



# **taking flight: the rapid growth of ethical consumerism**

*The Ethical Purchasing Index 2001*

**New Economics Foundation  
report for  
The Co-operative Bank**

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## Ethical Purchasing Index 2001

### Executive Summary

#### ***Headline results***

- ❖ Ethical market share has grown 15% -- the 2001 EPI now stands at 115<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ The value of ethical consumer purchases in selected sectors grew 18.2% between 1999 and 2000 -- from £4.8 billion to £5.7 billion.
- ❖ This compares with a total market growth in the same sectors of only 2.8% -- ethical purchasing is growing more than six times faster than the overall market
- ❖ Ethical purchases now have a market share of 1.6%, up from 1.3% in 1999, the baseline year
- ❖ Ethical investments and banking, which have not been included in the EPI, account for an additional £7.8 billion of ethical activity – growing at a rate of 20% per year
- ❖ Total ethical activity, with banking and investments amounts to £13.4bn in 2000, a growth of 19% from 1999

<sup>1</sup> the EPI is calculated using 1999 as the baseline year, with a score of 100 – the 2001 index measures growth from 1999 – 2000

The New Economics Foundation, in partnership with The Co-operative Bank, has established the first annual Ethical Purchasing Index (EPI). NEF measured the value of ethical purchases in a selected basket of goods and the total market in the same categories, comprising 7 key categories of consumer expenditure.

The findings of the first year demonstrate real consumer power. They provide firm evidence that ethical consumers have a great deal of influence over the products they buy, translating into a solid impact on market share in the measured areas. The ethical marketplace, from food to green energy, saw a substantial growth over the baseline year, of 15 points.

While there were challenges in establishing an EPI, it nonetheless offers a framework for understanding the value of the ethical marketplace for business, while providing consumers with an assurance that the purchases they make can in fact make a



difference. It also demonstrates an overall picture: that ethical business generates more value to the UK economy than its relevant counterparts.

Ethical consumerism is only just beginning to take flight. But its future path has tremendous potential, given the rapid growth to date. Key events will of course have an impact on future calculations of the index – most importantly an impending economic recession following the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Other crises, such as Foot and Mouth disease will only begin to show their impact on the ethical marketplace in next year's data. It is possible, however, that these crises may serve to reinforce the impact of the ethical consumer on the marketplace, and the growth of the ethical purchasing index itself.

Coupled with an understanding of contextual events and consumer behaviour, the EPI can be a powerful tool in galvanising the development of appropriate support in this area – from providing better services to ethical businesses, to implementing government policies and programmes which can ensure their continued annual growth. One hopes that in 20 years time, the EPI will not be needed – in the meantime, it is an important first step in analysing and understanding the dynamics of the ethical marketplace and its impact over time.



## I. Introduction

Last year's ground breaking report from The Co-operative Bank, "Who are the Ethical Consumers?"<sup>i</sup> sought to convey the true impact of consumer power in the ethical marketplace. It established that consumer power was indeed significant, with many ethical products surpassing the 1% market niche and some capturing as much a 5% of the relevant market. The report was the first in the UK that attempted to track whether or not consumers have an influence on the ways in which companies supply the marketplace. It found that not only were consumers concerned, they were also actively engaged – and regularly rewarded those companies who produced their goods in more socially and environmentally-friendly ways.

As a result of the success of the report, The Co-operative Bank committed itself to developing an index to measure the health of the ethical marketplace at regular intervals. In order to achieve this, the bank aimed to "create a robust and meaningful index based on the value of sales of ethical goods and services that would provide a hard measure of ethical consumer behaviour that could be tracked over time."

This report is the outcome of such a challenge, undertaken by the New Economics Foundation. It describes the process of developing the first annual Ethical Purchasing Index (EPI), including the methodology, challenges, and initial results. NEF monitored trends in sales of a basket of green and ethical goods and services in 15 consumer areas, covering 7 components of the retail price index.

In summary, the report includes:

- i. A descriptive overview of the methodology of the EPI and a discussion of the key challenges and dilemmas that have emerged in creating such an index;
- ii. A summary of the findings of the first annual EPI;
- iii. A review of trends that have impacted and will continue to have an impact on the future ethical marketplace.

