

# **„National Activities towards Changing Consumption and Production Pattern“**

## **NGO Country Report USA**

Prepared by Jeffrey Barber and Veena Ramani  
Integrative Strategies Forum

### *1. Is there a National Consultation towards Sustainable Consumption and Production Pattern?*

There was a national consultation addressing consumption and population, as part of the larger national consultation on sustainable development. However, the results and recommendations of this process have subsequently been ignored by the current Administration and congress. Currently, the main consultation process taking place generally addressing national SPAC strategy have been by civil society, such as the North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance.

### *2. How was it initiated?*

Over a decade ago, in July 1994, the President's Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD) created the Population and Consumption Task Force (PCTF).

### *3. Does it have a structure?*

PCSD members of the Task Force included high level representatives of the federal government, NGOs, business and indigenous peoples. This Task Force was one among several others reporting to the overall Council and President. The Task Forces, in turn, consisted of a main body and several working groups, drawing upon knowledgeable groups and individuals from different sectors and parts of the country. The working groups met on their own and reported to the Task Force.

### *4. Which goals were identified?*

The Population and Consumption Task Force goal on consumption was to: "Reduce the amount of primary materials (including energy) used in the U.S. economy by constantly and significantly improving the efficiency of materials use in extraction, production and manufacturing, while simultaneously reducing the environmental risks associated with consumption of materials and the generation of wastes."

Recommendations focused on: (1) shifting taxes, (2) reducing inefficient and environmentally harmful subsidies, (3) environmental labeling and certification, (4) government procurement, (5) public education and development of a stewardship ethic, (6) production, reuse, and recycling of packaging materials, (7) volume-based garbage fees, (8) disposal of household toxics, and (9) efficient and clean technologies. Additional policy recommendations were made by Task Forces on Energy and Transportation, Eco-efficiency, and other relevant areas.

In 1999, the PCSD held its last official public meeting in Detroit. The following year, the Bush Administration came to power with a somewhat different set of policy priorities, which did *not* include sustainable production and consumption. In general, participation by the national US government in the international dialogue regarding the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production remains passive.<sup>1</sup> Despite a history of progressive laws and innovations, the US government has an internationally poor public image on consumption

and production. In addition to the previous President Bush's remarks that "the American lifestyle is not up for negotiation,"<sup>2</sup> the current president is well known for his post-9/11 remarks equating shopping with patriotism.<sup>3</sup> As to national or regional consultations on sustainable consumption policy, the Administration continues to show little interest. By contrast, regional and national consultations on the 10-year framework have already taken place in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.

*5. Are there other national activities that can be seen as part of a Programm towards Sustainable Consumption and Production?*

In contrast to the government's passivity, civil society and parts of the business community continue to take notable steps forward in promoting SPAC. During the past five years, the Citizens Network for Sustainable Development, in conjunction with the UNEP Regional Office of North America, has organized a number of meetings to discuss the 10 year framework.<sup>4</sup> In January 2004, the **North American Sustainable Consumption Alliance (NASCA)** and Worldwatch Institute organized a national experts workshop on priorities for consumption strategy. This meeting, however, was not a multistakeholder meeting but primarily for US NGOs and foundations.

In 2005, another workshop is planned, organized by Integrative Strategies Forum and NASCA. This workshop will involve members of government, NGOs, business and academic representatives to explore potential national and regional strategic approaches to achieve sustainable production and consumption in North America. One of the objectives of this workshop is to outline a collaborative national and regional approach to promoting SPAC initiatives over the next decade, such as those identified in NASCA's 2003 survey and online database of SPAC initiatives in North America. These include the initiatives addressing the five strategic elements identified at the 2004 Ostend meeting.

