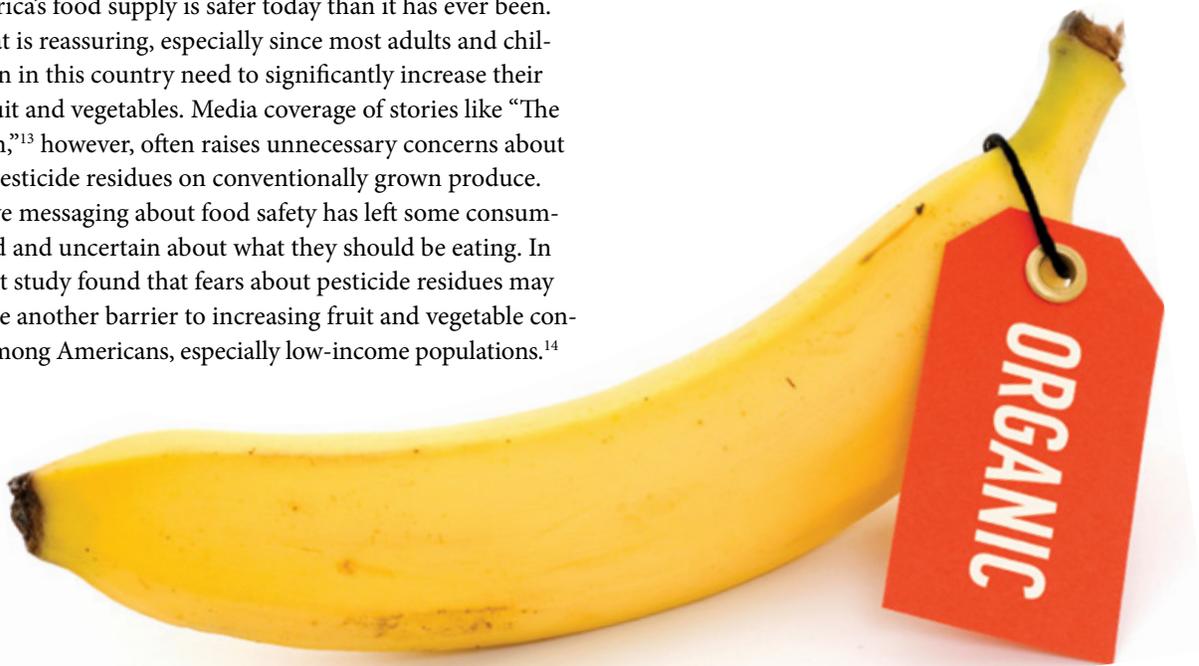


Are Concerns about Pesticides a Barrier to Consumption?

America's food supply is safer today than it has ever been. That is reassuring, especially since most adults and children in this country need to significantly increase their intake of fruit and vegetables. Media coverage of stories like "The Dirty Dozen,"¹³ however, often raises unnecessary concerns about the risk of pesticide residues on conventionally grown produce. This negative messaging about food safety has left some consumers confused and uncertain about what they should be eating. In fact, a recent study found that fears about pesticide residues may have become another barrier to increasing fruit and vegetable consumption among Americans, especially low-income populations.¹⁴



Putting Pesticide Risk in Perspective

To correct the common and often misleading information seen in the media about the effects and extent of pesticide residues on fruit and vegetables, consumers clearly need (and deserve) information from credible sources in order to make nutritionally-sound food choices. To meet this need, groups like the Alliance for Food and Farming (AFF) focus on presenting factual, science-based, and peer-reviewed information to the public. At safefruitsandveggies.com, AFF provides answers to common questions about actual fruit and vegetable pesticide residue. Among the most popular sections of the safefruitsandveggies.com website is the eye-popping Pesticide Residue Calculator, which puts residues into proper perspective. Website visitors can also see "Ask the Experts" videos, review peer-reviewed nutrition and toxicology research, and learn more about the regulatory systems in place to ensure the safety of produce.



What Leading Research Has to Say

Answering the Question:

Are Fruit and Vegetables Safe to Eat?

The U.S. food supply is considered one of the safest in the world. EPA, FDA and USDA set limits on how much pesticide can be used on farms and monitor pesticide residue on produce reaching the consumer. According to the latest findings from USDA released in 2012, “Consistent with guidance from health and nutrition experts—and as affirmed by federal nutrition guidance that urges people to make half their plate fruits and vegetables—we encourage everyone to continue to eat more fruits and vegetables in every meal and wash them before you do so.”^{15, 16}

“The amount of pesticide residues that an average person ingests throughout an entire year is even less than the amount of those ‘harmful’ substances in one cup of coffee.”

—Dr. Bruce Ames Professor Emeritus of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, University of California, Berkeley

We have the capacity to measure incredibly small amounts of anything, including pesticides and minerals, thanks to advanced technology. “The sheer fact that we can measure it . . . doesn’t necessarily translate into public risk.”

—Dr. Carl Keen, University of California, Davis, Department of Nutrition

FDA recommends washing all produce thoroughly under running water before eating, cutting, or cooking, even if you plan to peel the produce. Washing fruit and vegetables with soap or detergent or using commercial produce washes is not recommended.¹⁷

Organically grown produce is often promoted as being more nutritious than fruit and vegetables that are traditionally farmed. Studies have shown that “there is no evidence of a difference in nutrient quality between organically and conventionally produced food-stuffs.”¹⁸ In fact, virtually all research on the health benefits of fruit and vegetables has been done with little regard to whether the fruit and vegetables were organically or conventionally grown.

There is a common misconception that organic produce is pesticide or chemical free. That is not necessarily the case. By definition, the term “organic” means that pesticides, if used, come from natural resources, not synthetic products. In fact, there are even some synthetic pesticides that are allowed on organic products.¹⁹ Just because something is natural doesn’t mean it’s safe.²⁰ What makes organic farming different is not the use of pesticides, but the origin of the pesticides used. The bottom line is, organic and conventionally grown produce both represent good choices for consumers.

The Bottom Line

Health experts agree: Eat your fruit and vegetables! The benefits far outweigh the risks. As noted by Dr. Carl Keen, Professor of Nutrition and Internal Medicine at UC Davis, “For all of us involved in promoting better consumer health, increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables is among our main objectives. The benefits of consuming plenty of fruits and vegetables are absolutely indisputable. Consumers should eat both organic and conventionally grown produce without worrying about minute levels of pesticide residues.”

Suggested Websites for More Information:

Academics Review, Testing popular claims against peer-reviewed science
academicsreview.org/

Alliance for Food and Farming safefruitsandveggies.com/

American Council on Science and Health acsh.org/

Council for Agricultural Science and Technology cast-science.org/

EPA, Pesticides and Consumers www2.epa.gov/safepestcontrol

FDA, Pesticides
fda.gov/Food/FoodborneIllnessContaminants/FoodborneIllnessesNeed-ToKnow/default.htm

International Food Information Council Foundation (IFIC)
foodsight.org/

USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, Pesticide Data Program
ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/pdp

What consumers need to know about the “Dirty Dozen”

The “Dirty Dozen” list considers exposure but makes no attempt to address toxicity. Risk = Exposure x Toxicity

There are reliable, well-established, and accepted methods for assessing the risk of small doses of chemicals. The authors of the “Dirty Dozen” list acknowledge this methodology, and state on their website that the list “is not built on a complex assessment of pesticide risks.”

There is no convincing evidence that pesticide residues at the levels found on fruit and vegetables sold in the U.S. pose a risk.

Consumers should be advised to “Just Wash It” with water, if concerned about pesticide residues, guidance that’s based on government recommendations.