

Breast milk: the perfect renewable resource

Delivered efficiently and directly to the consumer, it creates no pollution

By Dr. Nancy E. Wight

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“The undermining of breast-feeding is the destruction of a natural resource and should therefore be seen in the same light as logging in the rain forests or overfishing our seas and rivers.”

Andrew Radford, 1991, *The Ecological Impact of Bottle Feeding*

Over the past 20 to 30 years we have become much more aware of the ecological damage our collective lifestyles are doing to our Earth. Global warming is upon us and natural resources are being depleted at an alarming rate. Breast-feeding is probably the most overlooked means of contributing to the health of our planet.

Breast milk is the perfect renewable resource. It is produced and delivered to the consumer without using other resources, and it creates no pollution. In contrast, artificial baby milk (ABM) production pollutes our land, air and water, and uses up scarce natural resources.

Despite recent concerns about environmental pollutants and contaminants in mothers' milk, research repeatedly shows that the risks of not breast-feeding consistently outweigh the risks of environmental contaminants in the milk. There are more risks of contamination with the use of ABM made from cow's milk and soy beans (pesticides, fertilizers, antibiotics, steroids, phytoestrogens, aluminum, lead, bacteria, etc.). In fact, breast-feeding may help compensate for the toxins in the environment. The solution is to clean up our environment, not stop breast-feeding.

There are many reasons artificial milk feeding is not eco-friendly:

- Producing artificial baby milk contributes to inefficient use of land (2.5 acres per cow), deforestation and soil erosion (wood to heat ABM in developing countries).
- Manufacture of packaging of ABM uses paper, plastic and tin which are not recycled (tens of thousands of tons). Dioxins are also a byproduct of paper manufacturing. It is estimated that for every 3 million bottle-fed babies, 450 million tons of formula are consumed each year. The resulting 70,000 tons of metal in the form of discarded tins is not recycled.
- Manufacturing ABM contaminates water through sewage from dairy cows and fertilizers used to grow feed for cows. In developing countries ABM may be mixed with contaminated water for feeding.

- Manufacturing of bottles, nipples and other feeding equipment uses large amounts of plastic, rubber, silicon and glass – which will take 200 to 450 years to break down in our increasingly scarce landfills.
- Processing ABM and producing bottles, nipples, etc. consumes energy.
- Transportation of raw materials for ABM, packaging and other components of bottle-feeding consumes ever more scarce and expensive fuel.
- Artificial milks cost billions of dollars that could be better spent to clean up our land, air and water.
- Menstruation and fertility are delayed with exclusive breast-feeding, saving vast amounts of paper (and fuel to produce them) for sanitary products and their packaging, and more importantly, lessening overpopulation.

Breast milk is a living, natural substance that is produced very efficiently by the mother with only a few hundred extra calories and a little extra water. It is delivered directly, without transportation or expensive packaging. The lactating mother is an exceptional national resource. Breast-feeding is not just a lifestyle choice; it is a health, social and environmental issue. Anyone interested in protecting our children and our environment should actively promote, support and protect breast-feeding.

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