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für Hauswirtschaft e.V.



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FOR HOME ECONOMICS

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On World Home Economics Day 2023

Waste Reduction Literacy

The unlimited use of natural resources exacerbates climate change, destroys nature, and increases pollution - with devastating consequences for mankind and the planet. The global material footprint grew by 70 per cent between 2000 and 2017 [1]. It is clear that the more raw materials we put into the economic cycle, the more waste will eventually emerge. Worldwide, around 14 per cent of food is lost along the supply chain before it reaches the retail trade. Every year, twelve million tons of food ends up in the bin in households in Germany. One million plastic drinking bottles are purchased every minute. Every year, five trillion plastic bags are thrown away [2]. 35 per cent of the total input of micro plastics into the environment comes from textiles [3].

Increasingly scarce raw materials

For decades we have become accustomed to the fact that we can have anything we want, whenever we want it. But many of the raw materials on which our economy and consumer behaviour are based are scarce. As Germany is one of the wealthy countries of the world, we can afford these scarce raw materials, but this is often at the expense of the people in the countries which provide these resources. The events of the last few years, from coronavirus to the war in Ukraine, have taught us that products can become scarce if global supply chains are disrupted.

To reduce the dependence on foreign resources and the amount of waste, expansion of the circular economy is often required. In practice this appears to be more a good intention than an economic reality. In Germany, for example, less than 10 percent of resources are recycled [2]. By 2030 all plastic bottles must contain at least 30 per cent recycled plastic [4]. These two figures indicate that smart technical solutions are only part of the equation.

Transformation at all levels

In many cases, conserving resources and avoiding waste simply means that we need to stop buying consumer goods in the first place. This requires questioning, re-thinking and re-evaluating our consumption habits. So that households don't get bogged down in the detail, there are various guidelines as to how they can act sustainably with greater impact.

1. *Pay attention to the Key Issues and analyse your own needs*

If you want to reduce your personal ecological footprint quickly and easily, you need to focus on three key areas: no air travel and limited trips by car; a predominantly plant-based diet; heating no higher than 20 degrees. Nutrition, housing and mobility account for the majority of our consumption and the burden we place on the climate. Systematic steps in these areas have far greater impact than many smaller changes (such as buying more efficient products or reducing packaging) combined. Another advantage is that they can save money, as sustainable behaviour is not necessarily expensive. Another *Key Issue* is a reasonable size of per capita living space. Housing decisions are usually made only a few times in a lifetime, but they determine resource and energy consumption over a long period [5, 6, 7].

2. *The R-strategies: more than reduce, reuse, recycle*

For decades, the three 'R's have been recommended for waste prevention: reduce, reuse, recycle. Recognising that it makes more sense to conserve resources rather than treat recyclables with additional resource inputs, additional 'R's have since been added. Refuse and rethink are the most logical of these and prevent products from being sought after in the first place. Repair, refurbish, remanufacture and repurpose are now promoted as variants of reduce and reuse. Recycle, probably the best known 'R', is still important because recycling brings resources back into circulation and provides the basis for new products - even if it is mostly downcycling. The final 'R' stands for recover, i.e. the recovery of resources. If all the previous 'R's cannot be applied, the last option is to recover energy from waste [6].

3. *The 4 D's*

We can contribute to social transformation and greater sustainability not only in the context of product consumption, but also through the design of our own everyday lives [8]. These 4 D's form the basis of what is now often summed up by the term "sufficiency".

Deceleration: a shift away from "ever faster and more" can help to slow down life to a healthy pace. Movements such as Slow Food, Slow Fashion and Slow Travel are practical examples of deceleration.

Decentralisation: coronavirus and the war in Ukraine have given us a premonition of the vulnerability of the globalised world economy. Stronger regionalisation of supply chains makes us less dependent, reduces traffic and enables greater transparency.

Decommercialisation: in our society, the only parts of the economy that are deemed to count are those which bring money in. But no one knows better than the home economics sector how much quality of life is created in households and through public welfare-oriented work. Reflection and a conscious appreciation of this work act as a positive counterpoint to the hamster wheel of more and more work and consumerism.

Decluttering: the way to a successful life does not depend on the accumulation of possessions or wealth. Excessive stuff makes everyday life more complex and complicated, distracting our attention and robbing us of the energy that we need so urgently for the challenges of day to day living. The pursuit of simplicity in our lifestyles would seem to offer the best way to optimise the art of living.

How can transformation succeed?

The home economics sector has great and as yet underutilised potential to contribute to a reduction in the consumption of resources.

- *Home Economics Know-how – The basis for social change*
To make D- or R-strategies a way of life rather than random measures adopted by a few, we need well thought out and executed campaigns. Households can make a major contribution to the transformation into a sustainable society. Home economics know-how provides a firm foundation for this. Home economics can apply and impart everyday practices for the appropriate, appreciative and measured use of resources, infrastructures and the environment.
- *The service sector – A blind spot in the discussion*
Whilst sustainability tips for private households are on the increase, businesses in the service sector scarcely play a role in the discussion. Yet the savings potential here is comparatively larger and more effective. Every service sector company claims to value sustainability. But a bit of sustainability here and there does not equate to sustainability in a meaningful way for the planet. What is needed is comprehensive sustainability management which takes sustainability into account at all levels and in all areas, starting from top management. Only in this way can we succeed in transforming companies and making an effective contribution to sustainability [9].
- *Individual limits and political responsibility*
However large or small they are, households cannot pull off the transformation on their own. The prevailing conditions need to be appropriate in order for households to act with sustainability in mind. Incentives are needed to encourage consumers to change their behaviour patterns. Lower consumption of resources is also linked to issues of climate-, gender- and social-justice and democracy. Home economics is therefore not so much a private matter, as a political necessity.
Recognition of the scarcity of resources and the need to conserve them in order not to plunge the planet into chaos, is in the gift of the broad majority of people. An average private household can influence up to 30 per cent of its resource consumption through its own behaviour and consumption decisions. For the majority of households, this is a significant contribution to sustainability (10,11). There is therefore a need for much more public debate on the issue, including a stronger commitment to corresponding political demands. Home economics can thus become a driver of transformation: through sustainable action in private households and businesses, through political demands and through active participation in social processes.

The International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) has actively supported World Home Economics Day on 21 March every year since 1982. The aim of this day is to raise awareness of the importance of home economics in managing everyday life and improving the quality of life for all people. In 2023, under the motto, "Waste Reduction Literacy" attention will be drawn to the potential of home economics to significantly support our transformation into a sustainable society.

The German section of the IFHE is launching a competition to mark World Home Economics Day. It is looking for examples of good practice and projects that show how resources can be conserved and waste can be avoided in conjunction with home economics skills. The deadline for entries is 31.01.2023. For further information see <https://t1p.de/WHED2023>

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Further information at www.ifhe.org; www.dghev.de

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