



Reducing your ecological footprint

Eco-Lifestyle

COMMENTARY

The purpose of living in central Oxford was to reduce commuting and other transport needs. But circumstances can change.

MARK:

I've worked at the local city council for 5 years, and that was a walk to work. I've stopped working there now, so now I'm looking at other jobs, and I don't know whether I'm going to be taking public transport or driving

ALICE:

I was working in central Oxford and I could walk to work, and I'm now working in Abingdon, which is 7 miles away, and - and looking at options for cycling, at the moment I take the bus.

COMMENTARY

Sometimes Alice has to drive to work because she needs to travel between two sites. Having planned to live where they could walk to work, Mark and Alice may have to commute by car some of the time.

But at least they own a hybrid car - the Prius. Its fuel efficiency is equal to the best small diesel car.

ALICE

So we needed a new car, and Mark was very keen to get one that was very energy efficient, and this one had just come out. The government was also giving grants towards the purchase of them at that time.

ALICE:

it has an electric motor and a petrol engine, it uses them both and determines which is the most efficient to use at which time. You don't have to think about it, you just drive.

COMMENTARY

The Prius is a mid-priced family saloon, but its petrol plus electric hybrid drive saves on fuel and emissions. The electric motor's batteries are charged either by the engine, or when going downhill or braking, recovering energy that would be lost as heat. The car achieves 55-63 mpg and road tax is a fraction of the norm. So if you must have a car, a hybrid is one of the more sustainable options.

The third main contributor to Mark and Alice's carbon footprint is their food. Growing and transporting food generates large amounts of emissions.

MARK:

Yeah, we read a book 'The 100 Mile Diet', and that was of a couple who tried to only eat things within 100 miles. We don't do that. We do buy things, but, what we do say is if it's in season and it's available locally we try and do that, and we buy through a box scheme, for example. Er, but occasionally, we'll buy things like bananas, which are not grown in Britain

When we produce food we're using energy to produce it. I to make fertilisers, to actually transport goods around the world, so those are sort of quite energy intensive things, and you're using water to irrigate crops as well. So it makes sense to think about some of the things that you're eating

COMMENTARY

Animal products are particularly intensive sources of CO2 and other emissions. So are Mark and Alice vegetarians?

MARK:

We eat meat and we eat fish, but what we have tried to do is be a bit more er, measured, so we don't eat vast amounts of meat and we buy carefully, so we'll buy food that's been ethically sourced and locally sourced.

MARK:

I do think a lot of food, particularly in supermarkets is overpackaged. Partly because we buy from independent retailers a lot of the time you find that they will reduce the packaging that you're getting.

MARK

It's better, in fact, rather than recycle things, not to use them in the first place. So the idea that you reduce first, you reuse second and recycle third.

COMMENTARY

With all these changes, Mark and Alice have succeeded in making major reductions in their carbon footprint. But there are dilemmas that face even the most environmentally committed family.

MARK:

We have relatives in Canada, and if you're going to see those family, friends and relatives you end up travelling. And all the energy that we've saved in this house is more than off-set by the energy used in those international flights, international flights are terribly energy intensive, so our carbon footprint is not as low as it really could be or, perhaps, should be

COMMENTARY

While there's no easy alternative to flying to Canada, for other trips there are options.

MARK

When we have to travel, we try and identify the lowest energy impact way of travelling,

ALICE

Just recently we've been to Amsterdam on the train, we've been t, the south of Spain by train.

MARK:

Well, we try and approach these things, but we also are balancing that with the realities of living in the 21st Century.

COMMENTARY:

Of course when you think about carbon footprints, the really big changes have to happen at government level, and others at community level, but as individuals we can still make a difference.

MARK

What we've found is that simply showing people some of the benefits of the house, the fact that it's quiet, the fact that it's warm, that it doesn't use very much energy, that choices that we've made mean that we don't have long commuting, that our lifestyle is a better as a result of this - and that it is something that people can do practically. People are attracted to that.