

Chapter 1

How Do Pets Affect the Environment?

It is not from ourselves that we learn to be better than we are.

—Wendell Berry

You care about the planet. If you didn't, you wouldn't have picked up this book. You love pets. Ditto. You might drive a hybrid or bike to work, support alternative energy, and put on a sweater instead of turning up the thermostat. As you look at ways to live a greener life, you wonder how to include your furred, feathered, or finned family members in decisions about living in harmony with the environment.

According to the 2007–2008 American Pet Products Association's National Pet Owners survey, 63 percent of North American households include pets, and most people have or will have pets in their lifetimes. Despite the feeling all pets owners voice—that we are ruled by our pets—we opposable-thumbed beings know we are in charge. Our pets, then, influence the environment in many of the same ways our human family does.

Why Pet Impact Matters

Of all the possible subjects related to sustainability, why write a book about pets and the planet?

Because There Are So Many Pets

An astonishing 71 million U.S. households—almost two-thirds of the population—keep pets, primarily cats and dogs. Per capita, Australians keep as many,

but are more likely to choose birds and fish. The Japanese prefer reptiles. European Union estimates claim 41 million dogs, 45 million cats, 190 million pet rabbits, and 5 million horses for the member countries.

Brazil has the second largest population of dogs, over 30 million according to www.mapsoftheworld.com. Japan, Russia, and South Africa each have 9 million, following China’s estimated 23 million pet dogs.

Number of U.S. Pets by Type

Pet Type	Number of Animals	Making It Real
Dog	74.8 million	If you petted one dog each second, you’d finish in 2½ years.
Cat	88.3 million	An average cat weighs 8 pounds. The cats in the U.S. weigh as much as 100 aircraft carriers.
Bird	16.0 million	Equals the number of wild birds in Wisconsin in the summertime.
Fish	151.6 million	If each fish were the size of a penny, the stack of fish would be more than 150 miles high.
Small Mammal	24.3 million	Equals the number of people in Saudi Arabia in 2008 or the number of people in Canada in 1981.
Reptile	13.4 million	If each reptile is one foot long, the reptiles placed end to end would go from Atlanta, Georgia, to Reno, Nevada.
Horse	13.8 million	Or two times the number of teachers in the U.S.

People Love Their Pets as They Do Few Other Aspects of Life

Companion animals are popular worldwide, and the number of households with pets continues to grow because of the special animal-human bond. What I’ve learned as a pet writer, which certainly was reinforced by the writing of this book, is how much more attentive we can be to our pets’ needs than to our own.

For many years I ordered Harrison’s Organic Food for my birds and chopped organic fruits and vegetables for them, while I purchased conventional products for myself. I commented to friends that if I ate as well as my birds, I’d be healthier. As I’ve visited pet stores and attended pet-related events, I’ve seen others shop for special diets and products for their pets.

We learn about ourselves and about our world from our concern for our animals. Thinking about pets and their needs is a way to learn more about how our choices affect the planet in terms of food, housing, medical care, and services. For example, once I heard myself make the remark about eating as healthy as my birds, I realized I could make healthier decisions for myself and for my planet.

Because most of us expend more resources on our families than is necessary or sometimes wise, including pets as part of this exuberant lifestyle intensifies our impact on the environment. Imagine if there were no Halloween costumes or designer sweaters for our pets. Our budget as well as our environmental impact would be improved.

Growing Populations Bring Us Closer to Our Neighbors and Their Pets

Some people love their neighbors and their neighbors' pets. Others are terrified of both the people and the pets. Many situations fall somewhere in the middle. Because we live in closer proximity to each other than we did in times past, an increasing number of laws and regulations deal with pets and their behavior.

One of my neighbors' daughters brings her dogs to our neighborhood in the back of her pickup truck and allows them to run loose, starting every dog in the neighborhood barking.

Another of my neighbors allows her adorable orange cat to roam. Although he is a perfectly nice cat, I don't enjoy his digging in my garden.

My own dog barks when the UPS, post office, and delivery trucks pass. Although my other next-door neighbor says he likes her guarding behavior making his home more secure, I am concerned when I leave home that she doesn't make a nuisance of herself.

