

How we can have a

# Healthy planet



Friends of  
the Earth

## About Friends of the Earth

Friends of the Earth is a charity that campaigns at all levels of politics – in communities, nationally and internationally. We believe the environment is for everyone and that a healthy environment and people's wellbeing go hand in hand.

### We are campaigning for:

**A healthy planet**

**A safe climate**

**A fair future**

**A smart economy**

Friends of the Earth believes things can get better if we tackle the economic causes of the threats to our planet. And with your help, we can do this. We are the organisation that led the successful campaign for the UK Climate Change Act – a world first that commits the UK Government to get to grips with climate change.

**With your support, we get things done.**

# A healthy planet

A healthy planet is our life-support system. Not only does it give us food, but also clean air, a stable climate and fresh water. Yet the natural world we depend on is in crisis, its ability to sustain life is under threat. Along with climate change, the destruction of natural systems is the greatest environmental danger we have ever had to face. But we can change things for the better. Read on to find out what we can do.

## Contents

Why a healthy planet matters	4
Less is more for the planet	6
What nature's systems do for us	8
Food that doesn't cost the Earth	10
Forests and our future	12
Support Friends of the Earth	14
What we can do together	15



“

Nature's assets underpin the very lives and livelihoods of more than six billion people. They make our very existence possible in the vacuum of space”

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

To find out more about what we do  
phone 020 7490 1555 or visit [www.foe.co.uk](http://www.foe.co.uk)

# A wonderful world

## Why a healthy planet matters

“What’s a healthy planet got to do with me?” The answer is simple. We need the natural world for our survival. It is a partnership. Some of the reasons we depend on nature are obvious: we use animals and plants for food. Some are less so: more than half the top 150 medicines in the United States come from chemicals in plants and animals. Bees pollinate fruit and vegetables – helping to put food on our plates.

It doesn’t stop there. Vital to most life on the planet – including us – are healthy ecosystems. An ecosystem is a community of living things, be it the pond in the local park or the rainforest canopy.

Ecosystems act like life-support machines. Forests absorb pollutants; soils filter water; bacteria in the ground help to decompose dead plants and animals, providing nourishment for crops to grow. Nature is not only a thing of beauty; it provides for us too.

### Climate change

Healthy ecosystems also help in the fight against dangerous climate change. Take the peat swamps in the Indonesian province of Riau. These store 15 billion tonnes of carbon – the equivalent of global greenhouse gas emissions for one whole year. Yet human activity is wrecking the natural world

– which in turn affects its ability to support us. One in four mammals and one in eight birds could soon vanish. There are now fewer mountain gorillas in the wild than footballers in the Premier League.

So what can I do about all this? Urgent action is needed, but if we bring pressure on governments, we can protect the world we rely on. That’s why Friends of the Earth needs your support. We’ve shown that when enough of us get together, politicians sit up and listen. We want to change the world by changing politics.

**Overleaf: more from less**

---

**Economists have estimated that nature’s goods and services are worth US\$33 trillion a year. That’s more than the annual turnover of the entire global economy**

---

**Disappearing acts:** logging, pollution, industrial agriculture and over-fishing are contributing to rates of extinctions not seen since the dinosaurs.



Creature comforts: an ecosystem is a community of living things, such as the pond in your local park or the rainforest canopy. Keeping them healthy is vital for human survival.

## Our track record

**With your support, we can make real change happen – here’s a taster.**

**We have taken Shell to court for oil spillages in the Niger Delta.**

**We revealed the connection between biofuels and rainforest destruction. We fought for decades for better**

**legal protection of UK wildlife sites – and won when the Countryside and Rights of Way Act became law.**

**We campaigned for the new South Downs National Park and exposed Tesco for selling products made from tropical hardwoods.**

**In Northern Ireland, we prevented an ice age landscape being turned into a quarry. And in Wales, we worked with others to stop oil and gas drilling in Cardigan Bay, where dolphins breed.**

**To find out about our work for a better world, go to [www.foe.co.uk](http://www.foe.co.uk)**

What you can do: page 15 →

# Consuming passions

Less is more for the planet

**Dog's dinner: the more we throw away, the more materials we need to make new things. This puts a huge strain on the natural world.**



What can we do to protect our precious natural world? It's a huge question, but let's look at where we have some direct impact.

Every time we buy something in the shops, we are creating a demand for raw materials – wood, for example, is needed for furniture, building and paper. And while there's nothing wrong with wanting the goods that give us a decent standard of living, the trouble is we are using too much. All this puts huge strain on the natural world.

