Our extractive economic system relies on endless growth and exploitation and hurts humans and wildlife. The harms of this system range from continued fossil fuel combustion, which threatens our health and climate, to voter suppression and growing wealth inequality.

Research conducted by the Pew Research Center found that more than 65% of people in the United States believe that the American political, economic and healthcare systems must be completely reformed or need major changes. The growing frustration with our present systems has caused people to turn to alternative economy practices, like participating in community-supported agriculture, land trusts or sharing and bartering programs.

The creation of an alternative economy requires community-oriented solutions grounded in equity, cooperation, democratic practices and sustainability. These alternative economy values embody the belief that the needs of people should be prioritized over the endless pursuit of profit.

But creating and scaling alternative economy practices so they’re widely accepted requires an understanding of how people perceive the present economy and support an alternative economy. To gain that understanding, the Center for Biological Diversity conducted an online survey of the U.S. public to get a sense of their existing knowledge of alternative economy principles, their perceptions of the role corporations play in the economy, and their willingness to engage in community-level alternative economy actions.

The survey revealed that three-fourths of Americans agree that our economic system needs to change but only one-third are comfortable using alternative economy language in conversation. It also found that the majority of those surveyed are familiar with alternative economy practices, but financial resources and time significantly limit their ability to participate in them.

Our recommendations to overcome these barriers include creating resources for the public and policymakers to support scaling alternative economy actions and advocating for increased corporate transparency and accountability in the political process and the economic system.

The results of this survey provide crucial insight into the public’s existing beliefs about our current capitalist economic system and people’s understanding and willingness to participate in a new and inclusive alternative economy. It’s our hope that the wisdom gained from this survey will help environmental advocates build support for a new economy.