Not only is our impact on the planet's resources dictated by our choices, but community ecology becomes increasingly important in the twenty-first century.

What Is Sustainable Pet Care?

Sustainability means striking a balance between our resources and our needs. In the context of pet ownership, it means providing for our pets in a way that leaves the earth as resource-rich after we care for our pets as it was before we acquired them. To attain this level of care, we must understand the elements involved in sustainability and make good choices for our planet.

Sustainability is about maintaining our life on earth and the ecosystems required to support it. Principles first articulated by Dr. Karl-Heinrik Robèrt provide a helpful way to think about natural systems on our planet:

1. We mine and use materials such as coal, oil, and metals faster than they are redeposited into the Earth.
2. Manufacturing processes create products, like cars and plastic bottles, and by-products, like gases and wastewater, faster than natural processes can break them down, if they can be broken down at all.
3. Society extracts resources, like trees or fish, or removes resources, such as agricultural land, through paving or homebuilding, faster than they can be replenished.
4. Meeting human *needs*, but not all of our *wants*, is an essential part of sustainability.

When we obtain a pet or purchase things for our pet, we could consider how our actions affect the earth's resources.

How Green Applies to Pets Day to Day

Sustainability, as it applies to pets, is about making decisions about when and what to purchase. The first step is to create some criteria that work for your values.

To Purchase or Not to Purchase

Becoming sustainable in our pet-keeping means more than deciding which products we purchase—green also means we decide consciously whether a purchase is necessary. If we remember that a main point about the environment is using no more than is necessary, we may be able to meet some of our pet-care needs through either sharing or recycling. (In chapter 4, “Green Pet Equipment and Toys,” we’ll have specific suggestions on how you can get what you need without purchasing.)

When you decide to purchase, consider three points:

- ✿ Purchase as little as possible
- ✿ Purchase products without toxins
- ✿ Purchase locally

Not only will you save money, but you’ll support local businesses and those that care about what they put into their products.

Guidance for Purchases

Pets provide plenty of day-to-day opportunities to make decisions about what's important to us. They need food. What goes in must come out. In addition, we need to keep our pets free of pests and diseases. More purchasing decisions. What makes it easier for me is to recall that what we do and acquire affects the air, water, and earth. When making decisions, the questions I ask myself, in the absence of better information, are based on these four elements:

- ✿ Earth: Are the materials used renewable?
- ✿ Air and water: Are the processes used to configure the materials into products safe for our air and water? In other words, would I be okay drinking that water and breathing that air right outside the plant?
- ✿ Fire: Fire means disposal to me because as a kid living in the country, our family burned our trash. (Yes, I know, but it was an earlier time.) Fire is about the disposal of the product itself when my use of it is complete. Can the product be broken down and returned to the earth?

The point is to remember what goes into something you use, how the processes of getting the materials and making them into the product affect the environment, and then how disposing of the product affects our ecosystem.

But how do we know what goes into products and how the production and manufacturing affects the environment?

What Does “Green” Mean?

For pet and other consumer products, green often means nothing substantive. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “green marketing” was used for the first time in 1989 to mean “marketing of products on the strength of their (supposed) environmental friendliness.” The example from the *New York Times* reads, “Their new approach is called ‘green marketing’ and in their efforts to portray themselves as environmentally concerned, some companies are making claims that do not stand up under close examination.”

Green is a descriptive term with no formalized standard that allows manufacturers or companies to stamp products as “green.” In contrast, the word “organic” has a specific meaning. Products labeled “organic” must conform to a set of complicated standards verified by certified examiners who are independent of the manufacturer or grower.

More meaningful than “green” is the *New Oxford American Dictionary*’s 2007 Word of the Year, “locavore.” A locavore is a consumer who eats food that is

produced locally. Originally applied to eating seasonal food grown locally—for example, not eating Argentinian strawberries in Connecticut over winter holidays—the word is gaining a broader application. Many people use “locavore” to mean a consumer who buys low-environmental-impact products locally.

Other Often Used Words

People and product packagers use “green” and other words and phrases to appeal to those of us who want to live more lightly on our planet. These words include:

- Recyclable
- Biodegradable
- Compostable
- Eco-friendly
- Energy efficient
- Minimal packaging
- Locally grown
- Nontoxic
- Earth-friendly
- Natural
- Organic
- No animal testing
- No genetic modification
- Fair trade

The truth is that many of these words mean nothing in themselves. They can be used at will, even though marketing claims are supposed to be true.

