

New Beyond Pesticides Databases Support Toxic-Free

Two new Beyond Pesticides databases, released in the last month and featured in this issue of PAY, are tools for action. They are conceived out of an urgency to effect the changes in practices and policy necessary to go toxic-free.

The first tool, *Organic Food: Eating with a Conscience*, evolves out of the notion that a focus on how pesticides affect the consumer regardless of their effects on the environment and workers (i.e., pesticide residue-driven decision making) will not get us to where we need to go. The second, *Pesticide-Induced Diseases Database*, emerges from a collective body of scientific literature that tells us a solution dependent on severely flawed regulatory tools (i.e., risk assessment-driven decision making) offers limited protection.

Eating with a Conscience: Good for you, workers, and the environment

Our food purchases have a direct effect on the health of our environment and those who grow and harvest what we eat. We launched the *Organic Food: Eating with a Conscience* guide to show consumers why food labeled organic is the right choice. In addition to health issues linked to pesticide residues on food, our food buying decisions support or reject hazardous agricultural practices, protection of farmworkers, and stewardship of the earth.

The *Eating with a Conscience* guide explains to consumers the effect they are having on health and the environment when they purchase food grown with chemical-intensive methods, even if a large number of residues do not remain on the finished food product. USDA organic certification is the only system of food labeling that is subject to independent public review and oversight, assuring consumers that toxic, synthetic pesticides used in conventional agriculture are replaced by management practices focused on soil biology, biodiversity, and plant health. Organic practices under the *Organic Foods Production Act* eliminate commonly used toxic chemicals in the production and processing of food that is not labeled organic, pesticides that contaminate our water and air, hurt biodiversity, harm farmworkers, and kill bees, birds, fish and other wildlife.

Recent media attention has focused consumers on purchasing foods that are often referred to as “clean,” but grown with toxic chemicals that show up as residues on food in small or non-detectable amounts. While this approach is helpful to consumers in alerting them to hazardous residues on food, consumers may not think about the fact that these “clean” food commodities can be grown with hazardous pesticides that get into waterways and groundwater, contaminate nearby communities, poison farmworkers, and kill wildlife.

For example, while conventional onions grown with toxic chemicals show low pesticide residues on the finished commodity, *Eating with a Conscience* documents that there are 63 pesticides with established tolerances for onions: 26 are acutely toxic, creating a hazardous environment for farmworkers, 60 are linked to chronic health

problems (such as cancer), 8 contaminate streams or groundwater, and 54 are poisonous to wildlife. While not all listed pesticides are applied to every onion, it is impossible at the point of sale to identify which specific chemicals are used.

With our *Eating with a Conscience* guide, Beyond Pesticides is asking consumers to, when possible, buy organic food and make the right food choice—good for you, the environment and workers.

Pesticide-Induced Diseases Database

A read through the scientific literature on pesticides and major preventable diseases afflicting us in the 21st century (asthma, autism and learning disabilities, birth defects and reproductive dysfunction, diabetes, Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s, and numerous types of cancer) suggests that one of the first responses called for is an all out effort to stop using toxic pesticides. The *Pesticide-Induced Diseases (PID) Database* begins an ongoing effort by Beyond Pesticides to maintain a comprehensive listing of the studies that support the shift to toxic-free. (Many have been tracked on our *Daily News Blog*.) The database helps us challenge the failure of risk assessment to adequately prevent major diseases and supports a transformational approach to regulation that defaults to no pesticides, only allowing the exception when essentiality is established (or when alternative practices and products do not exist) and when the hazard does not threaten health and the environment (from production through disposal). This alternatives assessment approach creates a regulatory trigger to adopt alternatives and drives the market to go green. Under risk assessment, we constantly play with “mitigation measures” that the PID database tells us over and over is a failed human experiment.

The goal is to use the epidemiologic studies that link pesticides with major diseases to support ending pesticide dependency in the management of land and buildings, whether preventing insect, rodents or unwanted plants. If we continue on the current regulatory road, we will continue to find hazardous pesticides in the umbilical cords of newborns, as the Johns Hopkins University study cited in this issue of PAY does. Worse, we will continue to debate for decades whether that exposure is linked to one of the major diseases. Meanwhile, we have not asked the simple question, “Is there another practice that would make these substances unnecessary?”



These databases can guide practices and policies to go toxic-free at home, schools, hospitals, workplaces, as well as in the decision and policy making of the local, state and federal government. To do less allows the continuation of unnecessary risks.

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