



You Can't Eat GNP: Economics as if Ecology Mattered (A Merloyd Lawrence Book)

By Eric Davidson

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"In clear, measured prose Davidson lays out how the traditional tools of economics don't work when you are talking about concrete things like soil, forests, garbage." -Inc. Ecology and economics are not doomed to be adversaries. This lively and concise book presents the exciting new insights of environmental economics as well as the three fallacies of conventional economic analysis. You Can't Eat GNP offers a blueprint for a truly sustainable economy that recognizes the natural resources (like water, air, and soil) on which we ultimately depend. Eric A. Davidson, Ph.D., is a senior scientist at the Woods Hole Research Center. His fieldwork takes him from the Brazilian Amazon to the re-growing forests of New England and he has conducted research at the University of California, Berkeley, and at the NASA Ames Research Center. A Merloyd Lawrence Book

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Editorial Review

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Eric A. Davidson's engaging and informative book couldn't have come at a more timely moment. In an age when high technology is driving our economy and propelling us further from the ecological system that physically supports us, *You Can't Eat GNP* sends a loud and urgent message: the economic system will fail if the ecosystem is not carefully managed.

As Davidson explains, the system of neoclassical economics, which governs our economy, assigns value to goods depending on the level at which they're produced and consumed. For example, marketed consumer products like bread hold high value, while bread's main ingredient, flour, holds less. Flour in its unprocessed form, wheat, holds even less value, and the soil from which wheat is grown holds the least worth of all. This triangle has become an exact inversion of the ecologist's pyramid, however, in which soil--which supports the entire ecological system, from plants to herbivores to carnivores--is viewed as the pyramid's stabilizing resource. Davidson argues these opposing models must be integrated in order to preserve the ecological system that sustains our economic system. He doesn't propose a "back to nature" solution, nor does he negate the importance of technological developments stimulated by our present mode of economics. He does, however, agree with R.H. Tawney's observation that "If economic ambitions are good servants, they are bad masters." Davidson examines the environmental effects of rigidly employed economic values such as cost-benefit analysis and considers the inevitable economic effects of global warming, waste disposal, and the failure to pursue sustainability. Though his proposals for change are not extensive, he does offer workable (and sometimes controversial) suggestions for both individual and community action.

An author as well as a respected scientist, Davidson writes in clear, lucid prose, making the sciences of economics and ecology accessible to the nonscientific reader, without dumbing down his arguments. He supports his points with relevant, contemporary examples, highlighting the vital importance of managing the economy in conjunction with the environment. As this intelligent treatise wryly reminds us, no matter how booming the economy, we'll never be able to eat our gross national product. --S. Ketchum

About the Author

Eric A. Davidson, Ph.D. is a senior scientist at the Woods Hole Research Center

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