We are also throwing too much away. The more that goes in the bin, the more materials we need for new things and the more energy we burn making them. And what happens to all our waste?

## **Greenhouse gases**

Every time degradable products are buried in landfill, greenhouse gases are given off as they decompose. Burning it isn't a solution either, because incinerators release more carbon dioxide than gas-fired power stations.

---

Fair or foul play? The European Union is a mere 7 per cent of the world's population, but creates 13.5 per cent of global greenhouse gases and consumes nearly one sixth of the world's resources

---

## A rubbish idea

**In Newport, South Wales, household recycling has trebled in recent years. How? In 2000 Newport recycled 9 per cent of its household waste. Then it introduced a public information campaign, together with more recycling centres to make it easier to deal with a broad range of materials.**

**Materials are also separated when they're collected from your doorstep. This not only means less is rejected because it is contaminated, but the recycled goods can fetch a higher price. Even so, Newport is still only recycling a third of total household waste. There's still a long way to go.**

## **A greener future**

Friends of the Earth is not suggesting we stop buying things. Instead, we want greener choices to be cheaper and easier to make. Better regulation of the sale of tropical hardwoods, for example, would help to preserve rainforests.

We are campaigning for better recycling, too, pressing Government and councils to improve facilities and increase recycling rates. The more that is reused or recycled, the less strain on resources and the less greenhouse gases emitted. It's a win-win situation.

There has been progress. Following a campaign by Friends of the Earth, councils now provide doorstep recycling. But it could be better. The UK recycles around a third of household rubbish, whereas in Flanders, Belgium, for example, the figure is above 70 per cent. And recycling is only the start. We need to stop the destruction of the planet's life support systems – especially the world's great forests – and the things that are causing it such as biofuel production (page 13) and industrial agriculture.

**Page 10: food that doesn't cost the Earth**

What you can do: page 15 →

# Seven wonders of the world

What nature's systems do for us

## Growing gains

Earthworms are among many creatures vital to soil fertility. Their tunnels bring oxygen into the soil to keep it healthy. Worms also help to break down dead plants, which enriches the earth – and means more plants can grow to feed us.



## Best for pests

Who needs expensive chemical pesticides when nearly all crop pests have a natural enemy? Ladybirds love nothing better than aphids for dinner, and will eat around 5,000 of them in their lifetime. Birds are essential for keeping down insect pests, too.



## Liquid assets

Soil helps to clean water, as do dams built by beavers, filtering it as it flows through them and removing pollutants. Such is their importance that some water companies are looking at reintroducing beavers to the UK countryside.



## Medicine cabinet

The Madagascan periwinkle is used in the treatment of leukaemia. Aspirin comes from the bark of a willow tree while quinine, the best-known anti-malarial drug, is made from the bark of cinchona trees. And that's just for starters: up to half the world's people depend mainly on plants for health care.



## Inspire me

Extracts from a poisonous frog have been used to make painkillers more powerful than morphine. Architects have used the shape of termite mounds to help design naturally cooled buildings. And Velcro was inspired by sticky plant burrs.



## Fact of life

Thousands of plant species need insects such as bees for pollination, meaning they can reproduce and make more plants. Around a third of the world's food crops rely on animals for reproduction.



## Air conditioners

Green spaces in cities keep down summer temperatures. Trees, oceans and grasslands not only help cool the planet, but are important for removing pollutants – as are some creatures. Tiny plankton absorb dissolved carbon dioxide from the seas to make their skeletons. This carbon is buried in sediments when they die – locked underground instead of being released into the atmosphere.



# What's cooking?

## Food that doesn't cost the Earth

What's a fair price for our food? Of course, there's the money we hand over in the shops. But that's not all. Our Sunday roast, biscuits and cereals have other costs too. They're just less obvious.

Over the past 40 years, UK farming has changed beyond recognition, with increased mechanisation and massive use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers. This has helped boost yields, but wildlife and habitats are being lost. Rivers are polluted by chemicals draining from fields. And there has been a decline in wildflowers, insects and the birds that feed on them.

### The problem with soy

It's a similar story with the UK's meat and dairy industry, which is trashing the planet in other ways. Animals in factory farms need huge amounts of protein to grow quickly, and typically this comes from feed made from soy beans. Most soy is from South America, where big business is clearing rainforests and grassland to grow it. This releases carbon stored in the trees and reduces the amount of carbon dioxide that can be absorbed. Not only are some

## It's official – GM doesn't work

**Some companies argue that farming should become more intensive and use genetically modified (GM) crops resistant to pests and disease. Friends of the Earth has successfully campaigned to keep GM out of farming in this country, saying there are dangers of cross-contamination with non-GM plants, creating super-weeds that need even more chemicals to keep them under control. A UN report has found little evidence that commercial GM crops increase yields.**

of the world's richest habitats being lost, it's making climate change worse.