*6. Key elements dealt with:*

	Ecological fiscal reform	Clean and eco-effective production	Education for sustainable consumption and production	Corporate responsibility and accountability	Information and public participation
Action made*	Some but insufficient efforts on subsidies, procurement.	Where this is good for business, the US EPA has actively promoted clean production, especially through voluntary initiatives.		The SRI movement within the US is growing, although not actively supported by the government.	Community Right to Know Act put in place after Bhopal incident, however there is a current trend towards rolling back these rights, especially in the name of security.
Action mentioned*	Highlighted more in PCSD report, but many of these recommendations have since been ignored.		Mentioned in the PCSD report, but since then ignored.	In contrast to mentions of accountability in the financial sector, voluntary approaches have been promoted over regulations and enforcement.	
Generally addressed					
Not part of the process	Policy of major overall tax cuts undermine efforts to use this as ecological incentive.		Not viewed as a priority in US education policy.	Tendency has been towards greater corporate rights vs. greater accountability.	US has been rather unsupportive of the Aarhus process.

## 1. Ecological fiscal reform

*Environmental Tax Shifting:* The [Center for a Sustainable Economy](#) in its 1998 report "[Harnessing the Tax Code for Environmental Protection: A survey of State Initiatives](#)" applauds the rapid growth of ecological tax reform at the State level in the US. "In 1970 environmentally motivated tax provisions were virtually unknown at the state level. Today only five states have fewer than five such provisions and 21 states have 10 or more. Our survey has identified 462 such provisions in place as of 1996."

Groups like the [Taxpayers for Common Sense](#) monitor the actions of legislators in the Federal and State governments in order to cut wasteful government spending and subsidies in order to achieve a responsible and efficient government. Others like the [Union of Concerned Scientists](#) advocate for the inclusion and preservation of federal tax credits for environmental goals<sup>5</sup>. Various regional networks like [Vermont Fair Tax Coalition](#) and the [Pennsylvania Fair Tax Coalition](#) have been working to "promote tax policy reforms that create incentives for environmental protection" on a State level.

*Subsidy Reform:* The US government is leading the international movement to that stronger global trade rules governing subsidies for the fisheries industry, to remedy the economic and environmental damage from over-fishing<sup>6</sup>. However, the issues that continue to catch the public eye is the record of the US government in providing unsustainable subsidies – particularly in the agricultural and energy sectors. Since 1994, the [Green Scissors Campaign](#), a coalition of civil society organizations, has been working with Congress and the Administration to end environmentally harmful and wasteful spending and claims to have helped cut more the \$26 billion in environmental wasteful programs from the federal budget<sup>7</sup>. The [Environment Working Group](#) maintains a [Farm Subsidy database](#) to track federal payouts to the agricultural sector since 1995.

*Procurement:* In the past years, the US government has issued a number of regulations to ensure green government procurement including [Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines](#), [EPA's environmentally preferable purchasing program](#), the [Resource Conservation and Recovery Act](#) and the [Executive Order 13101 \(Greening the Government through waste prevention, recycling and federal acquisition\)](#). Compliance in federal agencies with buy-recycled laws has greatly improved over the years<sup>8</sup>. Civil society groups are also very active in advocating for sustainable institutional procurement. Groups like [Forest Ethics](#) and [Dogwood Alliance](#) have successfully pressured retailers like Staples Inc to move towards environmentally preferable paper sales<sup>9</sup>.

## 2. Clean and eco-effective production

The PCSD also convened a Task Force on Eco-efficiency, whose recommendations were also not implemented by the federal government. Yet, the U.S. government can be credited with a number of programs to improve material and energy efficiency. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency administers the [Design for the environment program](#), which encourages voluntary eco-efficiency efforts.

The [EPA](#) and other agencies (like the [Council on Environmental Quality](#), the [Office of the Federal Environmental Executive](#), the [Department of Energy](#) etc) have instituted plans and programs to encourage sustainability. [Product Policy Project](#) critiques the lack of coherence in these efforts "US EPA's '[Sustainability Portal](#)' website, which was only launched in March 2004, reads like a laundry list of disconnected projects. While EPA is sponsoring valuable basic research on green chemistry, industrial ecology and materials flows/sustainable materials

management, there is no coherent plan or strategy connecting the dots.”<sup>10</sup> In the 1970s, these programs were supported by anti pollution legislations like the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. However, organizations like [NRDC](#) document a rollback of environmental safeguards. A 2004 report lists more than 150 environmentally destructive policy actions over the past year, describing an historic assault on the nation's environmental safeguards that have only accelerated in recent years<sup>11</sup>.

