

SIMPLE LIFESTYLE

CONSUMER TIPS, No. 6, Nov 2007

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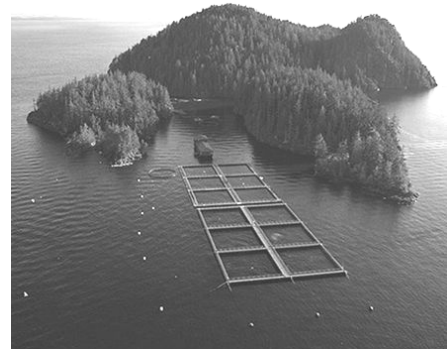
GIVING VIA A VOLUNTARY GAS TAX

Aware that the cost of gas should incorporate the costs of climate change, pollution, and wars, most economists agree that gas should be taxed to reflect its true social cost (which has been estimated at over \$15/gallon, not including climate change or Iraq). This would cause people to internalize the true cost and adjust their behavior. Note that gas runs about \$6.50/gallon in western Europe and over \$4/gallon in most of the world. Given insufficient government taxes, the Voluntary Gas Tax is a movement whereby a group of people voluntarily tax themselves for each gallon of gas they use.

How to start your own Voluntary Gas Tax

1. Gather friends, neighbors and colleagues.
2. Decide on a tax rate together, for example, 50¢/gallon.
3. Keep your receipts and track your gallons.
4. Get together regularly to collect your taxes.
5. Pick organizations to fund (e.g. a charity, your church, etc.).

Check out www.voluntarygastax.org



WHAT'S WRONG WITH FARMED SALMON?

From supermarkets to restaurants, farmed Atlantic Salmon is taking over. The farmed fish are raised in floating pens in bays and estuaries (see photo). These pens are breeding grounds for fish diseases which have infected wild salmon and wiped out wild salmon runs from Norway to British Columbia. Antibiotics and fecal matter from the pens harms other marine animals. Escapees have displaced and hybridized with wild salmon, reducing their genetic diversity. Finally, some farm salmon contain among the highest levels of PCBs and dioxin documented in food for humans; regular testing is not required. Its meat is naturally white, but dyed pink for consumers. It's best to pay a small premium and get better-tasting wild salmon from Alaska (where salmon farming is outlawed). See http://www.adfg.state.ak.us/special/as/as_home.php for more information.

CARBON OFFSETTING CONTROVERSY

Carbon offsetting is the voluntary purchase of "credits" by private individuals to compensate for our greenhouse gas emissions. These offsets are purchased from a growing list of private companies and non-profits, but with little government regulation or agreement on how CO2 credits are calculated. While the most common form of offsetting is tree planting, offsets may come in many forms, such as contributions to less CO2-intensive energy production like windfarms or encouraging people in poor nations to switch from kerosene to cow dung as cooking fuel.

Recent criticisms have questioned the accuracy of the CO2 calculations, the net emissions reductions if the actions were already going to occur, the consequences of some of the tree-planting (e.g. planting non-native eucalyptus inside national parks in Africa or displacing rural villagers), and the basic morality of allowing the rich to buy "indulgences" without changing their behavior (and paying others to change their behavior).

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_offsetting#Controversies for a summary of the issue and see <http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php?site/article/3788/> for a stinging attack that includes child labor in India.

Choose carefully—or better yet, reduce your own emissions and plant your own trees. About 30 trees per year (that would not otherwise be planted) offsets one year's emissions from my household.

SUGGESTIONS AND IDEAS for future tips are welcome! Email me at hamptons@sbcglobal.net