“Green,” “Sustainable,” and Pets

The market for products and services that qualify under the headings “ethical” and “environmentally sound” will grow to \$2.5 billion by 2012, projections say. Although this figure may seem high, retail sales of natural pet food topped \$1 billion in 2007.

The massive recall of pet food in 2007, producing concern not only about pet food, but about pet product safety in general, accelerated this trend. “Natural” everything skyrocketed in sales. Organic product sales surged also, buyers perceiving “organic” to be even safer than “natural.” Other desirable

traits following the recall are 100 percent U.S.-sourced ingredients, ingredients from local growers, and products that are labeled “no cruelty.”

In addition to the entry of major pet food manufacturers into the green product arena was the distribution of green products through major retailers, including “big box” stores such as Wal-Mart, major pet chains such as PetSmart, and local pet specialty stores. In addition, many pet owners include Trader Joe’s and natural grocery stores such as Whole Foods in their weekly shopping circuits, since those stores now carry green pet products.

According to a report from Packaged Facts, a major marketing information publication, almost 60 percent of the people who shop in pet specialty stores are eco-friendly, along with the 9.1 million “premium” pet households. Since 2000, the market size has grown, and major companies such as Nestlé, Purina, Mars, Del Monte, Hill, Hartz Mountain, and other familiar names as well as new specialty companies have filled store shelves with newer, greener products.

An interesting sidebar to this marketing research: cat owners are slightly more eco-friendly than dog owners.

The Broader Green Trend: Socially Conscious Consumers Speak

Socially conscious consumers are changing the rules of marketing, concludes BBMG, a branding and marketing agency. Its “BBMG Conscious Consumer Report,” said to be the first study to combine field observations with a national survey on purchasing and social values, states that nine in ten Americans say “conscious consumer” describes them well, and that given products of equal quality and price, they are more likely to buy from companies showing good environmental practices. Consumers showed a desire for companies to meet their personal needs and positively impact society. According to the study:

- ✿ Top on the list is health and safety, where consumers look for “natural, organic and unmodified products . . . avoid[ing] chemicals or pesticides that can harm their health or the planet. They are [also] looking for standards and safeguards to ensure the quality of the products they consume.”
- ✿ Magazines and newspapers, certification seals and labels, and the Internet inform their decisions. Ads and friends and family influence, but are no longer the primary source of, information.
- ✿ In addition, “consumers willingly engage in ‘easy’ behaviors, such as recycling . . . and using energy efficient appliances . . . but do not adopt more ‘demanding’ behaviors . . . like public transportation . . . or . . . carbon offsets.”



Kids and “Pets and the Planet”

Kids are learning about green initiatives in schools. *Weekly Reader* featured a “Green School” tour in one issue. There kids learned about:

- ✿ Temperature control through reflective windows
- ✿ Solar panels for electricity
- ✿ Rooftop gardens for temperature control and fresh foods
- ✿ Green buildings for saving energy

Lots of schools have recycling programs, emphasize reuse of items, and plant gardens. Other schools study ways to divert rooftop water runoff from city sewer systems by constructing bioswales. Still other schools are using wind to power their classrooms.

Talk with your kids about the ideas presented in each chapter of this *Pets and the Planet* adventure you’re starting. No doubt they’ll be interested in how they can play a part in your plans. In fact, getting your kids’ ideas about how to be more planet-wise about your pets may inspire them to take responsibility for family pets. Think about it.

Besides, great ideas are rewarded. The Youth Venture-Lorax Challenge offers prizes for kids with great ideas about saving the planet. Although rules don’t require the idea be about pets and the planet, that would be a great topic for an entry. Prizes range up to \$1,000, and grand prize winners get a trip to the University of Florida to attend an environmental camp. See www.newleadersinitiative.org for details.

My web site gives smaller prizes for great ideas from kids: we feature kids and pets in our newsletter, and provide every kid with a certificate signed by my own “Pets and the Planet” pets, Onyx and Gray Bird.

