

HOW COVID-19 CAN DRIVE CONSUMERS TO ACCELERATE SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES



An Ipsos Point of View

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GAME CHANGERS



COVID-19 threatens to blunt the momentum of growing concern for our environment and the role both consumers and corporations play in slowing climate change. A deeper look shows that rather than an opportunity to regress, this is a notable opportunity to innovate.

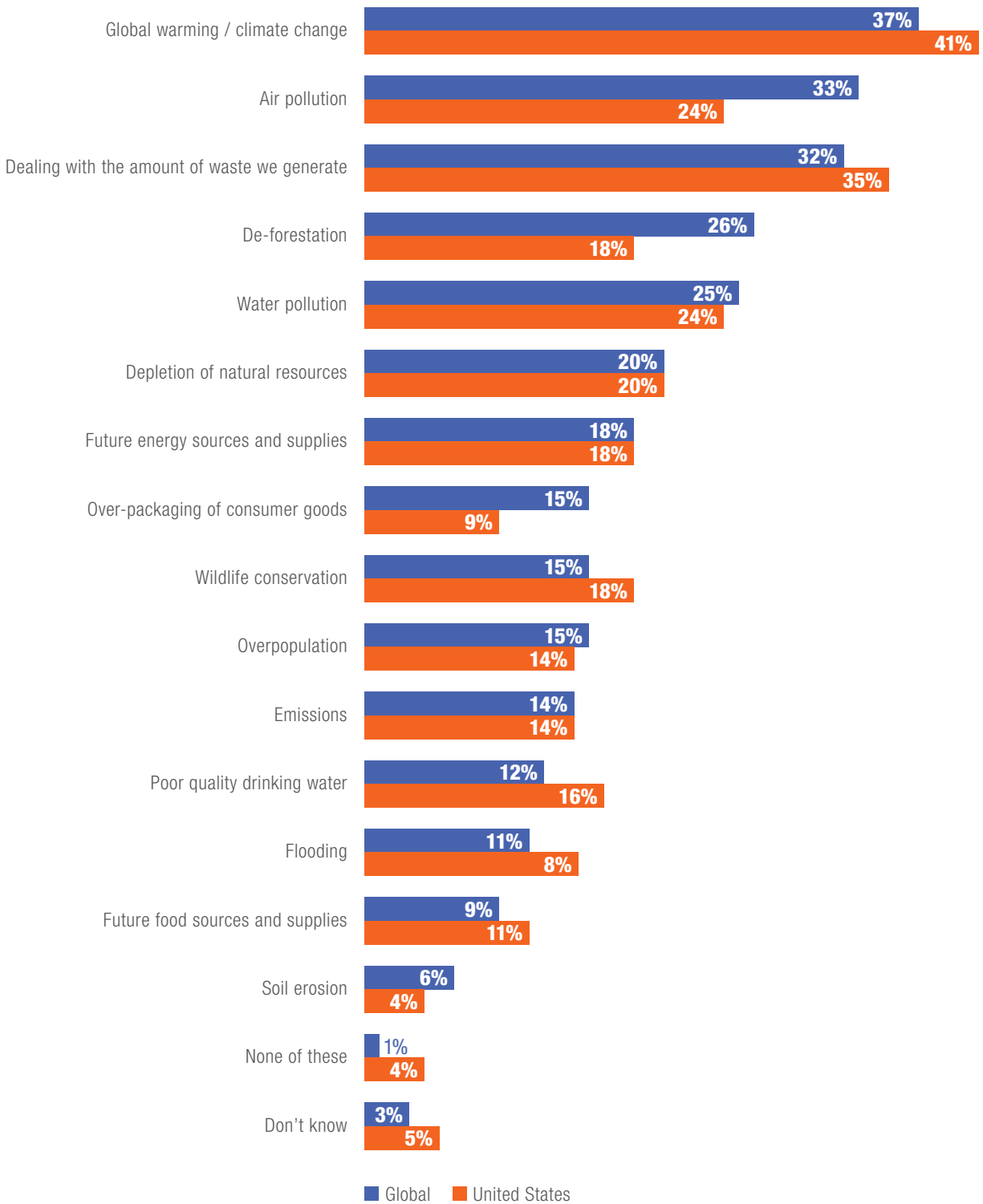
While COVID-19 remains one of the top concerns of those surveyed by Ipsos in the U.S., 71% also agree that climate change is just as serious a crisis as COVID-19. As a result, consumers and corporations are simultaneously navigating two very important crises—which currently conflict with each other in their solutions and require behavior changes. We specifically see this tension in the area of food safety and packaging.

As the pandemic unfolded in the U.S. in March, many consumers were willing (or even forced) to make a trade off; more packaging and waste for the benefit of increased safety and hygiene. By early August, 46% of shoppers reported they miss being able to use reusable grocery bags and coffee cups.

Some countries and states have paused their bans on plastic bags or single-use plastics to meet demand for safety and hygiene. As a result, there's concern that recent progress in reducing virgin plastics and recycling would be eliminated.

However, in the long run, sustainability efforts and worries over climate change will likely remain a primary concern and not be derailed by COVID-19. Already, in the U.S. the top environmental issue after climate change is the amount of waste we generate.