It is hoped that the development of the EPI will enable business, consumers, NGOs and government to understand the dynamics of the growing trend towards consumer



awareness about the products we regularly purchase and consume. In so doing, it can provide an incentive for stakeholders, including customers and shareholders, to be more active and ensure that those businesses that do respond in an ethical way are rewarded with loyalty and increased market share; while those who fail to respond to consumer concerns are not part of our long-term future.

## **II. Developing an EPI: *not as easy as it seems....***

Deciding how to put together an ethical purchasing index is a highly subjective task. When NEF and The Co-operative Bank embarked down this road, we thought the ride would be fairly smooth. But this was not to be the case. Ongoing tensions emerged, such as how to define an ethical purchase – there were a range of viewpoints to be taken into account and a consensus was not always possible. Once defined, what type of information would we measure? Finding reliable sources of data proved one of the most problematic challenges, while determining the overall market share was a further test of the various trade associations and National Statistics office.

And while the outcome of the first attempt has been robust, the result is by no means fool-proof. There are areas where, if data were available in a consistent format, we would have had a more complete picture – environmentally-friendly transport, for example.

The EPI does, however, capture the essence and vibrancy of the ethical marketplace, in keeping with the original goals. Over time, it is expected that the methodology of the EPI can be reinforced to ensure that it provides as accurate a picture as possible of consumer purchases in the relevant areas.

### ***What is an ethical purchase?***

First and foremost, it was necessary to define what comprised an ethical purchase. It is not always easy to determine consumer reasons for buying a product; someone might choose to use public transport, for example, as they believe it to be more environmentally friendly – others might choose it simply because it's the easiest way to get to work. And when someone chooses a product that they feel is more ethical, is it



*really* an ethical choice? Quorn products, for example, which many people consume as an ethical alternative to meat is often made using eggs from battery-farmed chickens.<sup>ii</sup>

After consulting with a number of key organisations and individuals, it was agreed that for the purposes of the index, an ethical purchase would be defined as a product that:

- a) is aligned to a particular ethical issue – human rights, animal welfare, or the environment.<sup>iii</sup>
- b) gives consumers a choice between one product and an ethical alternative.
- c) reflects, to the extent possible, personal or individual choice, rather than a corporate decision. Recycled paper, for example, was primarily purchased by the corporate sector and thus not included in the index.

### ***What's in the basket?***

We aimed to capture as much as we could of the ethical marketplace that individuals or households would normally consume. A starting point was the Retail Price Index, which includes 5 key categories of consumer expenditure: these include food, alcohol and tobacco, travel and leisure, housing and general household expenditure, as well as personal expenditure.

While this provided a good starting point – and we aimed to include as many of the RPI categories as possible - there were some obvious weaknesses to this approach. Alcohol and tobacco were not readily seen as an ethical purchase, and the RPI excluded expenditure on charity donations, which, for the purposes of the EPI were included.

The RPI also excluded investments. Ethical Investment, or Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) is becoming one of the fastest growing areas for ethical purchasing. While the final EPI does not include ethical banking and investment, we have nonetheless measured these areas as part of the overall picture.

What was ultimately included in the basket depended, in part, on the data available. In some cases, trade associations or relevant organisations didn't collect information on sales in the way that was required for the index; in other cases, information was



considered to be "market-sensitive" – especially the sales data of smaller, privately-owned companies. In an area such as travel, it was simply too difficult to define what an ethical purchase might be.

Eventually, the ethical purchasing "basket" included the following:

1. **Food:** includes free range and freedom food eggs, organic food, vegetarian meat alternatives<sup>iv</sup> and fair trade sales;
2. **Fuel and Light:** green energy sales
3. **Housing:** annual repayments to green mortgages
4. **Household Goods:** Forest Stewardship council sales; eco-labelled household appliances and cleaning products marketed as environmentally friendly
5. **Personal Items:** cosmetics and toiletries not tested on animals
6. **Transport:** annual grant value to LPG vehicles; memberships to ETA
7. **Subscriptions:** annual voluntary income to UK top 500 charities, including charity shop sales

Ethical Investment and financial services have also been measured, including the value of ethical ISAs, Unit Trusts, and deposits on account to ethical banks.

