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# Would Millennium Consumption Goals Help Rich Nations Reduce Their Eco-Impact?

 **Mat McDermott**  
[Business / Corporate Responsibility](#)  
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I'll assume you know what the [Millennium Development Goals](#) are and assume the same about [how the 'developed' world consumes natural resources](#) is grossly in excess of what is ecologically sustainable and equitably extendable to the planet's six, soon seven, billion people. The connection between them being, as the [Worldwatch Institute](#) suggests, ought we also have some Millennium Consumption Goals? Seems like a good idea to me. Here are the ones Worldwatch suggests we start with:

- 1. Halve obesity and overweight rates by 2020** (we're starting the MCGs later than the MDGs). This will reduce mortality, morbidity, and economic costs, as well as reduce ecological pressures driven by overconsumption of food.
- 2. Halve the work week from the current 40+ hours per week to 20 hours per week.** This will better distribute jobs, wealth,

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promote healthier living, and reduce economic activity, which is essential in our ecologically taxed world. For a good paper on this topic, read New Economic Foundation's excellent report [21 Hours](#).

[TH note: And [my take on that same report](#).]

3. **Better distribute wealth by raising taxes on the wealthiest members of society.** That one will get me in trouble with the American Tea Party but let's dust off the idea of [Noblesse Oblige](#): To those given much, much is expected in return. The days of extreme wealth spent on luxurious living must draw to a close. The Earth can't handle it any longer.
4. **Double the rate of use of non-motorized transport (bikes, walking, etc.).** Increasing these forms of transport will improve health, reduce fossil fuel and material use, and make for safer cities.
5. **Guarantee access to health care for all.** Yes, another minefield in the USA, but standard procedure in most industrial countries so that'll be an easy goal for most countries to achieve.

The goal for Worldwatch is to add three more to that list. Some already suggested in the comments there are creating new measures for assessing the economy (replacing or supplementing GDP with the Genuine Progress Indicator or similar), internalizing externalized environmental and social costs into consumer prices, halving the amount of meat consumed, halving the number of coal-fired power plants, and more.

All good suggestions, if not all articulated in the MCG/MDGs format of an actual target. Here are two of mine:

**Double the amount of food produced organically.** This will reduce fossil fuel, chemical fertilizer and pesticide usage, as well as reduce runoff which is polluting waterways and causing massive ocean dead zones.

**Halve household electricity usage.** Through a combination of energy conservation, energy efficiency, and better design, reduce household electricity usage by half. If your electricity comes from fossil fuels this would reduce pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and indirectly increase energy independence. If your electricity is generated from renewable energy, it reduces the amount of energy that needs to be generated and the amount of land needed for wind farms, solar power plants, hydropower, biofuels, etc--and the amount of time and money needed to replace all fossil fuels with renewables.

So what do TreeHugger readers think? What would you add to the Worldwatch list?

#### More on Resource Consumption:

[Cult of Consumerism at Root of Planet's Environmental Degradation & Destruction](#)

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Ruben • a year ago

How about live within the renewable capacity of our one planet?

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AnthonyC • a year ago • parent

Because while laudable, that isn't an actionable goal. It doesn't provide any guidance, any steps we should take.

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Terry31415926 • a year ago

Considering how anemic personal powered transport is in the US, I think a reasonable goal should be far higher than just doubling the current rates. Even in Minneapolis (US bike capital in 2009!), we have a long ways to go.

Regarding additional goals, I think continuing the trend of reducing our living spaces would be a good, measurable goal. There's much for us to explore about living well in less space. This can be accomplished in two ways--moving/staying in smaller living spaces and living with more people under the roof (friends, compatible strangers, relatives, etc).

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Terry31415926 • a year ago • parent

Ah, my second point is a bit vague. I mean, reduce our average square footage that we live (or work) in.

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tiddas • a year ago

This one's a no brainer. Birth control, women's rights, access to abortion. Don't give birth to unwanted children.

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Steven • a year ago

As much as I would love to see the Millennium Consumption Goals implemented and achieved, you very conveniently overlook the fact that there is an "elephant in your living room" standing between you and your ideals. That 'elephant' is the human condition. Go to [www.humancondition.com](http://www.humancondition.com) for a safe, compassionate solution to YOUR problem as much as it is mine and every other member of the 6

SOON TO BE / BILLION.

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Marvel • a year ago

BEST ideas ever. Life would be immensely better... but how to make these suggestions a reality? I can change me. Can you change you?

0 ^ | | v • Reply • Share >



AnthonyC • a year ago

I have to object to reducing the workweek to 20 hours by 2020. Someday that will make sense- but right now world GDP is still less than \$10k per person, and I fail to see how reducing economic activity can help that.

Also, a 20 hour week would never work for schools- you simply can't cram learning into that little time- and we need people to have more education, not less. Having students work more than either their parents or their teachers would be a tricky situation.

Plus, as more of the world's countries' populations continue aging, a larger and larger fraction of people will (want to) be retired, living off some combination of taxes, pensions, and investment income. They'll need every ounce of productivity they can get from the people who are actually working.

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Rckoegel • a year ago • parent

schools + 20 hour work week = more teachers, more individually focused learning for student (higher quality and more efficiency)... it can be done.

there's this silly idea still floating around that students need repetition and more repetition, it's not true... teaching kids when they're interested and focused greatly increases their information retention.

what we do now is: waste a lot of their time and our money, and therefor our time and a good portion of our lives.

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AnthonyC • a year ago • parent

Dividing the school week among more teachers might work. And I agree that school often focuses too much on meaningless repetition. But that's mostly a question about homework; once you get past about 6th grade, you almost never spend class time on that sort of thing. Except, sometimes, math (where it really \*is\* important to see a few examples done, but perhaps not as many as some teachers do) and English (where even in some high school, some teachers make students read aloud in class).

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