

How Much for that

Ladybug? Breaking News February

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We've known for a long time how much our kidneys are worth, but how much is a blade of grass worth? A gust of wind? How about a ladybug?

These questions are no longer mysteries. In developing news, a group from the United States has finally succeeded in giving a monetary value to everything.

Since 2045, the Cost Production Committee (CPC), a team composed of eight preeminent economists and one celebrity chef, has been living in a renovated air-conditioned grain silo near Davenport, Iowa. They've been calculating the price of things from pencil erasers to volcanoes; from egotism to the distance between the North Pole and the Sun. The team's goal is to provide complete and irrefutable transparency to the market, and maybe help disadvantaged communities.

"We know this is controversial because it could raise taxes for wealthy individuals, but we think this may be a sustainable way for climate refugees to sell things that were previously invaluable," says economist Heartel Sanscoeur. "We're creating new opportunities!"

For the past 20 years, we've all heard the stories coming from climate refugees about having nothing, being destitute, and becoming increasingly poor and irrelevant, but this new report shows that they may possess valuable assets.

"Things that we previously couldn't give a price to — like, say, mucus — now have a value in the market," says Weevil Lebete, another CPC economist. "We imagine entrepreneurial mucus collectors, sponsored by Kleenex, going around their climate shanty towns and then delivering mucus samples to local Center for Disease Control offices for disease prevention studies, as they relate to more affluent communities."

I leave Davenport and chart a course for Denver, Colorado, a shanty town once known for its unending suburban sprawl and dog lovers, to ask how excited the residents are at the prospect of collecting mucus. The first person I meet is Harry Chevelure, a man in his 70s dressed as if he just stepped out of a Canadian oxygen bar from the 2030s. Our conversation goes as follows:

So where are you from, Harry? Harry

Chevelure: Arivaca, just south of Tucson.

What did you do there? HC: I grew up there. Until the summer of 2042 when both my parents died, my brother died, and my niece and nephew died.

How did that happen? HC: One of the barrel bombs. I was working underground on a water catchment and I was the only survivor from Arivaca. So, yeah, it wasn't just my family who died. Everyone died.

And you didn't want to stay there, I take it? HC: No. There was no water. And everyone was dead. So I came to Colorado because there used to be snow, and I hoped that there might be something left. Some sort of water. Some place that hadn't burned yet. But we had to stay in Denver. We couldn't get up into the mountains. Because of the fences.

Bummer. How would you feel about collecting mucus?

HC: What?

What if I told you that your mucus and the mucus of all the people living in your tent is worth something? HC: That's not true.

It is. Mucus from vulnerable, exposed, derelict climate refugee communities could be worth \$50-60 per ton. HC: Go to hell.

The Cost Production Committee has also been working with an interdisciplinary group of eight preeminent engineers and one massage therapist to develop a small backpack the size and shape of a toaster that will calculate the price of whatever customers want to know.

When I ask why the device will be so large, lead engineer Happy Maistrise says, "Remember when people wanted smaller and smaller cell phones, and then they wanted larger and larger cell phones?"

Whatever the final design will be, the Carbondale, Colorado-based team thinks that our warming climate will never be so easy to navigate with the new device. At the end of our talk, Maistrise gives me the distinct honor of being outfitted with a test model for one week. At the mere mention of most anything, the device's retro touchscreen displays a price in USD. Dust? \$0.01/lb. Alligators playing jazz? \$600/note. There are still some limitations, however. When I tell the device to go to hell, it can't come up with a price, which is something I'm sure the engineers are still sussing out. The strangest thing I discover? Well, it's how much my depressing memory of my ex-wife leaving me for an engineer is worth — \$1,760! Still wearing the device, I quickly head up the road to Aspen, Colorado to get a market

evaluation of that depressing memory. There, I run into Dr. Grace Amovible, an experimental brain surgeon, who has been following the Cost Production Committee since it started in 2045. Dr. Amovible works out of her luxurious 8-car garage, treating patients who have lost the will to procreate.

“I thought to myself, if they give a price for individual functions of the brain, like speech recognition, and superficial judgement,” says Dr. Amovible, “then I could potentially get grant money to remove those parts and study them more in depth.”

So can Dr. Amovible remove my depressing memory and sell it?

“No,” she says, “not yet. I haven’t even started my trial studies using desperate climate refugees living in Denver.”

I tell her that I might know a candidate, but she’s already back to work, having lost approximately \$700 in taking the time to talk to me.

I leave her clinic and walk errantly through the cobbled streets of Aspen, quizzing the device. I can’t help but search for the most outlandish ideas that can be given a dollar value — Jupiter, Art Deco, Communism.

“And what about the future?” I ask.

The device
pauses.

“The future?” the touchscreen finally displays.

I stop underneath the last aspen tree in the town. The locals call the tree, Sally Sin, referring to the medicinal active ingredient in the bark, salicin, which can be used for pain relief. People have carved dates in the bark, the oldest of which is 2019 and hardly legible amid the black crusty scars.

I repeat, “the
future.”

There’s still no answer.

“How about a ladybug?” the touchscreen displays.

The device wastes no time in responding to its own question. So how much for that ladybug? Well, it’s worth about \$4.5 million, if you can find one.