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Jack Johnson



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GREEN as it gets

THE WORLD LOVES SINGER

JACK JOHNSON FOR MORE

THAN HIS CATCHY TUNES

By sarah sekula

JACK JOHNSON

IS EASYGOING, BUT HE GETS SUPER STOKED ABOUT PLENTY OF THINGS: ORANGES FROM HIS OWN BACKYARD. HIS NEIGHBOR'S BREADFRUIT HUMMUS. THE WATER CATCHMENT SYSTEM HE BUILT WITH HIS KIDS. AND NURDLES.

Nurdles? Suddenly, I feel a bit lost during our recent phone conversation.

Before I can ask, he explains. It's the raw material that makes up nearly every plastic product on Earth. In Australia, the discovery of nurdles led to a lawsuit against a major plastic plant. And tons of those same pesky pellets wash up on the shores of Oahu, where Johnson lives with his college sweetheart and wife, Kim, and their three children.

"Especially along the windward side of the island, where basically the island acts as a filter in the middle of the Pacific," Johnson says, sounding more marine biologist than chart-topping, soft-rock recording artist.

In fact, if you sort through the trash that washes up, as Johnson often does, "you find all these little clues," he says. Meaning, the beach cleanups he leads — just like so many things in his life — are more than meets the eye.



Hawaii resident Jack Johnson examines nurdles that have washed up on the shores of Oahu, left. The pellets are the raw material in virtually all plastic products.

Not to mention, the ripple effect is just plain cool. First-graders are asking their parents if they can grow green beans at home. Others are gung-ho about making pesto. And many lecture their parents when they accidentally toss plastics in the trash. In a song from the album Johnson recorded for the 2006 *Curious George* movie, *The 3 R's*, the main verse repeats: "We gotta learn to reduce, reuse, recycle."

"If children grow their own food, they will eat it," says Natalie McKinney, director of program development for Kōkua.

Johnson's wife agrees. "You have these kids who might have hated cherry tomatoes, but if they grow them they will just be eating them like candy."

In turn, the hope is that the students will become lifelong stewards of the planet.

"Ninety percent of our food is shipped in to Hawaii," Jack

"It feels good to know people appreciate what we are doing."

— JACK JOHNSON

ALL IN THE DETAILS

Johnson is fascinated by the science behind the environmental movement, and he puts what he learns to practice. His green-mindedness funnels all the way down to the compact fluorescent light bulbs he uses at his touring venues. That's right: While some bands demand bowls of M&M's with the blue ones picked out or bottles of vitamin water to bathe their dogs in, Johnson asks for something more worthwhile. His EnviroRider (aka tour agreement) asks venues to buy carbon offsets for the show and compost organic waste. His goal: to leave the towns he visits in better shape than when he showed up.

"We could stop touring altogether to have the smallest impact," says Johnson, whose everyday voice is, by

the way, not much different from his singing voice. "But the greater impact could be to find ways to make the industry more responsible."

That he has done. His tours are, hands down, the greenest of the green. The 39-year-old (soon to be 40) songwriter says it all stems from being on tour with fellow green-hearted musicians Pearl Jam and Willie Nelson early in his music career.

Johnson's concerts serve as part-think tank, part-fundraising machine. Fans get connected with local eco-minded programs in the Village Green. And his social action network, All At Once, keeps those like-minded people in touch, encouraging global change.

To top it all off, from 2008 to 2013, 100 percent of his touring revenue went to nonprofit groups around the world.

"What's inspiring to me about Jack is that he lets his appreciation of the environment guide everything he does," says Jessica Scheeter, the wife of Jack's keyboardist, Zach Gill, and the executive director of the Johnson Ohana Charitable Foundation. "With Jack, tour 'greening' is not just an afterthought. It's the foundation of the entire process."

From the drivers who fill up the tour buses with biodiesel fuel to the vendors selling 100 percent post-consumer products, they all believe wholeheartedly in the mission. That includes sourcing most of the food eaten on tour from a local radius. "We will have somebody go shop at the farmers market to make sure we support local farms in the area," Johnson says.

The green practices continue at

Johnson's Brushfire Records studio in Los Angeles, which is powered by rooftop solar panels, insulated with cotton from scraps of blue jeans and decorated with rugs made from recycled plastic bottles.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

After being on the road for months at a time, there's nothing Johnson loves more than 1) tending to his organic garden full of peppers, spinach and herbs 2) surfing (Pipeline is practically in his backyard) and 3) passing along new ideas.

"When I take my music outside of Hawaii, I'm sharing a piece of Hawaii with the world," says Johnson, who is known for hits like *Banana Pancakes*

and *Better Together*. "At the same time I'm learning as I'm out there. You can't help but want to bring it home to share these ideas."

Sharing, in fact, is Johnson's modus operandi. Jack and his wife Kim have donated more than \$25 million to charity since 2001. Their Kōkua Hawaii Foundation, which they launched in 2003, helps kids in Hawaii connect to their food through school gardens, recycling programs and farm field trips.

"It's sad to say, but some kids don't know that certain foods grow on trees and certain foods grow underground," says Kim Johnson, who has gotten kudos from the Environmental Protection Agency for her work.

Johnson says. "A lot of the farmlands are getting rezoned. Once they are rezoned and something's built on it we lose that farm land forever."

It's clear that if there's one thing that matches Johnson's oversized talent (his albums have sold more than 20 million copies worldwide), it's his generous heart.

"I'm the most unlikely rock star," Johnson admits. "I had no idea this was all going to happen. I had the best job in the world; I was making surf videos. I wasn't really looking for a job change."

That's just part of his appeal. He never asked for the limelight. But now that he has it, he uses it to shine a light on things much bigger than himself. ●