

the existential dread of supermarket shopping

 nervouswreckage.substack.com/p/the-existential-dread-of-supermarket



Nervous Wreckage

a writer with panic disorder looks for examples of how anxiety manifests all around her: in pop culture, everyday life, & beyond

I'm so excited to introduce NW's second guest writer, [Bridget Shrivell of Parenting in the Climate Crisis!](#) Please join me in welcoming Bridget and reading her meditation on climate change anxiety, parenting, and consumerism below. Be sure to check out and subscribe to her excellent Substack using the link above.

Bone tired after nearly 18 hours of traveling with a 3-year-old, I slowly climbed up the 3 flights of stairs to our home away from home for the next 30 days, dropped the bags and then forced us to go back down the stairs and walk 5-minutes to the supermarket.

Once upon a time, I loved supermarkets. Sneaking away from work on a random Tuesday or waking up early on a Saturday and exploring the aisles finding inspiration in a container of cardamom or a package of buckwheat flour. But these days, simply thinking about a supermarket fills me with dread. Lurking around every aisle, I find another reminder of our impending climate doom.



It starts with the plastic packaging. Once you start noticing all that single-use plastic, you can't unsee it. Of course, I've been seeing that plastic packaging for my entire life; as a young child tagging along on supermarket outings with my mom; as a college student just figuring out the whole cooking for myself thing and as a professional writing about climate and the food system. Yet, having my child in 2018 made it personal. The majority of the items I put in my cart only add to the horror of her future world: the carbon emissions, the heatwaves, the wildfires, the rising waters.

Even the most eco-conscious among us live most of our days taking actions that only add to the climate crisis. There is no other choice. I might drive to the grocery store using my electric car, powered by the solar panels on my roof, but once there, my options, even when shopping organic, are still problematic. I have yet to find organic cauliflower (one of the few vegetables my child will eat) that doesn't come wrapped in plastic cling. What's the alternative? Not buying it? I can buy the non-organic yogurt that comes in the glass jar. Or I can buy the organic yogurt that comes in the plastic container. Or when we're home, I can drive to my local farm and buy their yogurt, which also comes in plastic but which they'll take back (or at least before COVID they did and maybe they will again someday.)

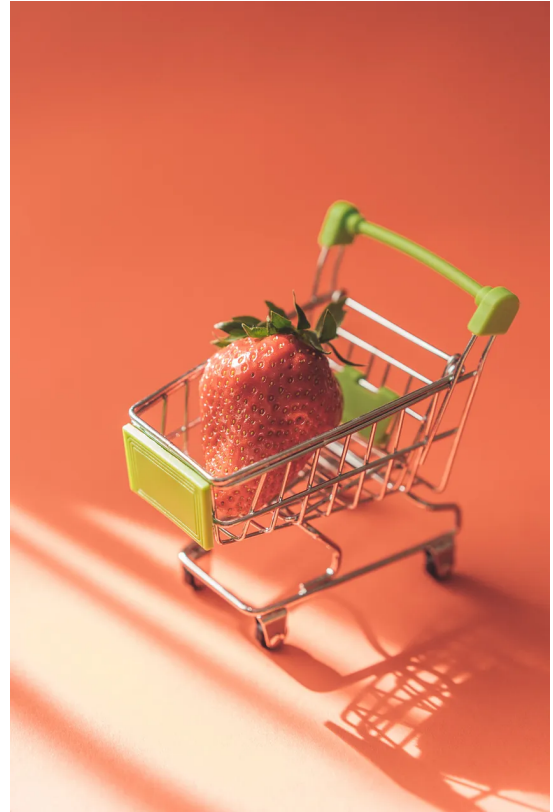
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With each food choice, I weigh the pros and the cons. Is there one I can put in my basket that will make it so that the beach I spent my childhood going to, the one that is now losing more than 14 feet of shoreline a year to rising waters, will still be there for my daughter to take another generation too?

If I'm honest, the answer to that question is no. That shoreline is already lost to future children. It makes me want to skip the market entirely. But we need to eat. My daughter wants mac and cheese, I want a big salad, and we need provisions for breakfast the following day, so into the Tasco we go.

Over the following month, we'd end up in the supermarket once or twice a week. I loved that almost all the options were organic; it lessened the stress of reading ingredient labels. And the food was so much cheaper than what I was used to. In New England, to feed two of us, my weekly grocery bill often reached \$80; in England, it was never more than \$50, but still, there was all that packaging, a constant reminder of impending climate doom, that could either taunt me in every aisle or spur me to buy more seeds, to call my representatives, to email cauliflower brands and ask if they'd consider other non-single use plastic packaging, to continue to fight to make the world a bit better for my daughter and her generation.

Bridget Shirvell writes about the intersection of the climate crisis and parenting. You can subscribe to her newsletter: Parenting in the Climate Crisis, [here](#).



A guest post by

[Bridget Shirvell](#)

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