footprint by 6 global acres.

Our homes, and the associated goods and services required to fill and maintain them, contribute significantly to our overall eco-footprint. Making positive changes in our living space is often the best way to lower our eco-footprint.