### ***Calculating the Index: the challenges of data collection***

We aimed to gather two key pieces of information:

**a) Annual sales for 1999 and 2000.** The first year's figures create a baseline point for the index – the second year enables us to track changes, both in actual sales volume of the product itself; and in terms of the potential growth (or decrease) in market share.

Our primary goal was to find an individual organisation that could provide data on behalf of its members. However, there were few obvious organisations that collected information in a systematic way. While the Soil Association and Fair Trade associations gathered relevant data in their respective areas; there was not one organisation that collected information on the cosmetics industry or environmentally-friendly cleaning products. Other areas of difficulty included the category of transport – there was no



single source of information on the value of electric car vehicle sales. This information was therefore ultimately excluded. In some instances, it was necessary to go to individual companies – however, the information was occasionally considered to be market-sensitive and was withheld. Annex 2 provides a description of problem areas and recommendations for a way forward.

**b) Total market sales of the relevant market.** We aimed to use the most relevant comparator of the market to demonstrate market share of each category of items.

In some cases, there was not always a direct full market comparison. Charity contributions and vegetarian food sales were an obvious challenge. Is vegetarian food a market share of total meat sales, for example? In the case of charity contributions, we determined that the relevant "market" was the total "other spend" after all regular goods, as defined by the National Statistics Office. Nonetheless, although the decision of what to use for the full market was subjective, the data is consistent and reliable – and can be tracked year-on-year.

**Table 1**  
**Total Market Sales – Data Sources**

<b>Food</b>	British Egg Information Service: total egg sales, Geest plc: total fresh meat and poultry sales, Office of National Statistics: total sales of coffee, tea, Honey Association: total honey sales, British Confectioners Association: total chocolate sales, Fair Trade Foundation: total banana sales
<b>Fuel &amp; Light</b>	Department of Trade and Industry: total domestic expenditure on energy
<b>Housing</b>	Bank of England: total annual UK mortgage repayments
<b>Household Goods</b>	Office of National Statistics: total sales cleaning products and household appliances, at current prices, WWF: total sales wood and timber products
<b>Personal Items</b>	Office of National Statistics: total sales cosmetics and toiletries, current prices
<b>Transport</b>	Office for national Statistics: final household expenditure on vehicles
<b>Charity purchases</b>	Office for National Statistics: final household expenditure on "other" goods and services as a proxy for discretionary income



### ***What did we calculate?***

1. Total sales in each category – what is the annual value of ethical purchases, in each category?
2. Growth in sales from year to year, by category – how much growth is there within each category, in total sales?
3. Market share in each category – how much of the market does the relevant ethical product(s) capture?
4. Market share growth, by category – how much is the product(s) growing, in proportion to the overall market in each category?
5. Total ethical purchases, annually
6. Total ethical market share, annually
7. Total market share growth in all categories between 1999 and 2000
8. Average growth overall, across the categories

### ***Weighting the Index***

It was eventually concluded that the EPI should remain simple – and be represented simply as growth in market share of the total basket. This enables transparency and ease of calculation in future years. It further provides an advantage in that we can easily add items to the basket, using previous years' data if it becomes available.

By determining total market share of all items in the basket – rather than an average growth figure (which resulted in a far higher number) -- we in effect provided an indirect weighting for the index, giving all products equal importance in the result. Therefore, where a product only had a small market share, its growth within the market was the relevant component of the index.

### ***III. The Findings – trends in the ethical marketplace***

The main findings of the index show that the ethical market share within the measured areas have grown at a rate of 15% -- meaning the EPI stands at 115 points for 2001<sup>1</sup>. Overall share of the ethical marketplace has grown from 1.35% to 1.55%, with some



products, such as Green Energy and Forest Stewardship Council wood products growing at exceptionally high rates – 70% and 90% respectively. The full findings are presented in Annex 1.