State and local governments continue to make strides clean production and eco efficiency. One example is the combined [climate change initiative of the three West Coast states](#) of Oregon, Washington and California to promote clean energy efficiency -- resolutely in opposition to current federal policy on climate change. Maine and California have passed major electronic waste bills<sup>12</sup>.

Civil society organizations and business continue to push for progressive legislations and encourage sustainable technologies. [Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition](#) is spearheading a vibrant movement around the need for Extended Producer Responsibility laws in the US. The [Sustainable Products Purchasers Coalition](#) has been formed to leverage its members' aggregate purchasing power to accelerate industry's adoption of the use of LCA tools. The [Grassroots Recycling Network](#) is pushing a holistic design principle called [Zero Waste](#) that seeks to redesign the way resources and materials flow through society by eliminating subsidies for raw material extraction and waste disposal, and holding producers responsible for their products and packaging 'from cradle to cradle.'

### **3. Education for SPAC**

The Federal Government has not taken much initiative in popularizing and raising awareness for sustainable production and consumption in the US. However, local governments are beginning to fill this gap with the help of civil society. [Redefining Progress](#) has worked with various local governments including Sonoma County, Santa Monica and Sarasota to calculate the region's Ecological Footprint, thereby raising awareness about the impacts of the inhabitants' consumption habits and the need to reduce the same.

Also of note are the organizations and programs that encourage voluntary simplicity among Americans. [Center for a New American Dream's Turn the Tide](#) asks participants to take nine simple actions in their daily lives to save the environment. The [New Road Map Foundation's Simplicity Forum](#) aims to actively work towards changing both the culture and the policies that drive over-work and over-consumption. Youth groups like the [SustainUS](#) are also involved in raising awareness about sustainable consumption.

### **4. Corporate responsibility and accountability**

In 2002, responding to a year marred by corporate scandals, the US Senate passed two laws related to corporate accountability (1) [Corporate Fraud Accountability Act](#) 2002 and (2) Sarbanes – Oxley Act 2002. However, these legislations refer primarily to accounting practices, disclosures and protection of whistleblower rights. On the subject of international environmental and sustainability policy however, the performance of the government has been questioned. A report by [Corporate Accountability International](#) (formerly Infact) finds that the US has “increasingly distanced itself from the international community on issues of enormous global, environmental and humanitarian consequence” and links these positions to “corporate influence in the government”<sup>13</sup>.

## 5. Information and public participation

*Eco-labeling:* The U.S. Department of Energy-run [Energy Star](#) program helps businesses and individuals protect the environment through superior energy efficiency. There are many third party initiated eco-labelling schemes run by NGOs like [Consumers Union](#), [Greenseal](#) etc targeting non energy related issues like food, fair trade products etc.

*Participation and access to information:* Following the infamous Love Canal and Bhopal controversies, the federal government passed several laws ensuring “Community Right to Know” or rights of public access to local environmental information, the most important of which is the [Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act of 1986](#). The government has also taken a noteworthy step to ensure that relevant information is made available to the public through the establishment of the [Toxics Release Inventory](#). The Access Initiative report [Closing the Gap: Information, Participation and Justice in Decision Making for the Environment](#) gives the US a good record in implementing Principle 10 in its policies and practice. Organizations like the [Working Group on the Community Right to Know](#) are striving to educate Americans about their rights under the Right to Know, and are lobbying the government to broaden these rights.

### Conclusion

The United States federal government does not and currently indicates no intention of developing a centralized and integrated strategy for changing the country's unsustainable production and consumption patterns. Nevertheless, a number of policies and programs promoting sustainable production and consumption currently exist at federal, state and local levels. While these touch on the problem, despite the lack of an integrated policy framework, large gaps remain in both policy, targets, implementation, monitoring and assessment, ultimately resulting in significant growth of unsustainable consumption and production, resulting in increased pollution and waste, with harmful impacts on health, environment and communities.

