



# School Pesticide Monitor

A Bi-Monthly Bulletin on Pesticides and Alternatives  
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## Negligent Bed Bug Extermination at School Demonstrates Need for IPM

**A**n elementary school in Brooklyn, New York paid a private contractor almost \$100,000 to exterminate bed bugs and, according to teachers, left the classrooms “soaked” with pesticides. According to the local news ABC 7 Online, an odorous fluid was left behind on children’s and teacher’s desks, books and on the floors, and parents and teachers were not informed as to what chemical was used. The teacher’s union estimates that cleaning up the classroom will cost over twice what was paid, and the school plans to bill the contractor and

stop the company from future business in the city, according to the news report.

This story showcases the importance of a comprehensive school pest management policy in response to the mass hysteria that bed bugs are causing. The bed bug outbreak has prompted the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to issue warnings against improper treatments and misuses of pesticides, and on the overall ineffectiveness of many products to treat bed bugs.

It’s true that bed bugs are hitch-hiking pests, however it’s important to consider the likelihood of a bed bug infestation in a school. A child, teacher or staff member with a bed bug infestation at home may carry these pests in their clothing or bag which may then be transported into the school. Spotting a lone bed bug on the school grounds is no cause for alarm, however. This lone bed bug would have to fall off of the article of clothing, find another bed bug to breed with or lay eggs in order to become a new infestation.

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## Organic Food Program Teaches Children Self Sufficiency, Good Health

**A**voyeleles Parish Charter School in Louisiana has many reasons to celebrate. After a year of growing organic fruits and vegetables in their new school garden, students will now learn how to cook their harvest in a new kitchen.

Paige Rabalais, the school garden coordinator explained to local paper The Town Talk that all of the students in every grade have a chance to learn about the entire cycle of the food they eat, from the planting process to the cooking phase.

teach valuable lessons to children about health and nutrition, self-sufficiency and even good environmental stewardship. It also provides a link for school children with local farmers and farm products, including fruits and vegetables, meat, grains and other items.

According to the school’s garden blog, students harvested 30 pumpkins, cantaloupes, yellow squash, green onion, green beans and two watermelons in November. The students used the pumpkins to make pumpkin soup, muffins and pumpkin cheesecakes; some students even got to take a pumpkin home to make cheesecake for their parents for Thanksgiving.

The garden strives to be a holistic and completely organic system and as such does not rely on any pesticides or chemical fertilizers. It includes a compost pile that is used to create a soil conditioner for future crops, and will eventually have a rainwater collection system to water the plants.

Farm-to-school provides fresh, healthy food choices, helps children develop healthy eating habits and supports small and mid-size farmers. According to the Farm-to-School website, forty-six states have 2,257 farm-to-school programs impacting 9,715 schools nationwide.

Farm-to-school programs like this

*...continued on reverse*

## Bed Bugs

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It's also important to note that these pests are active mainly at night and prefer to hide close to where they feed, and lay their eggs in secluded spots, thus the school is not an ideal environment. With strategic monitoring, parents, teachers and other school officials can help prevent a bed bug invasion.

School officials need to determine a course of action on pest problems and infestations. This should include notifying teachers, staff and parents of any potential problems and providing information on how to identify, prevent and control these pests.

It should be pointed out that there have been no known cases of bed bugs transmitting disease, and that they are mainly a nuisance rather than a public health threat. It's also important to try to eliminate the stigma associated with bed bugs and to prevent having the blame placed on any one individual.

Everyone should be taught how to identify bed bugs and pay attention to places that may be particularly welcoming to a bed bug: lockers or cubby holes where clothes are stored, backpacks, upholstered furniture, etc.

Students can shake out their bags and jackets when they come home from school. Educators should try to eliminate areas of clutter in the classroom and discourage (particularly amongst younger grades where nap time is common) students from bringing blankets and pillows from home. Custodial staff should be trained to look for these pests, too, and frequently clean areas that may harbor bed bugs.

Because children are especially vulnerable to the health hazards associated with pesticide exposure, Beyond Pesticides recommends the implementation of a defined integrative pest management (IPM) system to prevent pest problems with non-chemical management strategies and only least-toxic

pesticides as a last resort.

IPM relies on a combination of methods that address sanitation, structural repair, mechanical measures, biological controls and other non-chemical methods inside buildings and additional approaches for turf and ornamental plant management that build healthy soil and natural resistance to pests.

To solve the bed bug problem nationwide, it is going to take widespread community efforts. Ultimately it is everyone's responsibility to learn about these pests and share with neighbors, friends, teachers and coworkers on ways to mitigate an infestation and the risks associated with control methods.

Just remember—one lone bed bug does not make an infestation. For more information, including a fully cited fact sheet on bed bug control and prevention, see [www.beyondpesticides.org/bedbugs](http://www.beyondpesticides.org/bedbugs).

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## School Gardens

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Many school districts across the country already have policies banning junk food and encouraging organic food in school cafeterias. Some examples include the Boulder Valley School District in Colorado, Seattle public schools, and California school districts in Berkeley, Santa Monica, and Palo Alto. The San Francisco Unified School District and the River Valley School District in Wisconsin, have passed school board resolutions to source only rBGH-free milk in their schools due to parents' demands. And an organic salad bar started at Lincoln Elementary School in Olympia, Washington has proven so popular and economically feasible; all grade schools in Olympia now have one.

Children who eat a diet of organic food show a level of pesticides in their body that is six times lower than children who eat a diet of conventionally produced food. A study from Emory University found that an organic diet given to children provides a "dramatic and immediate protective effect" against exposures to two pesticides that are commonly used in U.S. agricultural production.

A study published in *Environmental Health Perspectives* earlier this year and discussed in the last issue of *School Pesticide Monitor* found that government agencies may be underestimating children's dietary exposure to pesticides, and therefore the inherent risks to children's health.

Beyond Pesticides advocates for organically grown local food. Organic farming and food systems are holistic, work with nature rather than relying on inputs such as chemical pesticides and fertilizers, exhibit higher standards for the welfare of animals, and do not allow routine use of antibiotics. Organic farming protects the local environment, waterways, air quality, and the farmworkers and their families from chemicals that have been shown to cause a myriad of chronic health effects, such as cancer, endocrine disruption and a series of degenerative diseases like Parkinson's disease.

For more information of the many benefits of organic food, please visit [www.beyondpesticides.org/organicfood](http://www.beyondpesticides.org/organicfood).