### Reform of subsidies

One of the solutions to these global problems is radical reform of the way we produce food in Britain. At the moment the Government uses taxpayers' money to subsidise factory farms. This would be better used supporting smaller farms that rear animals less intensively, and helping develop a market for locally grown feed.

Supermarkets, which sell more than three quarters of our food, have a part to play. Due to their buying power,

they pressure suppliers to reduce costs and farmers have little choice but to squeeze more from the land.

The Government's competition watchdog has recommended that supermarkets act more responsibly, and consider their impacts on farmers and the environment.

Will a fair deal for farmers mean higher prices? Not necessarily. According to research by *Farmers Weekly*, local food sold in the farm shop is often cheaper than the supermarket.

### Overleaf: forests and our future

**Shock stat part one:** meat and dairy farming produces 18 per cent of the planet's climate-changing gases. **Shock stat part two:** that's more than the emissions from all the world's planes, cars and lorries put together



On the hoof: the UK taxpayer subsidises factory farming. Consumers, farmers and the planet deserve a better deal.

## Farming – a possible future?

What might the future look like without factory farming? Good, we think. Take Meg and Will Edmonds, who have an organic farm near Worcester, in West Midlands. The couple rely mainly on home-grown fodder and pastures to feed their animals, with a small amount of organic and non-GM soy in the

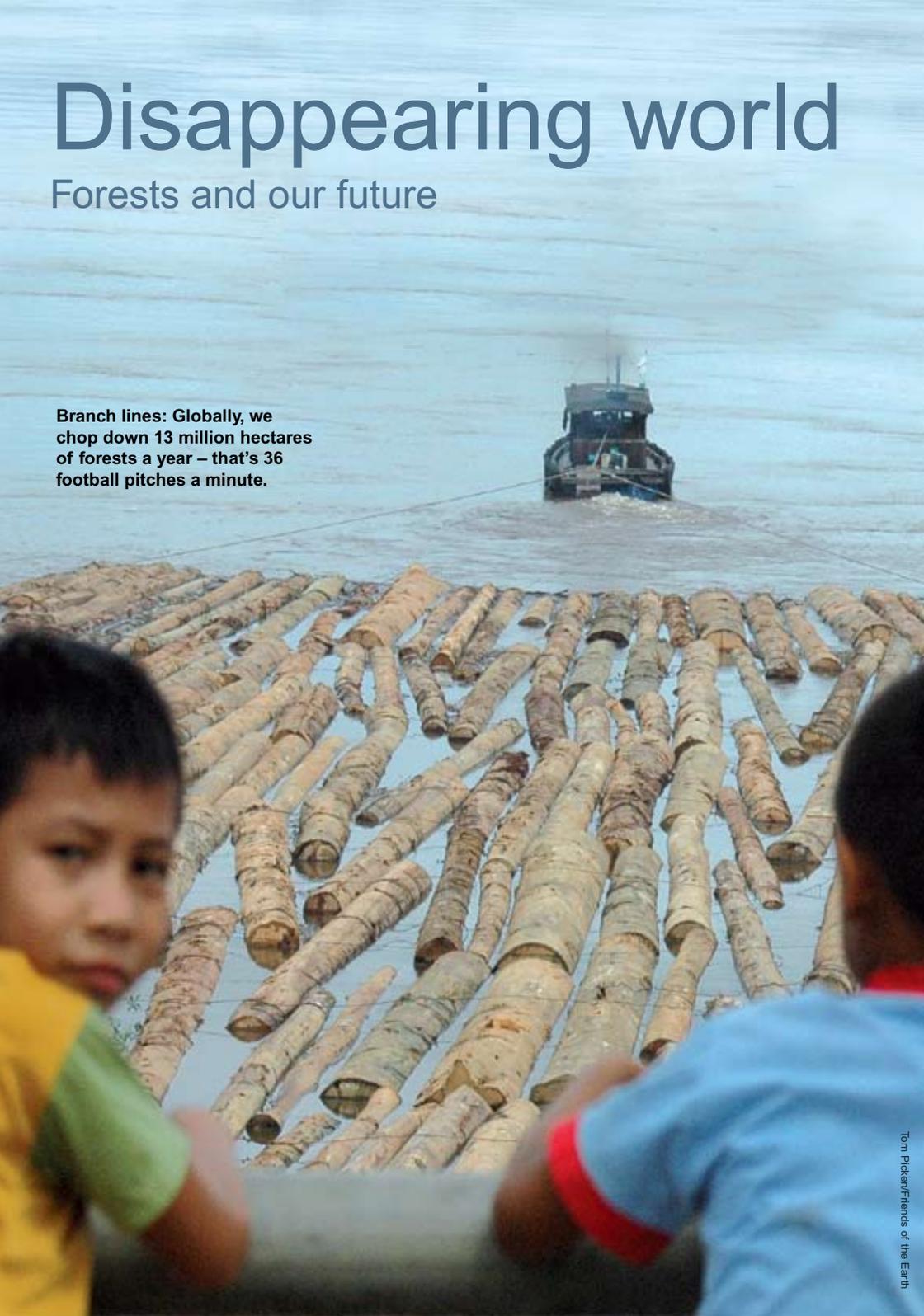
winter. They have a farm shop, too, selling their own meat and home-grown vegetables. "We didn't want to be standing at the farm gate waving it off to the supermarket," says Meg. And the business is thriving – so much so that in 2006, the couple took over another nearby farm.

