

USDA and EPA confirm non-organic foods are safe to eat

I'll admit it, I have a Facebook account. Although I rarely post anything, it is a good way to stay in touch with friends and keep up with news and people's opinions. I have noticed a recent increase in the number of people, mostly the younger generation (my generation), who are scared to eat food if it does not have a sticker marking it as "organic." They're under the impression that non-organic foods are killing people every day. I respect a person's right to their own opinion, but it's time to tell the truth.

The United States Department of Agriculture has recently published the data and results of the 2013 Pesticide Data Program Annual Summary. The details of this report can be found at: www.ams.usda.gov/pdp. For consumers, this report means that foods such as fruits and vegetables, infant formula, butter, and fish found in stores across the U.S. are safe for human consumption, even if they were not grown organically. This includes not only fresh produce, but canned or processed foods as well.

The Pesticide Data Program randomly sampled over 10,000 products and conducted tests to determine if pesticide residues are present, and if so, whether they are below EPA-established tolerances for safe human consumption. The study found that over 99.7% of the tested foods were safe for human consumption. In fact, over 40% of products tested had no detectable pesticide residue. Of the 10,000 products tested, only 23 samples were found to contain pesticide residue amounts that exceeded the set tolerances. Seventeen of these 23 samples were imported from outside of the U.S. It is important to keep in mind the very strict tolerances that EPA has established for pesticide residue on foods. The residue amounts are measured in parts per million (PPM). The EPA tolerance for many products ranges from 0.2ppm to 25ppm, although most tolerances are in single-digit numbers. This computes to residue concentration tolerances being tested down to the one-thousandth of a percent (0.0001%); a miniscule amount. The EPA also has safety factors built into these tolerances; if a certain ingredient is harmful to humans at a certain amount, EPA sets tolerances

with at least a 10-fold margin of safety, but usually over 100-fold. This means that if the tested level of harm is 300 ppm, the EPA tolerance is set at 3 ppm.

Remember, farmers do not apply pesticides arbitrarily or without care. Every time a farmer makes a decision to use a pesticide, it may be a multi-thousand dollar decision. Therefore, it is in the farmer's best interest to only apply pesticide if it is absolutely necessary, and to use the least amount of product necessary to be effective. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension has never hosted a training or educational program that dealt with the responsible use of pesticides without stressing the importance of following the directions and precautions on the label. It is in fact against the law to use a pesticide in a manner inconsistent with the label instructions. The data and results from this Pesticide Data Program Annual Summary are proof that properly applied pesticides pose no health risks to humans.