### ***Rising Stars***

The "rising stars" in the ethical marketplace included:

- Ethical food, which grew at an overall rate of 24%. Ethical food may have already broken through the 2% market share barrier (it was at 1.8% in 2000). Some areas, such as Fair Trade chocolate, banana and honey have increased five-fold, aided in part, by the introduction of Comic Relief's "Dubble" chocolate bar last year, which has sold five bars/minute since its launch in October 2000. The Day Chocolate Company itself, which produces some of the Fair Trade chocolate bars on the market, doubled its turnover between 1999 and 2000.<sup>v</sup>
- Green energy, while still with a very modest market share, has seen explosive growth of almost 70%.
- Household goods, with an overall growth in market share of 50% and a sales volume growth of 43%. Forest Stewardship Council products are probably the biggest success story in this area, having seen a growth of 90% from 1999 to 2000. Overall, the basket of goods in this area had the largest market share in 2000 of 5.4%.
- Ethical banking and investment has grown at a consistent rate of almost 20% per year; most major investment funds now offer an "ethical" option.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2001 index is measured using growth figures between 1999 and 2000.

**Table 2 – Index results 2001**  
**Market Share growth 1999 – 2000**

	Market Share 1999	Market Share 2000	Market share – growth	EPI Index 2001 (1999=100)
<b>Food</b>	1.4%	1.8%	24%	124
<b>Fuel &amp; Light</b>	0.03%	0.04%	69%	169
<b>Housing</b>	0.01%	0.01%	-1%	99
<b>Household Goods</b>	3.6%	5.4%	50%	150
<b>Personal Items</b>	3.5%	3.6%	2%	102
<b>Transport</b>	0.03%	0.04%	46%	146
<b>Charity</b>	2.0%	2.0%	3%	103
<b>Total purchases</b>	<b>1.35%</b>	<b>1.55%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>115</b>

Growth in actual sales value of these products has been at a rate of over 18% overall. The value of the ethical marketplace, for consumer goods stood at almost £5.7 billion up from £4.8 billion the previous year. When we add in the value of ethical banking and investment activity we find that the ethical market for goods and services was worth an estimated £13.4 billion at the end of 2000.

In terms of consumer impact on the ethical marketplace, the total market growth in the relevant areas was only 2.8% - equivalent to GDP growth over the same period. Thus ethical purchasing outstrips growth with "non-ethical" counterparts by more than six times.

**Table 3 – Sales Volume of the Ethical Market**

		Ethical purchases 1999	Ethical purchases 2000	%Growth 1999-2000
<b>Food</b>	Basket of goods	1,022,320,000	1,288,750,000	26%
<b>Fuel &amp; Light</b>	Green Energy	3,500,000	6,100,000	74%
<b>Housing</b>	Green Mortgage repayments	4,333,000	4,497,000	4%
<b>Household Goods</b>	Basket of goods	866,019,486	1,241,327,630	43%
<b>Personal Items</b>	Cosmetics and toiletries not tested on animals	316,439,785	341,506,836	8%
<b>Transport</b>	Environmentally-friendly transport	8,120,801	11,400,564	40%
<b>Charity</b>	Voluntary income to charities (incl. Charity shops)	2,570,000,000	2,764,000,000	8%
<b>Total purchases</b>	<b>Total purchases</b>	<b>4,790,733,072</b>	<b>5,657,582,030</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Investment</b>	Ethical investment	<b>2,872,451,000</b>	<b>3,702,174,000</b>	<b>29%</b>
	Ethical banking	<b>3,594,004,148</b>	<b>4,070,205,000</b>	<b>13%</b>
	<b>Total banking &amp; investment</b>	<b>6,466,455,148</b>	<b>7,772,379,000</b>	<b>20%</b>
	<b>Total purchases plus investments</b>	<b>11,257,188,220</b>	<b>13,429,961,030</b>	<b>19%</b>

### **Room to Grow**

A number of areas demonstrated only modest growth. Charitable giving, as a percentage of market share, grew at a rate of only 3%, while the market share of spending on ethical personal items like cruelty-free cosmetics grew at rate of just 2%.

In spite of the fact some areas demonstrated only modest growth, there is still considerable room to grow, particularly for products that have yet to emerge on the consumer radar screen. Green Mortgages are a new and growing entrant to the ethical marketplace, and can be expected to be a more prominent option in the coming period.