What you can do: page 15 →

# Disappearing world

## Forests and our future

**Branch lines:** Globally, we chop down 13 million hectares of forests a year – that's 36 football pitches a minute.



Tom Picken/Friends of the Earth

A healthy planet is not possible unless we tackle the destruction of the world's great habitats – oceans, forests, grasslands and wetlands. All are vital for human survival.

Take forests, for example. In the tropics, such areas are home to more than half the wildlife that lives on land. One fifth of the Earth's population relies on forests in some way for essentials such as food and fresh water; these people include the poorest on Earth.

### Why forests matter

Forests absorb carbon dioxide, helping to stabilise the climate. They help prevent soil erosion and in coastal communities act as a buffer from severe weather. Yet they're disappearing.

In South America the expansion of soy plantations and cattle ranches are the major reasons for forest destruction. In south east Asia the main culprit is the palm oil industry.

Palm oil appears in many products such as biscuits and ice cream. It is also used as a biofuel for cars and lorries.

### Biofuels: the truth

Biofuels are promoted as a renewable form of energy, but they can be more damaging to the climate than oil. One reason is that forests are being cleared to make way for palm oil plantations.

Palm oil and soy have huge social costs too. The land used for biofuels means less land for growing food, which pushes up food prices and hits poorer people hardest. As for soy farms, they are gigantic operations whose owners are mostly large land owners or companies. Small farmers are selling up because they cannot compete. Some are thrown off their land at gunpoint.

The devastation in the tropics is driven by consumption in the industrialised world and government rules that ignore their impact in other

countries. Take Europe's biofuel targets. The European Union (EU) wants biofuels to make up 10 per cent of transport fuels to reduce carbon emissions from vehicles. So the rainforest is being chopped down to make way for palm oil.

### Unfair trade

The EU also wants trade deals that give its companies better access to raw materials around the world. Often, the timber, minerals and fuels we want in Europe come from developing countries. The EU wants to get rid of restrictions on the export of these resources, so that its businesses can buy them up.

But if poorer countries could protect their raw materials, they could use them sustainably to build their own economies. So reforming the trade rules that favour industrialised countries would help create a fairer society – and stop destruction of the natural world.

**Overleaf: how to support us**

## The rights stuff

**Did you know that 51 of the world's top 100 economies are corporations? When you are that size, you have more power than some governments and can ignore the rights of poor communities. This is why in areas threatened with soy and**

**oil palm expansion, Friends of the Earth is working with forest communities on their rights. In Indonesia's West Kalimantan and Riau provinces, for example, we helped prevent the destruction of 50,000 hectares of forest.**

What you can do: page 15 →

# What next?

## Support Friends of the Earth

Changing individual behaviour is important, but it's not enough on its own. We need to act together to make a lasting difference. That's why Friends of the Earth asks you to support us in our work. You can help us by:

### Making a donation or regular contribution

A regular direct debit is the best way to support our vital campaigns, but there are many other ways to help. These include getting a Friends of the Earth credit card, signing up to Good Energy to provide your electricity, shopping on our website [www.foe.co.uk/shop](http://www.foe.co.uk/shop) or holding a fundraising event. For more ideas go to our website [www.foe.co.uk](http://www.foe.co.uk) or phone **020 7490 1555**.