Echoing the findings of the BBMG study, Jeffrey Pollock, president of Global Strategy Groups, a leading research firm, summarizes: “Many consumers evaluate the social and environmental impact of their purchases. They tend to prefer to buy from companies that reflect their values and are increasingly likely to buy from companies that demonstrate they are good for people and the planet.”

Caution: The Green Claim

Alarming are the claims on packages of products that do not merit them. A recent study from TerraChoice Environmental Marketing concluded that most environmental claims on packages have no supporting evidence. TerraChoice's report "The Six Sins of Greenwashing" includes the most frequently seen "Sin of the Hidden Tradeoff," meaning that claims present a misleading picture of the product, one that a complete analysis would not support. Many claims have no proof easily accessible to the public. Another common problem is that claims are so vague as to be meaningless. "Chemical-free" (nothing on earth is free of chemicals) or "All natural" (natural products are some of the most toxic chemicals on earth) are examples. These terms have no meaning.

Labels with Meaning

While there are labels that have no meaning, there are a few relatively dependable labels you can look to.

Energy Star

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy award the Energy Star logo (www.energystar.gov) to products consumers can depend on to realize large gains in energy efficiency while reducing pollution.

Environment Canada's EcoLogo Program

Canada's EcoLogo label (www.ecologo.org) means a product has met stringent criteria for environmental leadership. Manufacturers can apply to have their product certified as qualifying for this logo. Products that qualify need to be biodegradable, nontoxic, low VOC (volatile organic chemical), recycled or recyclable, or a combination of these characteristics. Administered by the Government of Canada since 1988, this program has certified more than 3,000 products and services, having them examined by a third party who validates the product claims.

Other Meaningful Labels

Package labels can be difficult to understand, since product names and claims are not the same as product certifications. Then there are so many different kinds of labels. Here are a few of the more important categories.

IFOAM Accredited (International Organic Label)

The IFOAM (International Federation of Agriculture Movements) Organic Guarantee System assures organic integrity internationally. IFOAM provides a label and a guarantee that products that say they are organic are actually organic. The Organic Guarantee System (OGS) unites the “organic world” through a common system of standards and verification. See chapter 3 for more on IFOAM and visit www.ifoam.org/press/media_contacts/index.html.

Organic Trade Association Member

The Organic Trade Association (OTA) is the membership-based business association for the organic industry in North America. OTA’s mission is to promote and protect organic trade to benefit the environment, farmers, the public, and the economy. OTA envisions organic products becoming a significant part of everyday life, enhancing people’s lives and the environment. Visit www.ota.com/index.html.

Co-op America’s Green Business Network

The Green Business Network, the nation’s oldest and largest network of socially and environmentally responsible businesses, investigates each applying company to determine: (1) its familiarity with and commitment to social and environmental responsibility, and (2) significant action in terms of this commitment. For more information, go to www.coopamerica.org/about/newsroom/index.cfm.

No Animal Testing

The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) provide an opportunity for companies to certify through them that their products are not tested on animals and are vegan. PETA (www.peta.org) allows the use of the “bunny ears” logo and the modified logo to those companies completing certification.

Decoding Other Labels

An excellent resource for decoding certification labels is located at www.greenerchoices.org/eco-labels. Categories of certification logos include organic, animal welfare, sustainable agriculture, sustainable wood, social responsibility, pest management, no genetic engineering, sustainable fishing, and environmental persistence.



Pets and Product Labeling

Consumers would benefit from a “Good Housekeeping Seal” that applies to the environmental status of a product. Although eco-labels are many (*Consumer Reports* lists 147 of them), few of them are used widely. Organic certification labels and the Energy Star labels are two widely recognized ones.

What, then, is a consumer to do? Rely on our common sense and tips from the experts. To do less is to reward the companies that place meaningless labels on their products and suppress consumer support for truly innovative products and companies.

The listing includes the certifying organization, the logo picture, and an interpretation of what the logo actually means.