Green energy, as one of the fastest growing areas still occupies a small portion of the potential market, less than half a percentage point. Yet with more and more incentives being offered for consumers and business alike in this area, next year's growth may exceed this year's index results.



### ***Ones to watch***

This year's EPI is by no means inclusive of all ethical products on the market. Areas for future development include ethical baby products, such as cotton nappies, up and coming labelling schemes, including the Marine Stewardship Council and Rugmark, which has just established its own licensing office in the UK. The UK rug and carpet market, for example, represents a turnover of £100 million/year; Rugmark rugs, however, are currently only offered by a limited number of suppliers, with only 2 UK-based licensees.<sup>vi</sup>

Further areas for development include a Travel and Tourism category: a considerable portion of household spend.<sup>vii</sup> Is there an "ethical tourism" choice that can be defined and included in the index? NEF will be working with Tourism Concern to determine if this is possible.

## **IV. Pressures from the outside world: *impacts on the ethical consumer***

### ***Continuing crises in the food industry***

While the mid-1990's saw the impacts of BSE on the British Beef industry, the new millennium has witnessed the horrific effects of foot and mouth disease. Although foot and mouth in no way affects our own health, it has still resulted in a heightened awareness of food production and we now have an unprecedented public concern over food quality. The big winners from these crises are alternative meat products and the organics business.

A secondary impact of the growth has been an increasing dependence on imported organic goods: 75% of organic food is now imported from overseas, up 5% from 1999, according to the Soil Association<sup>viii</sup>. The Soil Association has been calling on the government to make sure there are better incentives for farmers who want to convert; and the New Economics Foundation has recently called for an Organics Tax Credit to be established to help local suppliers.



### ***Government enablers***

The government does have an enabling role in promoting ethical business. Last year's pension legislation, which required pension funds to declare whether or not their investments were chosen on an "ethical" basis had a trickle-down effect and means that many businesses are now scrambling to define what ethics really means in order to respond to the legislation. This type of legislation, not involving regulatory red-tape has encouraged there to be more ethical investment choices on the market than ever before.

The UK government has also provided an increasing number of grants for automobile conversion to Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) – a boost for both consumers and business.

Lastly, the government has set a target of seeing 10% of energy in the UK derived from Green Energy sources by the end of the decade. Unfortunately, perverse incentives (cheaper tariffs for electricity) mean that more energy is consumed; and the National Grid is currently shutting down some green energy sources, providing less, rather than more, choice.<sup>ix</sup> The government could choose to introduce additional enabling legislation, such as tax incentives, to further the growth of green energy rather than indirectly supporting its decline.

### ***Global Protests***

The last few years have seen the rise of the anti-globalisation movement and greater numbers of international protests against corporate power. Naomi Klein's "No Logo" highlighted the negative impact that big brands have on people around the globe, and on our own day-to-day lives. The anti-globalisation movement continues to lack a consistent message, and few solutions have emerged from the protests. They are nonetheless symptomatic of the current unease with the global system and have served to further heighten consumer awareness about the products they might normally buy. The Future Foundation reports that 60% of consumers are willing to boycott manufacturers whose products contribute to pollution,<sup>x</sup> for example. Global protests are expected to continue into this decade and businesses are having to consider the



impacts, not simply in terms of altering their marketing tactics but by looking more closely at how they produce their goods. At the same time, they have lost a considerable amount of consumer trust, such that new ethical products not from traditional brands are more likely to be the winners.

### ***Economic Recession, global terrorism and the ethical consumer***

After 5 years of record-breaking growth, this year has seen the first signs of an economic slow-down; and with Britain's entry into the global war on terrorism, economists are now predicting a full-on recession, in spite of repeated cuts in interest rates.

But with this war comes an unlikely ally for the ethical consumer: rising oil prices may bring about more demand for alternative fuel sources; and there is a growing recognition that the underlying causes of terrorism is related to global inequality and globalised capitalism.

A recent forum at Harvard University<sup>xi</sup>, proposed that corporate responsibility programmes may serve to bridge the gap between have and have-not nations, as one way to reduce terrorism. According to one commentator, US business students are being forced to consider how their actions impact on society. Thus, a conversation about ethics now includes the discussion of whether it is right to dismiss workers following a national crisis – a far cry from the unbounded rationality of the market.

