

(f) Reinforcing Values that Encourage Sustainable Production and Consumption Patterns

The Canadian Labour Congress, which represents 2.2 million workers, is holding its 1994 conference on the theme of "Organizing for Environmental Change." Its environmental education program focusses on workers as consumers and citizens and makes direct links between workers, production and consumption. Its union education course examines environmental issues and solutions, including consumer action and boycotts, solid waste reduction, workplace and community action, and workplace environmental audits.

Des watts entre les deux oreilles is a joint publication of several Quebec agencies and institutions dealing with energy education, efficiency and conservation. It is notable in its promotion of the six R's (rather than the usual three): reduction, reuse, recycling, re-evaluating value systems, restructuring our economic systems and redistributing resources.

Problem Areas and Serious Challenges to be Overcome

Changing consumption patterns is difficult because it requires fundamental decisions about the lifestyles that many people have and the lifestyles to which many more aspire.

The growth of "green consumerism" in Canada demonstrates that public concern over the environment is leading to more environmentally responsible production and consumption. At the same time, there is at least some recognition that sustainability demands lifestyle changes, even though traditional economic indicators report the absence of spending as a serious crisis of consumer confidence.

It is essential to discuss consumption patterns in ways that go beyond the individual and the household. How waste, packaging, energy, and water are used has profound implications for non-renewable resources, natural areas, wildlife, agricultural land, wetlands, and human communities. Connections must be made between consumption, sustainable economic development, and ecosystems in Canada and around the world.

Information gathering must assume a higher priority so that sustainability efforts can be better monitored and shared, and so that gaps and deficiencies can be more readily identified.

NGOs concerned with the environment and with development continue to play key roles in drawing public attention to these issues and in sparking debate over the implications of changing consumption patterns.