Greenwashing

Greenwashing is creating the impression that a product is environmentally friendly when it is not. As a result of people’s desire to have low-cost green products, consumer products often use labeling on the package front to persuade the consumer to purchase those green benefits. In consumer products—the things we buy to support everyday life—abuse of the word “green” is so rampant that the term “greenwashing” applies. Because no standard green certification similar to a “Green Housekeeping Seal of Approval” exists as yet, you need to look at the back of the package. Are the ingredients listed? A proprietary ingredients list usually means that the product contains chemicals the manufacturer does not want to claim. Is the packaging itself minimal or recyclable? Is the product endorsed by an organization known for its environmental standards? If the answers are no, but the information on the front of the package looks like an environmentally friendly product, the product has been greenwashed.

However, packaging won’t tell you anything about the water and energy usage of a manufacturer. Major corporations should consider the savings in water and power they can obtain from thinking more closely about their manufacturing processes. Multinationals such as Unilever and Schweppes Cadbury lead a new way of thinking and create marks for manufacturing suppliers that benefit the major providers of companion animal products.

In fact, it's tough to understand advertising regulations in the United States, difficult to believe they are strictly enforced, and, well, many of us are jaded about labels that do not carry certifications. Enter "The Greenwash Brigade," a panel of folks on American Public Media who comment on various and sundry green items. An exchange by the brigade sent me scurrying to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) web site for more information.

The brigade said in essence, "Hey, we're confused about what's green, and we're very educated consumers." They'd like a green "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval." This designation would take into account the manufacturing of the product, as well as the use and disposal of the product. In other words, the information given would compare the total impact of one product versus the total impact of the other. Current designations normally deal with the cost of energy the product uses when it operates, not the costs of manufacture and disposal. The group also said that carbon offsets, where consumers pay others to reduce greenhouse gases, are something the FTC should regulate to ensure that those offsets are real and not just a credit-based shell game in which the same credits are moved around and around.

What the FTC Now Requires

So, keeping the information to what we pet caretakers need to know, the FTC Act doesn't allow companies to be deceitful in commerce. In its "Guide for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims," the FTC requires that package labels be clear. A package labeled "recyclable" should be clear about whether the box or the product itself is recyclable.

The FTC says a company can't overstate their claims. If the box says a trash bag is recyclable, then the label asserts a claim with no meaningful benefit. No one recycles trash bags.

Claims such as "biodegradable," "environmentally friendly," "compostable," and so on should be substantiated by the manufacturer. In addition, the claim should not mislead the consumer. "Environmentally friendly" needs to mean just that.

But simply because the FTC creates guidelines doesn't mean the guidelines are being followed. These are voluntary guidelines, but violations can lead to serious consequences. However, the case must be brought to the FTC.

Updating to Combat Greenwashing

The FTC plans an update to "Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims," last updated in 1992. The update to the "Green Guides" addresses claims about renewable energy and carbon offsets. A company's claims about their carbon footprint or the carbon neutrality of a product or process need to

be considered after a company has taken reasonable steps to reduce emissions and then purchase offsets greater than remaining emissions. In other words, carbon offsets should not be a “get out of an environmentally horrifying process free” card. There needs to be some honest effort to reduce emissions without carbon offset purchasing. In addition, third-party verification and certification will be a means of substantiating these claims.

To Combat Greenwashing

The types of questions you might ask about products and services you purchase include the following, suggested in Shaila Wunderlich's June 22, 2008, article on greenwashing in the *McClatchy-Tribune Business News*:

- ✿ Look for a product's distance shipped. Distance shipped = energy required. When you can, choose materials that are the least energy-intensive to produce, although most of us are hard pressed to know what materials are the least energy-intensive to produce.
- ✿ Try to buy from companies that are family-run businesses or community co-ops.
- ✿ Look for labels like USDA Organic, Energy Star, Green Guard, and Forest Stewardship Counsel.
- ✿ If ingredients are not listed on the label, beware.
- ✿ Buy from companies you trust.

I add one more point. If a product manufactured overseas is incredibly cheap, you can assume that whatever is in the product probably would not pass muster in the United States, or that the manufacturing process is “too dirty” to take place in the United States. We see this kind of manufacture in cheap children's toys, and certainly in the pet toy aisle in any superstore. The toy looks cheap and doesn't last because it is made with materials and by processes that provide no value for sustainability. Just say no. If no one bought these products, no one would sell them.

