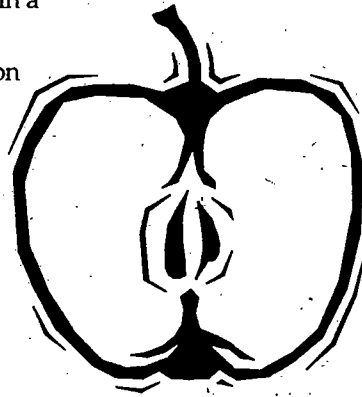


## Getting Pesticides Out of Food & Food Production

*"If, having endured much, we have at last, asserted our 'right to know' and if, knowing, we have concluded that we are being asked to take senseless and frightening risks, then we should no longer accept the counsel of those who tell us that we must fill our world with poisonous chemicals, we should look around and see what other course is open to us."*

*Rachel Carson, Silent Spring*

**Y**ou have an opportunity to join in a national effort to remove toxic pesticides from food production and pest management. Our future rests with clear protective human health and environmental protection standards and a clear commitment to an aggressive national program to assist in the transition to sustainable alternatives not reliant on pesticides. Consumers and farmers must join together in this effort to reduce pesticide dependency and effect a shift that reverses the ever-increasing diseases associated with environmental pollution.



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**W**hen you consider where your food comes from and how it is grown, one of the major questions that you may ask about is safety — how safe is our food. This is because most food today is grown with toxic chemicals called pesticides. Three-fourths of the 1.2 billion pounds of conventional pesticides used today, including insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides, are used in agriculture. If other groups of pesticides, such as wood preservatives, specialty biocides and chlorine are included — much of which is used on farms— the overall quantity of pesticides used in 1995 is 4.52 billion pounds. (Aspelin AL. Pesticides Industry Sales and Usage: 1994 and 1995 Market Estimates. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. August, 1997.) According to the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), “Pesticide use has doubled since the publication of *Silent Spring*, increasing from 500 million pounds per year in 1964 to over 1 billion pounds in 1989,” excluding wood preservatives, disinfectants, and sulfur, which account for another billion pounds. (Guerrero PF. Pesticides: 30 Years Since Silent Spring —Many Longstanding Concerns Remain. GAO. July 23, 1992. GAO-T-RCED-92-77.)

Many in agriculture are taking steps to reduce pesticide use by adopting Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and organic farming. One-quarter of the nation’s farms (1.4 out of 1.9 million) report using no pesticides. (Aspelin)

Various terminology is used to describe farming systems that are reliant on pesticides to varying degrees. Whether we are talking about sustainable, IPM or organic, actual farm practices need to be evaluated. What are these practices and what do they actually mean to the health of consumers, farmers, farmworkers and the environment?

We live in a toxic world with extraordinarily high rates of cancer —one in three people get cancer and one in four die from the disease prematurely. One in 600 children contract cancer by the age of 10. (Cushman JH. New York Times. September 29, 1997. p.A1.) Farmers have elevated rates of five types of cancer, including non-Hodgkins Lymphoma associated with exposure to the widely used weed killer, 2,4-D, which is the seventh most commonly used pesticide in agriculture and number one for nonagricultural use. (Aspelin).

### *Is our food safe? The Myth of Safety.*

The biggest problem in discussing pesticide safety is the fact that government is years behind schedule in evaluating safety tests on the over 21,000 pesticide products that are in wide use. In addition to this, the underlying law which authorizes the registration of pesticides, the *Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act* (FIFRA), is a law that has been the subject of controversy, with numerous government and scientific reports suggesting that it is not protective enough of the public’s health.

Critics say the pesticide law:

- requires only limited safety testing requirements that does not consider the mixtures of chemicals to which people and the environment are exposed;
- uses risk assessment techniques that are uncertain and imprecise;
- assumes pesticide benefits, rather than requiring the evaluation of less toxic alternatives; and,
- allows the majority of product ingredients to be withheld from public disclosure.

And yet, because pesticides are in wide use, legally available and displaying an EPA registration number, it is widely assumed that they must be safe.

### *Are legal residue levels for pesticides safe?*

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sets allowable or legal limits of pesticides, called tolerances, on and in food commodities under the *Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act* (FFDCA). These limits are proposed by pesticide manufacturers based on their need to generate a profitable level of product sales

