



**Pesticide  
Action  
Network**  
Europe

# Pesticides in Food

## Fact Sheet

### **EU food contamination**

In total 349 different pesticides are present in food products sold in the EU.<sup>1</sup> Some 45.7% of food items tested are found to contain pesticides, including 5% – one item in 20 – which contain pesticides at levels above EC legal limits. While fruits and vegetables show the highest likelihood of pesticide contamination, cereals, processed foods and baby foods are also widely affected.

### **Multiple residues**

Over 25% of fruits, cereals and vegetables tested in the EU contain two or more different pesticides.<sup>2</sup> While over 5% of fruits, cereals and vegetables tested in the EU contain 5 or more different pesticides. More than ten different pesticides are detected most frequently in sweet peppers and grapes.

### **Hazardous pesticides**

Six of the EU's most hazardous pesticides are among the top 10 most common EU food contaminants:<sup>3</sup> carbendazim (mutagen, reprotoxin), iprodione (carcinogen), procymidone (carcinogen, reprotoxin, endocrine disruptor), captan (carcinogen), maneb (carcinogen, endocrine disruptor), deltamethrin (endocrine disruptor).

### **Consumer concern**

A 2006 survey undertaken by the European Commission found that 70% of EU citizens are either 'very worried' or 'fairly worried' about the pesticides in fruits, vegetables or cereals.<sup>4</sup> The study ranked pesticides as Europe's number one food issue with consumers expressing more concern on pesticides than any other topic.

### **Invisible pesticides**

A 2008 study by Greenpeace Germany found that EU governments are technically unable to detect over 50% of pesticides chemicals.<sup>5</sup> While around 1,350 pesticides are applied to food crops worldwide, food samples tested for pesticide residues can only be analysed for up to 600 different pesticides. Most German states, for example, test food items for fewer than 400 different pesticides.

### **Pesticides applied to EU food crops**

More than 140,000 tonnes of synthetic pesticides (active substances) are sprayed onto EU food crops each year<sup>6</sup> – equivalent to 280 grams of pesticides for every European citizen. Grapes, citrus fruits and potatoes are the three most intensively sprayed food crops in the EU and all receive over 6kg/ha of synthetic pesticides.

## **Pesticides in wine**

A 2005 study published by the French Ministry of Agriculture found that French wine is systematically contaminated with pesticides.<sup>7</sup> A PAN Europe analysis of 34 bottles of conventional wine produced from across France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Portugal, South Africa, Chile and Australia found that all bottles tested contained pesticides.<sup>8</sup>

## **Pesticides in the European Parliament**

In 2007 Friends of the Earth Netherlands tested eight fruit items purchased inside the European Parliament building in Brussels.<sup>9</sup> In total 28 different pesticides were detected including ten carcinogens, three neurotoxins, three developmental toxins, and eight suspected endocrine disruptors. All eight fruit items were contaminated, including three (apricot, grapes, oranges) which contained pesticides at levels exceeding EC legal limits. The strawberries contained 14 different pesticides.

*Last updated: 29 June 2008*

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<sup>1</sup> Monitoring of Pesticides Residues in Products of Plant Origin in the European Union, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, European Commission (2007)

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/specialreports/pesticides\\_index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/specialreports/pesticides_index_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Monitoring of Pesticides Residues in Products of Plant Origin in the European Union, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, European Commission (2007)

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/specialreports/pesticides\\_index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/specialreports/pesticides_index_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Monitoring of Pesticides Residues in Products of Plant Origin in the European Union, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, European Commission (2007)

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/specialreports/pesticides\\_index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/fvo/specialreports/pesticides_index_en.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Special Eurobarometer 238 / Wave 64.1 – *TNS Opinion & Social* (2006)

[http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/resources/special-eurobarometer\\_riskissues20060206\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/resources/special-eurobarometer_riskissues20060206_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Greenpeace Study: Pesticide contamination of our food far underestimated, Greenpeace Germany press release (31 January 2008)

[http://www.greenpeace.de/fileadmin/gpd/user\\_upload/themen/umweltgifte/PE-Pestizidanalytik-engl.pdf](http://www.greenpeace.de/fileadmin/gpd/user_upload/themen/umweltgifte/PE-Pestizidanalytik-engl.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The use of plant protection products in the European Union, European Commission (2007)

[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_OFFPUB/KS-76-06-669/EN/KS-76-06-669-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-76-06-669/EN/KS-76-06-669-EN.PDF)

<sup>7</sup> Cugier et al. 'Plan de surveillance résidus en Viticulture (Campagnes viticoles 1990-2003)', Direction Générale de l'Alimentation, Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation, de la Pêche et de la Ruralité (2005) <http://agriculture.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/enqueteraisin.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> European wines systematically contaminated with pesticide residues, PAN Europe press release (26 March 2008) <http://www.pan-europe.info/Media/PR/080326.html>

<sup>9</sup> Toxic Food in the European Parliament, PAN Europe press release (10 October 2007)

<http://www.pan-europe.info/Media/PR/071010.html>