

**Press Contact:**  
Alyssa Hall  
Harris Interactive, Inc.  
212-539-9749  
ahall@harrisinteractive.com



## **The Buying Behavior of Substantial Minorities of Public Is Influenced by Environmental Attitudes – If the Price is Right**

*Many people prefer to buy locally grown, or organic, produce and “green” products from environmentally-friendly companies, but not if they are much more expensive*

**New York, NY — October 23, 2009** — It’s quite popular for people to claim that they care about the environment. In fact many millions of people - from 18% to 39% of all adults - say that their purchasing behavior and other interactions with companies is sometimes influenced by environmental factors. However, in reality, only a very small minority is willing to pay substantially more for “green” products or goods produced by environmentally-friendly companies.

These are some of the results of *The Harris Poll* of 3,110 adults, surveyed online between July 7 and September 8, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

Over 30% of adults say that they often or always purchase locally grown products or seek out and are willing to pay more for “green” products. And a quarter of all adults say that environmental issues are very important to them when deciding what products to buy. But only a few people seek out and buy green products if they have to pay a lot more for them (2%) or say the cost doesn’t matter (3%).

Some of the findings of this Harris Poll include:

- 26% of all adults say that environmental issues are extremely or very important to them when deciding what products or services to buy;
- 17% say that environmental issues are extremely or very important to them when deciding what company to work for;
- Fully 32% say they seek out ‘green’ products and are willing to pay at least a little more for “green” products;
- However, only a few do not consider cost (3%) or are willing to pay a lot more (2%) for them;
- 18% of all adults prefer to do business with a “green” company.

These findings come from a much larger survey by Harris Interactive which asked many other questions about environmental issues, attitudes and behaviors. The survey also found that most people were taking some action, however modest, to limit their use of electricity, water or gasoline. While two-thirds (67%) of these

people said that they were doing this to benefit the environment, over half (55%) said that they were doing this to save money.

This Harris Poll divided the adult population into four segments based on how they described themselves in response to [four different questions](#). These segments went from the least to the most “green” and, as the tables here show, the replies of the four segments to virtually all of the questions are dramatically different. The “most green” segment, 22% of all adults, are far more likely to adopt all of the environmentally-friendly activities. The “least green” are extremely unlikely to adopt any of them.

For example, fully 68% of the “most green” segment are willing to pay at least a little more for green products. Only 3% of the “least green” are willing to do so.

**So what?**

The most important conclusion to be drawn from these findings is that “green marketing” surely appeals to substantial numbers of consumers. *Everything else being equal*, many millions of people would prefer to buy products and services that are “green” or are produced by environmentally-friendly companies. However, if “green” products cost significantly more than less “green” products, relatively few people will buy them. When push comes to shove, in these economic times especially, price usually trumps environmental factors.

**TABLE 1**  
**HOW GREEN-NESS INFLUENCES PURCHASING BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES TO COMPANIES**  
 (Summary from 8 Questions)

Base: All adults

|   | All Adults | Green-ness  |    |    |            |
|---|------------|-------------|----|----|------------|
|   |            | Least Green |    |    | Most Green |
|   |            | 1           | 2  | 3  | 4          |
| Agree that “Going Green is just a marketing tactic”   | 22         | 33          | 21 | 17 | 16         |
| “I prefer to do business with ‘green’ companies”  | 18         | *           | 5  | 14 | 60         |
| Environmental issues very important when deciding:  |            |             |    |    |            |
| - “Which products or services you purchase”   | 26         | 4           |    |    |            |
| - “What company or business you work for or apply for a job at”   | 17         | 5           | 11 | 28 | 67         |
|   |            |             | 6  | 17 | 43         |
| “Seek out green products and willing to pay more for them”  | 32         | 3           | 20 | 40 | 68         |
| “Often/always purchase locally grown produce”   | 39         | 20          | 31 | 42 | 65         |
| “Boycotted a business . . . because of their environmental or conservation practices (or lack thereof)” | 6          | 1           | 2  | 8  | 15         |

**TABLE 2**  
**INTEREST IN PAYING MORE FOR GREEN PRODUCTS**

“Which of the following statements best describes your perspective on environmentally-friendly products or services?”

