

PUTTING YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS

The fastest way to a complete ban on the use of animals for testing cosmetics, toiletries and household products could be via the supermarket shelf. Most large supermarket chains are now carrying 'green' and 'cruelty-free' products, but they will only continue to do so, and expand their range, if there is consumer demand for these items. When consumers put their money where their mouths are, the power they wield is considerable. YSABELLE HOBSON explains how buying cruelty-free products helps animals, and how you can do it and still save money.

Although the animal liberation/welfare/rights movement is at last seeing a worldwide trend towards a reduction in animal testing, we still have a long road to travel.

If we want only cruelty-free products on our supermarket shelves, we have to persuade the companies which still test on animals to change. We can do this most effectively by hitting them where it's going to hurt the most — in the cash register.

As Michael Grinholz of Caring products, one manufacturer of cruelty free products I contacted when I was scouting around for raffle prizes for an animal welfare group, put it: "If each of your society's members bought only cruelty-free products and educated their friends and families to do the same, they would be doing something far more positive and constructive towards banning animal testing than coughing up for a handful of raffle tickets in the hope of winning a hamper of the products."

We'll still run raffles, because fund-raising is important, but Michael does have a point. We need to do much more than just raffle the products.

Unfortunately, one glance at the toilet soap shelf in one of our largest supermarkets suggested immediately that our own hip pockets will also suffer drastically if we buy only cruelty-free products. For instance a cake of cruelty-free soap can cost a minimum of around twenty cents more than a cake of soap containing animal products. Other cruelty-free products, even in supermarkets, may seem comparatively costly, and in these uncertain times, sticking to our principles may seem an indulgence we simply cannot afford — or can we?

Cruelty-free need not be costly

The main ingredient of most soaps is tallow (animal fat derived from abattoir waste) and they are heavily perfumed to disguise their origins. They are cheap to make and the manufacturers' profit margin is high. Cruelty-free soaps are based on high quality non-animal ingredients such as coconut and/or palm oil. They cost a great deal more to produce than waste-product soaps, and the profit margin is much lower.

Supermarket prices are geared heavily to volume of sales. In other words, the best way to reduce the retail cost of a particular product is to buy it and keep buying it.

Cruelty-free soaps may be more expensive than some other soaps, but many other products can be cheaper or at least comparable in price to leading brands. For instance, cruelty-free washing powders are highly competitive.

A 1.5 kg packet of Caring is usually around \$5.79, the same size of Aware around \$6.32. Omo, Fab and Drive are all about \$6.99 for 1.5 kg packets. But price is not the only consideration. A glance at the instructions on the packet reveals that both Caring and Aware call for less powder per load than the others, a fact borne out by a washing powder survey published in *Choice* magazine (February 1990) which claimed that Caring gave 24 washes per 1 kg while Omo gave only 10 washes. So, what you save on washing powder can help to buy toilet soap.

There are other savings not so obvious. Cruelty-free cosmetics, toiletries and household products are generally based on natural ingredients. This means that many of them are allergy-free. The little bit extra consumers spend on allergy-free products may save them hundreds of dollars in medications and dermatologists' fees.

If some cruelty-free products are dearer than popular brands, try substituting a few leading brand groceries on your shopping list with cheaper alternatives or 'house' brands. The money you save will help you to afford cruelty-free cosmetics, toiletries and household cleaners.

Creating a demand

If your supermarket does not stock cruelty-free products, give the manager a copy of *The Compassionate Shopper* (extra copies are available from ALMAG) and request that the shop stock a range of the products recommended in it.

Supporting cruelty-free/environmentally safe products is a type of ethical investment. The greater the demand for cruelty-free products, the more pressure we place on the other companies to discontinue animal testing. By buying products which are not tested on animals, the consumer helps to keep them on the market and bring the prices down.

Of course, the cruelty-free companies will benefit from increased consumer demand for their products, but all of them are supporting, often at the expense of higher profits for themselves, the ethic of not cruelly testing on animals or using animal ingredients in their products. Many of them also directly support the animal liberation/welfare/rights movement by sponsorships and donations. □

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