



*FQPA, EPA & Food Safety: A different view:*

## Children's health may be *harmed* by restricting pesticides

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**I**n the name of protecting families and children, the Environmental Protection Agency has entered into agreements with manufacturers to restrict the use of two pesticides — methyl parathion and azinphos methyl — widely applied to protect fruits and vegetables in the United States.

In announcing the agreement, Administrator Carol Browner said, "Our actions today will protect children from the adverse effects of exposure to pesticides commonly used on foods." She added, "I want to emphasize that for children and adults alike, the benefits of a diet that includes fruits and vegetables far outweigh the risks of pesticides."

How's that?

Administrator Browner's remarks beg the question: If the benefits of fruits and vegetables in our diets far outweigh the minute risks from trace amounts of pesticide residues, then why is EPA moving to restrict pesticides that are so vital to increasing their quantity and quality?

The answer is that the 1996 Food Quality Protection Act regulates risks from pesticide residues with no consideration of the beneficial role played by safe applications of pesticides. This response makes sense only inside the Beltway.

This tunnel vision approach, unfortunately, is quite typical of environmental law. But it is especially unfortunate in this case because in the name of children's health and in compliance with the FQPA, EPA is more likely to harm than to protect America's children.

A diet rich in fruit and vegetables is associated with reduced risk of degenerative diseases, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, and brain dysfunction. Bruce

Ames and Lois Swirsky Gold of the University of California at Berkeley report that the rate of most types of cancer is roughly twice as high in the 25 percent of the population with the lowest intake of fruits and vegetables as in the 25 percent with the highest.

And pesticides play an important role in producing high-quality, low-cost fruits and vegetables. Researchers at Texas A&M University estimate that a 50 percent reduction in pesticide use on crops of nine fruits and vegetables (apples, grapes, lettuce, onions, oranges, peaches, potatoes, sweet corn, and tomatoes) would reduce average yields by 37 percent.

Banning methyl parathion's use on a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and reducing application rates and allowable residues for azinphos methyl on apples, pears and peaches will raise prices for the produce protected by these widely used effective compounds. Higher prices mean that fewer families will choose to purchase fresh produce. Children in low-income families will be impacted the most of all.

Who speaks for these children? Well, certainly not the environmental groups. The reaction by the Natural Resources Defense Council to the announced pesticide restrictions was that it plans to sue EPA for failing to move fast enough to restrict even more pesticides.

The Consumers Union and the Envi-

ronmental Working Group mounted a campaign this year to frighten the public about pesticide residues. The media blitz included a full-page advertisement in the New York Times. Their primary target was methyl parathion, the pesticide just banned by EPA.

But according to Carl Winter, director of the FoodSafe Program at the University of California at Davis, "When you use real data it's hard to make a strong case that pesticides are posing real health threats to infants and children."

Robert Golden, a toxicologist and former EPA employee was even more taken aback by the CU-EWG campaign. He warned, "People need to know that all the evidence just keeps pointing towards eating more fruits and vegetables. What Consumers Union has done, this is dangerous stuff."

The environmental groups that engage in counterproductive fear mongering about pesticide residues should be required to explain their motivations, rather than being lauded for their actions.

EPA claims to know what is the best way to protect crops and reduce risks from pesticide residues. With its regulatory blinders firmly in place, the agency is focusing on eliminating pesticides with a long history of effective and safe use, expecting them to be replaced by lower-risk alternatives. EPA's version of the "Field of Dreams" theme is, "If you ban it, better replacements will come."

EPA is not solely to blame for displaying such tunnel vision, however. The Food Quality Protection Act calls for virtual elimination of one type of risk - pesticide residues - while ignoring the unhealthful impacts of this myopic approach on the diets of Americans, especially children. Congress should rethink this well-meaning but counterproductive law.

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