If you have children, you know that the recall lists on toys have been long. Some manufacturers are getting the message, and the same standards for children's toys are being applied to toys for animals—but not by the low-end product manufacturers.

Juggling Materials and Planetary Requirements

Even when we see the information about what's in a product, understanding the impact is difficult. Consider plastics—not the cheap, brittle kind, but those

used to make cat litter trays, or bowls or toys for your dog, or housing for the heat lamp for your reptile, or the acrylic for your tank. A major component of plastics is petroleum, which also powers the manufacturing process. Many technologies have been invented to reduce dependence on petroleum. New technologies to make plastics include elements made from plants like corn. Corn requires lots of fertilizer to grow, and corn is a means of feeding people. Even newer technologies involve the waste from corn production. Other approaches use bacteria, but genetic engineering of the bacteria is required.

Japan in 2002 set a national goal of sourcing 20 percent of all plastics renewably by 2020. Belgium encourages product biodegradability for short-lived products like shopping bags. The government taxes nondegradable bags at 300 percent, making the degradable ones more economical. Italy mandates that by 2010, all two-handle bags in Italy must biodegrade.

The conclusion from all of this is that no product is truly free of effect on our planet. New technologies come with new problems. Nevertheless, through new technologies we will find a way to make products that have less impact on the planet. Supporting innovation in technology is an important activity for consumers to consider.

Certifications

Certifications such as Energy Star appear on packages for qualifying products, and certifications are the best way for you to know what you're getting. In chapters 3 and 4, labels that apply to purchasing are explained in some detail.

Certifications are available for food, to tell you whether an item can be recycled, or to tell you whether an appliance is energy saving relative to others. What you can't find out from certifications is what the net impact of a product is on our environment. Europeans come closer than North Americans on this demand. The environmental impact of various products is beginning to be shown on packages in grocery stores and other consumer products outlets in Europe, where environmental regulations typically are more stringent than in the United States.

Although certifications don't evaluate the complete environmental impact of a product from creation through disposal, use them as guides that provide facts instead of "marketing speak."

What Is Your Sustainability Score?

Some people love quizzes and scoring systems. Others of us run in the other direction. For readers who love scores, or for family leaders who want to

encourage other family members to participate, a sustainability starting point assessment may be helpful.

Like measuring your speed at the butterfly before you begin training in the pool, this quiz helps you create a benchmark against which you can measure your improvement. Often we don't realize how far we've come without such a benchmark.

Some people are motivated by competition—not just with themselves, but with others. For those who are willing to share their sustainability scores, I'm providing a place to register your scores and compare yourself against others. Visit www.thiswildlife.com and see the "Pets and the Planet" section. Assessments can help you prioritize areas for improvement. Once one area is under control, you can work on the next area.

The scoring system I use is "Good," "Better," "Best." Hey, we need to give ourselves credit for what we do. If you bought or borrowed this book, you're obviously interested, so even if you're struggling, you deserve points. Throughout the book, we think in terms of "Good," "Better," "Best."

Circle the answer that best fits your situation and total your points (105 points maximum).

My Sustainability Score: A Starting Point

	Good	Better	Best
Choosing a pet	I didn't know much about my pet in advance, but my choice has worked okay so far.	Knew what I was getting into with a dog or cat, but I did go to classes and learned how to solve problems.	Considered species, age, life span, and the cost of the pet over the lifetime of the animal, got help when I had problems, and we're still together.
The impact of "releasing" animals	Releasing pets doesn't seem right to me, so I take pets to the shelter when it doesn't work out.	I volunteer to take pets to shelters for neighbors who are too embarrassed to take them.	I work with shelters to do outreach to the community on pets.

