

# Case Studies

## Yom Iyun on Torah Consumer Ethics & Jewish Buyer Responsibilities

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Uri L'Tzedek is an Orthodox social justice organization guided by Torah values and dedicated to combating suffering and oppression. Through community based education, leadership development and action, Uri L'Tzedek creates discourse, inspires leaders, and empowers the Jewish community towards creating a more just world.

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The logo for The Center for Modern Torah Leadership features a stylized sun rising over a horizon. The sun is a semi-circle with a gradient from orange to red. The text 'The Center for Modern Torah Leadership' is centered over the sun in a serif font.

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# Case Studies

Case #1	
<p>The case for local food is several-fold: It tastes better, its proponents argue, and preserves species biodiversity. It shores up small-scale economies and communities in the face of globalization and cultural homogenization. It even, some of its advocates claim, protects against terrorism: a decentralized food system could limit the impact of a virus or other bio-agent introduced into the food supply.</p>	<p>One of the arguments most often heard, however, is about energy. And at a time of rising concern about climate change, the great distances that most of our food travels are a potent symbol of the system's profligacy and cost in greenhouse gases. For local-food activists, "food miles" have become a favored measure of environmental impact. Food activists in the US and especially in Western Europe have pushed to put the term on menus and grocery-store labels.</p>
<p>But a gathering body of evidence suggests that local food can sometimes consume more energy -- and produce more greenhouse gases -- than food imported from great distances. Moving food by train or ship is quite efficient, pound for pound, and transportation can often be a relatively small part of the total energy "footprint" of food compared with growing, packaging, or, for that matter, cooking it. A head of lettuce grown in Vermont may have less of an energy impact than one shipped up from Chile. But grow that Vermont lettuce late in the season in a heated greenhouse and its energy impact leapfrogs the imported option. So while local food may have its benefits, helping with climate change is not always one of them. "All things being equal, it's better if food only travels 10 miles," says Peter Tyedmers, an ecological economist at Nova Scotia's Dalhousie University. "Sometimes all things are equal; many times they aren't."</p>	
	
<p>Michael Pollan hastens to point out that eating locally is only part of a larger food ethic. The problem isn't merely, he argues, that we ship our lettuce across the country; the problem is that people living in New England, a place naturally unfriendly to large-scale lettuce production, feel entitled to eat lettuce in February. Before World War II, he points out, Americans ate locally and in season because they had no choice.</p>	
<p>From Drake Bennett, "The Localvore's Dilemma," <i>The Boston Globe</i> (22 July 2007), <a href="http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2007/07/22/the_localvores_dilemma/">http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2007/07/22/the_localvores_dilemma/</a>.</p>	
<p><u>Questions:</u>            How does this affect buying foods from the middle of the country or the west coast?            What about buying food from across sea, especially Israeli produce?            Is more important to support fair trade products that come from a distance or locally produced products that don't harm the environment from all of their travel?            Do you feel that we should support American products over foreign products? Why?</p>	

Case #2

The resources needed and pollution created to manufacture a hybrid could be worse than the overall cost of producing and running a non-hybrid

A recent article has been floating around started by CWA marketing detailing how GM's Hummer only cost about \$1.95 per mile to put on the road, while the Prius \$3.25 per mile. The idea is that building a Toyota Prius causes more environmental damage than a Hummer that it is on the road for three times longer than a Prius. It's assumed the Hummer will be around for over 300,000 miles and the Prius 100,000 miles.

Some other things to consider... the nickel in the batteries

Of course you have to figure out emissions and fuel cost. If the Prius uses four times less fuel (and drastically reduced carbon emissions), even if it lasts one third the time, it has less impact from emissions. And really, how many Hummers are on the road after 300,000 miles, after taking into account accidents and owners just not driving them 300,000 miles. How many



Hummers are parked while Prius' are running a daily commute.

The more you read about this comparison, the more confusing it gets. There are far better ecological choices than the Prius or the Hummer - like walking and riding your bike. It does, however, shed light on the environmental costs to be considered in vehicle production.

From Paul Kuehnel, "Unraveling the Hummer vs. Prius cost/pollution analysis," *Green Mesh* (25 March 2007), <http://www.yorkblog.com/greenmesh/2007/03/unraveling-the-hummer-vs-prius.html>.

Questions:

Although it may seem better for the environment based on one's usage of the Prius, does this outweigh the environmental costs going into it?

How high in your priorities of spending is environmental protection?

What percent of what you spend on products would you be willing to increase in order to buy with more social responsibility?

Case #3

Any look at the tag of an article of clothing will let you know if it is sweatshop made. The mention of any underdeveloped/developing country is an easy marker to spot for sweatshop labor. However, there are sweatshops everywhere in the world, including wealthier nations such as Japan and the U.S. Look for "union-made" mentions on labels. Unions ensure decent standards of work for employees. However you are unlikely to find the mention of unions on most major brands, so don't feel too frustrated when they aren't there. Unions are often

discouraged, put down (sometimes violently), and banned for garment workers by corporations as it interferes with the current labor practices. Overall, any garment found in the local shopping mall, department store, megastore, etc., is likely to be sweatshop made, so these are generally places to avoid when shopping with a conscience.

While a thrift store or Salvation Army find may be from a sweatshop company, the purchasing of it does not support that company any longer. .... After the first purchase, this product is essentially economically "dead" to the label. .... It is also more economically efficient to purchase such clothing at the lowered price, not just because it's easier



on your wallet either. Sweatshop-made clothing is very cheaply produced due to extremely inexpensive labor fees, the profit margin the corporations make is very large. The heavily discounted price you purchase the used clothing at is far closer to the actual worth of the garment than the inflated price originally allotted to it by the corporation.

Anti-Sweatshop Labor Companies are fairly easy to identify since one of their typical distinctions is that they are NOT sweatshop made. Finding this minority in the garment industry can be very frustrating. Outside of most large cities, it is unlikely you will find such a progressive label.



Companies such as American Apparel and Busted Tees are two youthful, cutting-edge clothing brands that are sweatshop free, very fashionable, and best of all, moderately priced. Though they are limited in full wardrobe (neither makes jeans for example), both are cult favorites for high quality tees. .... These brands are easily accessed via the internet and provide extensive online shopping. .... Needless to say, the choices are quite limited, and internet shopping is not everyone's cup of tea and/or privilege.

Few people have the time, energy, and convenience to purchase a fully sweatshop free wardrobe. Having an "All or Nothing" type attitude isn't the focus, being more aware and helping out in the small ways you can is! Scale back that mall shopping a bit, look at used clothing stores a bit more, and make an occasional purchase (if possible) at a non-sweatshop label you like. Going about an ordinary task, such as buying a new t-shirt, shouldn't have to send you on a guilt trip that you are helplessly supporting unjust sweatshop labor.

From Mieke Lindeman, "Practical Ways to Avoid Sweatshop Clothing," *GoogoBits.com* (10 June 2005), <http://www.googobits.com/articles/p0-491-practical-ways-to-avoid-sweatshop-clothing.html>.

Questions:

Sometimes, it can be just too much to bother about where one's clothes are coming, or is it? Is it hypocritical to not buy from 2 companies with sweatshop labor but to buy from the rest or is this a good start? Is child labor ever justifiable in your opinion?