### Joining Campaign Express

When an MP receives hundreds of letters they take notice. When a company director gets a thousand postcards in the morning mail, it makes things happen. If you join Campaign Express via our website, you will receive (by post or email) two packs a year containing easy actions that are planned to put pressure on the right people at the right time.

### Joining a local Friends of the Earth group

Help to protect the natural environment where you live. Find your nearest local group at [www.foe.co.uk/community](http://www.foe.co.uk/community).

### Together we can bring about real change.

**Friends of the Earth campaigns are groundbreaking and have been behind laws to protect wildlife in Britain, doorstep recycling for every home and the world's first climate change act.**

Ring **020 7490 1555**, email [info@foe.co.uk](mailto:info@foe.co.uk), or visit [www.foe.co.uk](http://www.foe.co.uk)

## Further information

[www.millenniumassessment.org](http://www.millenniumassessment.org)

[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

[www.wrap.org.uk](http://www.wrap.org.uk)

[www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

[www.corpwatch.org](http://www.corpwatch.org)

[www.wwf.org.uk](http://www.wwf.org.uk)

[www.rightsandresources.org](http://www.rightsandresources.org)

[www.rainforestfoundationuk.org](http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org)

Find out more about our work at [www.foe.co.uk](http://www.foe.co.uk)

## What you can do

### Chew for change

In the UK, people eat on average three-and-half times the amount of meat recommended by the World Health Organisation. So eating less and better meat is good for you and the planet.

### Shop locally and ethically

Local and seasonally grown produce will help cut the distance food is transported and reduce emissions. See [www.bigbarn.co.uk](http://www.bigbarn.co.uk) and [www.localfoodshop.co.uk](http://www.localfoodshop.co.uk). Organic food box suppliers at [www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org). More ethical shopping at [www.naturalcollection.com](http://www.naturalcollection.com)

### Think before you buy

Ask yourself if you really need something before you pull out your wallet. Use second-hand shops and join your local library. Useful sites: [www.carbootjunction.com](http://www.carbootjunction.com), [www.gumtree.com](http://www.gumtree.com), [www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org), [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com), [www.recycle-more.co.uk](http://www.recycle-more.co.uk) and [www.recycledproducts.org.uk](http://www.recycledproducts.org.uk)

### Garden for wildlife

Dig a pond, leave a wild area in the garden, create shelters for useful bugs and animals. Loads of ideas at [www.wildaboutgardens.org](http://www.wildaboutgardens.org)

### Make your own compost

Compost: [www.gardenorganic.org.uk](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk). Wormeries: [www.wigglywiggers.co.uk](http://www.wigglywiggers.co.uk)



Massimo Barberis/Flickr

## What we can do together

### Stop climate change

We want governments to come up with fair international agreements and action to halt dangerous climate change.

### Save our forests

Soy and palm oil production is destroying forests and livelihoods in South America and south east Asia. We are supporting communities fighting expansion of these

industries, and pushing the European Union (EU) to drop biofuels targets which encourage forest destruction.

### Fix the food chain

We want the Government to stop subsidising factory farming and use taxpayers' money to support planet-friendly farming instead.

### Reform trade

We want to stop the free trade agreements the EU

is trying to force on the poorest countries in the world. We want big business made to consider their environmental and social impacts.

### Preserve resources

We want EU countries to introduce a way of measuring resource use. Once this is in place, we will campaign for them to slash resource use.

**Friends of the Earth – the most influential environmental organisation in the UK – makes the world a better place. We inspire solutions to environmental problems which make life better for you, your family, friends and your community. It doesn't stop there. We're helping to bring about changes that benefit the whole planet.**

**Find out more at [www.foe.co.uk](http://www.foe.co.uk)**

Photocredits for centrespread:

worms	istock
ladybird	istock
beaver	Brett Abbott, Tancread/Flickr
frog	Isselee/Dreamstime.com
periwinkle	Himanshu Sarpotdar
bees	istock
leaves	PhotoDisc



**Friends of  
the Earth**

**Friends of the Earth**  
26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ  
Tel: 020 7490 1555 Fax: 020 7490 0881 Website: [www.foe.co.uk](http://www.foe.co.uk)

Friends of the Earth is the collective name for Friends of the Earth Trust, registered charity 281681, company number 1533942, and Friends of the Earth Limited, company number 1012357, May 2009

 Printed on paper made from 100 per cent post-consumer waste