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	Good	Better	Best
Feeding pets impacts the environment	I don't know much about pets and their food, but would like to.	I feed my animals natural foods, but am a little hazy on why this might be better for the Earth.	I help other people understand what sustainable agriculture is. I just reevaluated my pet's diet and confirmed with my vet.
Nutrients pets need	I buy a major brand.	I check for the AAFCO label.	My vet and I discussed the best organic food with the AAFCO label.
The must-haves for each pet type	My vet told me what I needed.	I do have the vet's list, plus a way to confine my pet when I need to.	In addition to the vet list and a confinement area, I continually find new enrichment toys for my pet.
Exercise	I make sure my pet gets some exercise every week.	We're on an everyday exercise schedule.	Exercise we do is a function of weight and conditioning, and we work on building this as much as we can.
Waste and your pet	I bag my cat litter and throw in the trash. My dog poop I put in trash cans at the dog park.	I put pet waste in biodegradable bags and put it in the trash or bury it in my backyard at least 200 yards from a water source.	I use a waste service that takes pet waste to an industrial composting facility.
Waste and the community	I can't worry about others right now. I can just worry about myself and my own pets.	We're experimenting with a waste disposal service for our dog park.	Our town doesn't have curbside compostables pickup, but I'm working for this through a local group.
Pets and your health	I take my pets to the vet when they're sick.	I do an annual exam for my pets.	Besides the annual exam, we emphasize handwashing.

	Good	Better	Best
Pets and cleaning	We use cleaners that get the job done.	Weekly cleaning works for us, and we're considering converting from harsh chemicals to mild organic cleaners.	We emphasize regular cleaning with soap and water, and disinfection when pets have been ill. Hepa filter vacuums help keep allergens down.
Pet services	We don't leave home because our pets are too important to us. That's got to change. We're considering a range of pet services.	The need for services caused us to look at the number of animals we have at home. We've made a decision not to replace our current pets.	We buy the services we need to be independent of our pet's most restricting needs—pet-sitting and day care keep us sane during our job and kid crunches.
Community ecology	Our pets are neutered. We don't like the leash laws.	The dog park wasn't for us. We run together. And we've committed to keeping our next cat indoors.	The kids and I decided we're too busy for pets. We volunteer at our local shelter and that feeds our pet need.
Problem pets	We adopted a dog who just didn't work for us, even after training. We decided that we're cat people and adopted an indoor cat instead.	I do get frustrated with my pets, and I do research to solve my problems. We get along pretty well most of the time.	We exercise together almost every day. When I have a problem with my pet, I call the behaviorist.
Eco-concepts	The biggest problem is illegal importing of reptiles.	The biggest problem is the illegal trade in wild-caught pets.	The biggest problem for pets and the planet is keeping pets in their homes.
Eco-concepts	Product labels may be useful, but I don't understand them.	I understand that natural may not be better, but I don't know why.	I understand the nutrition and product labels and know where to look for help when I don't.

For each “good” answer, give yourself 3 points. For each “better,” count 5 points. For “best” answers, give yourself 7 points.

Score card:

45–74: You have good prospects for becoming a pet-wise planet supporter.

75–90: You’re better than most people at making the pet/planet connection. You have potential for the Green Pet Award.

90–105: You win the Green Pet Award! You’re doing a good job and are a good person to help others learn about the connection between our planet and our pets. You’ll pick up a few tips from this book, and I hope you’ll share your own tips at www.thiswildlife.com/petsandtheplanet.

Achievable Goals: Growing into Sustainability

Some thoughts to make your progress easier and more fun include:

1. Don’t stop what you’re doing now, even though it may not be perfect.
2. Involve your family and spread the fun and the work.
3. Select high-value activities. If you can’t figure out what else to do, give your pet and yourself some exercise—preferably together, so you can burn off some of that eco-anxiety if you’re a perfectionist. If you’re more laid-back, the exercise might help you mobilize a bit faster.
4. If you can only do one thing, address any behavior issues that make you think you might not be able to live with your pet.
5. If you have no behavior issues, move on to a diet evaluation, and with that, move on to a less environmentally damaging type of food.
6. If you’ve conquered these areas, move on to community activities, especially as they pertain to helping your community move toward a stable population of pets, industrial-grade composting of pet waste, and the issues related to community harmony discussed in chapter 8.

Low-value activities to avoid are any on which you get stuck. Examples from my own experience include obsessing about whether to use paper or biodegradable plastic bags to pick up pet poop, whether to use plastic or a cloth bed for my dog, and which cleaner is the most perfect on the market. Moving forward, even in an area that is not as critical or with a solution that is not perfect, brings benefits. In our stressful world, I’m convinced that the best thing each of us can do for the planet is to keep our minds and bodies healthy, to shop based on the best information we can, and to enjoy our environment.