Base: All adults

|  | All Adults | Green-ness  |           |           |            |
|--|------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
|  |            | Least Green |           |           | Most Green |
|  |            | 1           | 2         | 3         | 4          |
| <b>SEEK OUT GREEN PRODUCTS AND WILLING TO PAY EXTRA (NET)</b>          | <b>32</b>  | <b>3</b>    | <b>20</b> | <b>40</b> | <b>68</b>  |
| I seek out green products, no matter the additional cost               | 3          | *           | 1         | 3         | 10         |
| I seek out green products even if I have to pay a lot extra            | 2          | -           | *         | 2         | 7          |
| I seek out green products even if I have to pay a little extra         | 26         | 3           | 19        | 35        | 50         |
| <b>SEEK OUT GREEN PRODUCTS BUT NOT WILLING TO PAY EXTRA (NET)</b>      | <b>45</b>  | <b>43</b>   | <b>57</b> | <b>47</b> | <b>28</b>  |
| I seek out green products as long as the cost is the same              | 29         | 21          | 37        | 34        | 22         |
| I seek out green products only if they save me at least a little money | 9          | 10          | 11        | 9         | 4          |
| I seek out green products only if they save me a lot of money          | 7          | 12          | 9         | 4         | 2          |
| <b>I DO NOT SEEK OUT GREEN PRODUCTS, NO MATTER THE COST OR SAVINGS</b> | <b>24</b>  | <b>54</b>   | <b>23</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>4</b>   |

**TABLE 3**  
**WHY PEOPLE HAVE BEHAVED IN ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY WAYS**

“For which of the following reasons, if any, do you engage in these activities or behavior?”

Base: Adults who have done green activities in past year

|  | All Adults | Green-ness  |    |    |            |
|--|------------|-------------|----|----|------------|
|  |            | Least Green |    |    | Most Green |
|  |            | 1           | 2  | 3  | 4          |
| To benefit the environment   | 67         | 38          | 64 | 77 | 88         |
| To save money  | 55         | 55          | 54 | 55 | 56         |
| To take advantage of a ‘green’ government tax credit (e.g., for purchasing a hybrid car, making certain home improvements) | 7          | 2           | 6  | 7  | 12         |
| To set a good example for others (e.g., friends, children)   | 47         | 23          | 41 | 57 | 67         |
| To make a statement  | 13         | 2           | 7  | 18 | 27         |
| To reduce clutter in my home   | 49         | 42          | 47 | 52 | 52         |
| Out of habit (e.g., it’s how you were raised, or you’ve always done so)  | 40         | 30          | 40 | 40 | 49         |
| Because it is required by law (e.g., recycling)  | 14         | 16          | 13 | 15 | 10         |

**TABLE 4**  
**HOW "GREEN-NESS" WAS DEFINED**

"To what extent, if any, does each of the following describe you?"

Base: All adults

|                                | <b>Describes Very Well/<br/>Completely</b> |
|--------------------------------|--|
| I am environmentally-conscious | 30%  |
| I am a conservationist         | 17%  |
| I am an environmentalist       | 13%  |
| I am 'green'                   | 13%  |

**DEFINITION OF "GREEN-NESS"**

"Green-ness" was defined on the number of those replies people gave, as follows:

|                 |                           |
|-----------------|---------------------------|
| 1 "LEAST GREEN" | Average score = 1.00-1.50 |
| 2               | Average score = 1.75-2.25 |
| 3               | Average score = 2.50-3.00 |
| 4 "MOST GREEN"  | Average score = 3.25-5.00 |

**Methodology**

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States July 7 and September 8, 2009, among 3,110 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

*These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*

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By Humphrey Taylor, Chairman, The Harris Poll, Harris Interactive

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