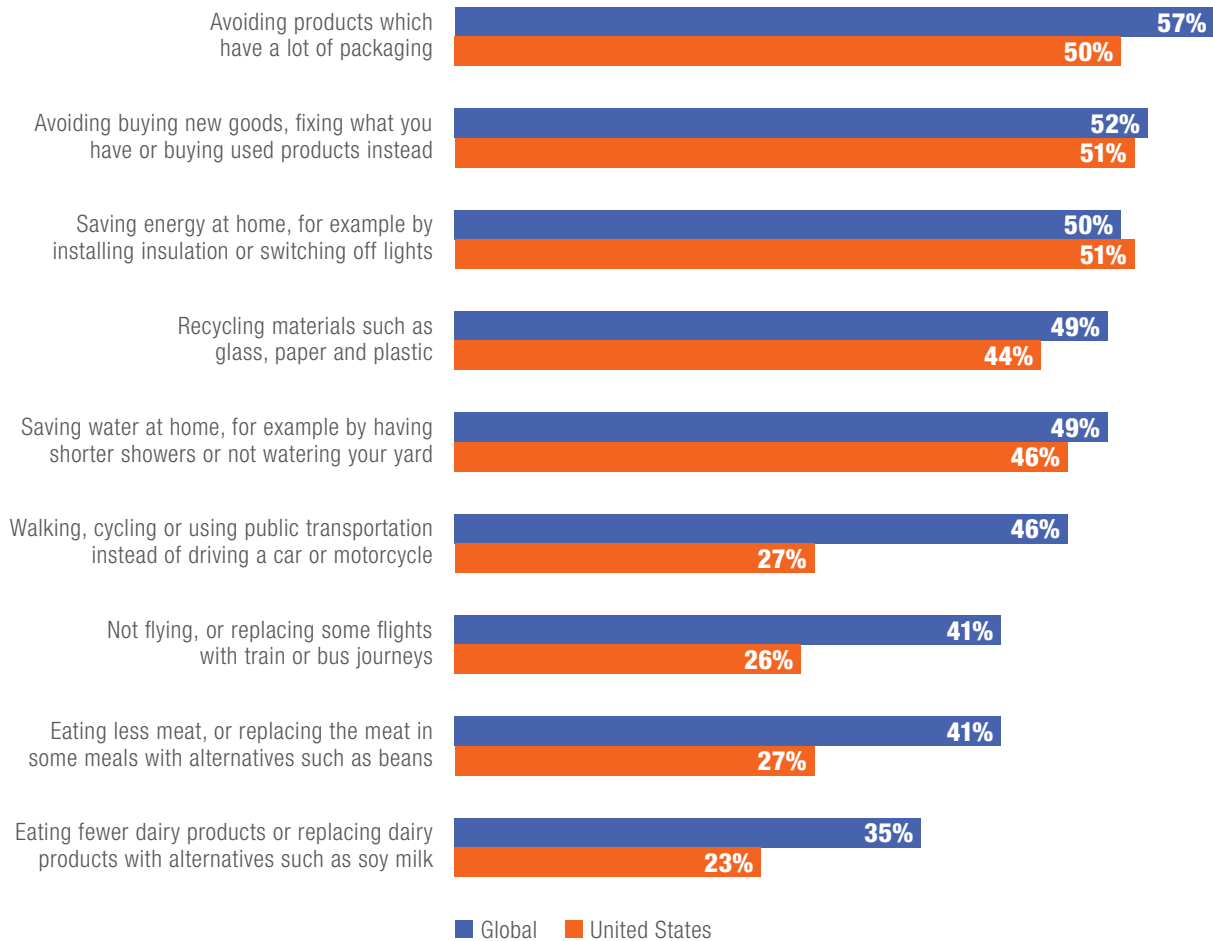
Figure 1 Top environmental issues today



What's interesting, though, is there is a significant gap between what people say and what they do when it comes to "green" behaviors. People clearly care about the environment and waste,

but their willingness to dramatically change their behaviors is weaker compared to global peers.

Figure 2 % of adults likely to make changes within the next year to limit their own contribution to climate change



Therefore, the impetus will be on packaging engineers, food manufacturers and policymakers to continue to lead the way in green and sustainable practices especially in light of the pandemic. Americans are looking to corporations to drive this change, according to a recent Ipsos Coronavirus Consumer Tracker. Nearly two-thirds of those polled said they want the brands they buy [to make it easy to recycle or reuse the packaging of their products](#).

Here are ways companies can reconcile these evolving needs of consumers and our broader society:

- Many corporations and brands are creating new sustainability goals for 2030 and beyond, and the United Nations has updated their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to serve as a framework for global COVID-19 recovery.
- PepsiCo recently announced its plan [to join a consortium of global consumer goods companies to pilot branded paper bottles in 2021](#).

Consumers are also seeking changes from restaurants: More than half of adults in an August survey hoped restaurants [would find less wasteful packaging for take-out and delivery](#). And even as sales have taken a hit and business models have pivoted, restaurants are addressing this desire:

- In the U.S., Starbucks began [trialing a new recyclable, compostable cup](#).
- Domino's is using a communications strategy [to educate customers that they can safely recycle cardboard pizza boxes—even with grease on them—after those late-night quarantine binges](#).
- As 49% of consumers surveyed by Ipsos say they'd [prefer to be asked if they need extras like plastic silverware or napkins](#), local restaurants can help customers to pause and actively make the choice for these “extras” to save money and limit their environmental impact.

Meanwhile, there remains tremendous upside potential to meeting consumer needs during these dual crises.

- With the increase in consumer demand for and usage of online ordering and home delivery, reusable container services like Loop [can attract new food and beverage brands to drive reusable packaging](#).
- Materials developers will need to consider ways to make cost-effective compostable or bio-degradable materials available to local restaurants that have employed some of the most creative and innovative approaches to stay in business during the pandemic, including the sale of meal kits, “pantry” sales and carryout quarantine cocktails.
- Brands could pick up on the TikTok trend where the kids [were biting into the bottles of apple juice](#) with truly edible packaging.

In all, the foods and beverages we buy, prepare and consume together will continue to not only bring the U.S. together in unique and safe ways, but can also serve to advance society's goals for a sustainable future.

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