In the absence of government leadership, the responsibility falls on civil society organizations to take the lead in this process. This report provides merely a sampling of the efforts and programs initiated by CSOs to supplement, complement and in some cases to supplant and substitute government efforts (or the lack thereof) in tacking unsustainable production and consumption patterns in the US.<sup>14</sup>

Currently, civil society organizations are working on various pieces of the SPAC puzzle, but not yet the most coordinated and politically effective manner. There are thousands of organizations and individuals are working through a range of initiatives and campaigns, many of which are also linked together in action and knowledge networks. However, there remains a need for these organizations and networks to come together and work strategically towards common goal and objectives for achieving sustainable production and consumption in the United States and beyond. In the January 2004 meeting organized by NASCA, assembled civil society representatives agreed upon the need for a common strategy and “meta-network.” Considering the continued impact of the production and consumption habits of the US on the world environment, and the government's greater emphasis on economic growth than sustainability, the need for civil society, progressive business and local authorities to move forward in this process is more urgent than ever.

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- <sup>1</sup> The Marrakech Process,  
<http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/sdissues/consumption/Marrakech/conprod10Y.htm>
- <sup>2</sup> Absent globally, acting locally, <http://www.simpleliving.net/news/archives.asp?id=276>
- <sup>3</sup> Shopping is patriotic, leaders say, <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines01/0929-04.htm>  
<http://www.saulandau.net/BusBook.htm>
- <sup>4</sup> For example, see <http://www.citnet.org/wg/spac/Oct01meetingreport.aspx>
- <sup>5</sup> Renewable Energy Tax Credit Saved Once Again, but Boom-Bust Cycle in Wind Industry Continues,  
[http://www.ucsusa.org/clean\\_energy/renewable\\_energy/page.cfm?pageID=121](http://www.ucsusa.org/clean_energy/renewable_energy/page.cfm?pageID=121)
- <sup>6</sup> US submits ideas in the WTO to reform harmful fisheries subsidies,  
[http://www.ustr.gov/Document\\_Library/Press\\_Releases/2003/March/U.S.\\_Submits\\_Ideas\\_in\\_WTO\\_to\\_Reform\\_Harmful\\_Fisheries\\_Subsidies.html](http://www.ustr.gov/Document_Library/Press_Releases/2003/March/U.S._Submits_Ideas_in_WTO_to_Reform_Harmful_Fisheries_Subsidies.html)
- <sup>7</sup> About Green Scissors, <http://www.greenscissors.org/about/index.htm>
- <sup>8</sup> Greening the Government: A report to the President on Federal Leadership and Progress,  
<http://www.gpp.org/greengovt.pdf>
- <sup>9</sup> Office Supply Superstore Staples Inc. Agrees to Historic Endangered Forest and Recycling Policy,  
<http://www.forestethics.org/html/eng/536.shtml>
- <sup>10</sup> Environmental Policy in Europe and the US: An NGO Perspective,  
<http://www.productpolicy.org/assets/resources/EnviroPolicyInEUandUS.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> Rewriting the rules: The Bush Government's Assault on the Environment,  
<http://www.nrdc.org/legislation/rollbacks/rr2004.pdf>
- <sup>12</sup> EPR Policies in the US and Canada: History and Status,  
<http://www.productpolicy.org/assets/IPPchapter.pdf>
- <sup>13</sup> Cowboy Diplomacy: How the US Undermines International Environmental, Human Rights, Disarmament and Health Agreements,  
[http://www.stopcorporateabuse.org/files/pdfs/cowboy%20diplomacy\\_1.pdf](http://www.stopcorporateabuse.org/files/pdfs/cowboy%20diplomacy_1.pdf)
- <sup>14</sup> For a more detailed list of SPAC initiatives in the US, visit the North American Sustainable Consumption and Production Database at <http://nasca.icspac.net/db/>