## **V. Conclusions**

The EPI has demonstrated without question that ethical business is indeed 'taking flight' and is regularly rewarded by consumers who are concerned about the environment, animal welfare, human and social rights. And while a number of hurdles were encountered in developing such a measure, it is an important step in gauging the impacts of consumers on the market, fostering a more ethical arena over the long-run.

The health of the ethical market will be influenced by a range of factors, from government intervention to international crises. Critical issues such as a global recession,



for example, may have a negative impact in the short-term. At the same time, consumers do have power, and we can still expect them to remain actively aware about the products they buy and the impact they have on society and on the environment.

Perhaps the most important message of the EPI is that there is still considerable room to grow; most of the products measured occupy a tiny portion of their relevant marketplace, with only a few items, such as household goods reaching a significant portion of market share. It is up to business to respond by providing accessible and affordable ethical alternatives for consumers; and for government ensure that incentives are in place to enable this to happen.

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<sup>i</sup> R. Cowe and Simon Williams, 2000

<sup>ii</sup> According to the Vegetarian Society

<sup>iii</sup> organic food was considered an ethical purchase for environmental reasons; many purchase organic foods for health and safety reasons, which we consider to be linked to environmental issues

<sup>iv</sup> includes only vegetarian meat alternatives as approved by the Vegetarian Society. These products are only produced using free-range eggs.

<sup>v</sup> Day Chocolate Company, 2001

<sup>vi</sup> Rugmark, UK, October 2001.

<sup>vii</sup> The Future Foundation estimates that approx. 18% of household expenditure is on travel.

<sup>viii</sup> [www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org)

<sup>ix</sup> BBC, Radio 4, 17 Oct 01

<sup>x</sup> Nvision Survey 2000

<sup>xi</sup> FT; 8 Oct, pg. 22

## Ethical Purchasing Index

	Ethical purchases 1999	Ethical purchases 2000	%Growth 1999-2000	Total purchases 1999	Total purchases 2000	Market Share 1999	Market Share 2000	EPI index (1999=100)	
<b>Food</b>	Basket of goods	1,022,320,000	1,288,750,000	126%	71,970,000,000	73,043,000,000	1.42048%	1.76437%	124%
<b>Fuel &amp; Light</b>	Green Energy	3,500,000	6,100,000	174%	13,650,000,000	14,105,000,000	0.02564%	0.04325%	169%
<b>Housing</b>	Green Mortgage repayments	4,333,000	4,497,000	104%	77,097,000,000	80,742,000,000	0.00562%	0.00557%	99%
<b>Household Goods</b>	Basket of goods	866,019,486	1,241,327,630	143%	24,162,000,000	23,145,000,000	3.58422%	5.36326%	150%
	Cosmetics and toiletries not tested on animals	316,439,785	341,506,836	108%	8,997,000,000	9,556,000,000	3.51717%	3.57374%	102%
<b>Personal Items</b>	Environmentally-friendly transport	8,120,801	11,400,564	140%	29,209,000,000	28,055,000,000	0.02780%	0.04064%	146%
<b>Transport</b>	Voluntary income to charities (incl. Charity shops)	2,570,000,000	2,764,000,000	108%	129,832,000,000	136,124,000,000	1.97948%	2.03050%	103%
<b>Charity</b>	<b>Total purchases</b>	<b>4,790,733,072</b>	<b>5,657,582,030</b>	<b>118%</b>	<b>354,917,000,000</b>	<b>364,770,000,000</b>	<b>1.34982%</b>	<b>1.55100%</b>	<b>115%</b>
<b>Investment</b>	Ethical investment	2,872,451,000	3,702,174,000	129%					
	Ethical banking	3,594,004,148	4,070,205,000	113%					
<b>Total banking &amp; investment</b>		<b>6,466,455,148</b>	<b>7,772,379,000</b>	<b>120%</b>					
<b>Total purchases plus investments</b>		<b>11,257,188,220</b>	<b>13,429,961,030</b>	<b>119%</b>					